



## PARTY WITH MAXIMUM NUMBER OF SEATS IN LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

Andhra Pradesh	2004 INC	2009 INC	2014 TDP	2019 YSRCP	Meghalaya	2008 INC	2013 INC	2018 INC
Arunachal Pradesh	2004 INC	2009 INC	2014 INC	2019 BJP	Mizoram	2008 INC	2013 INC	2018 MNF
Assam	2006 INC	2011 INC	2016 BJP		Nagaland	2008 NPF	2013 NPF	2018 NPF
Bihar	2005 RJD	2010 JD(U)	2015 JD(U)	2020 BJD	Odisha	2004 BJD	2009 BJD	2014 BJD
Chhattisgarh	2008 BJP	2013 BJP	2018 INC		Punjab	2007 SAD	2012 SAD	2017 INC
GOA	2007 INC	2012 BJP	2017 INC		Rajasthan	2008 INC	2013 BJP	2018 INC
Gujarat	2007 BJP	2012 BJP	2017 BJP		Sikkim	2004 SDF	2009 SDF	2014 SDF
Haryana	2005 INC	2009 INC	2014 BJP	2019 BJP	Tamil Nadu	2006 DMK	2011 AIADMK	2016 AIADMK
Himachal Pradesh	2007 BJP	2012 INC	2017 BJP		Telangana	2014 TRS	2018 TRS	
Jammu & Kashmir	2008 JKNC	2014 JKPDP			Tripura	2008 CPI (M)	2013 CPI (M)	2018 BJP
Jharkhand	2005 BJP	2009 BJP & JMM	2014 BJP	2019 JMM	Uttarakhand	2007 BJP	2012 INC	2017 BJP
Karnataka	2004 BJP	2008 BJP	2013 INC	2018 BJP	Uttar Pradesh	2007 BSP	2012 SP	2017 BJP
Kerala	2006 CPI(M)	2011 CPI(M)	2016 CPI(M)		West Bengal	2006 CPI (M)	2011 AITC	2016 AITC
Madhya Pradesh	2008 BJP	2013 BJP	2018 INC		NCT Delhi	2008 INC	2013 BJP	2015 AAP
Maharashtra	2004 NCP	2009 INC	2014 BJP	2019 BJP	Puducherry	2006 INC	2011 AINRC	2016 INC
	Manipur	2007 INC	2012 INC	2017 INC				

## PARTY WITH MAXIMUM NUMBER OF SEATS IN LOK SABHA ELECTIONS\*

	2004	2009	2014	2019
Max. Seats	INC 145	INC 206	BJP 282	BJP 303
2nd Max. Seats	BJP 138	BJP 116	INC 44	INC 52

\*~ Over 10 Lakh Polling Stations across the COUNTRY now



ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA  
www.eci.gov.in

# 325 Crore Voters

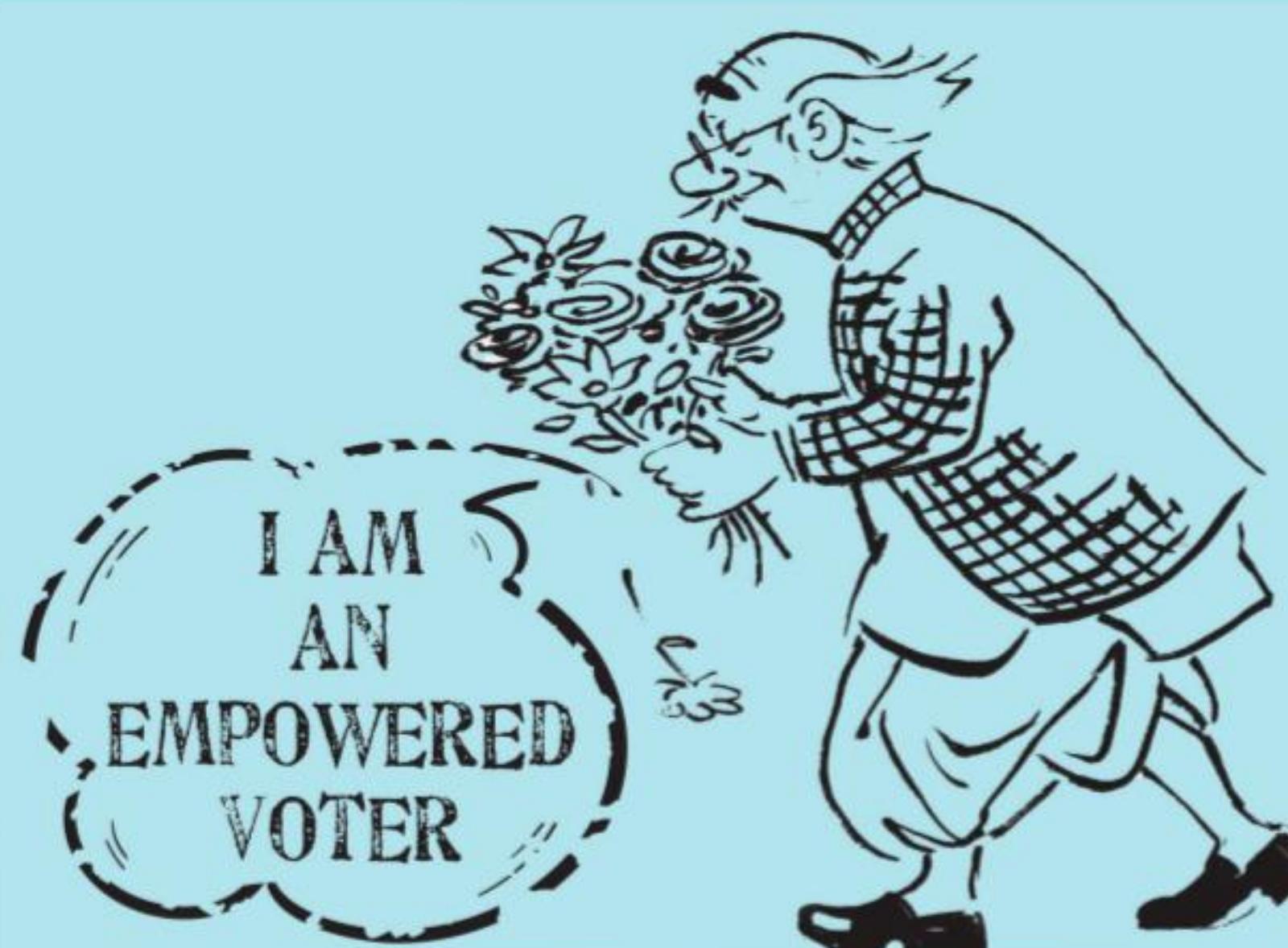
127 Assembly  
Elections | 4 Lok Sabha  
Elections

(used EVMs since 2004)

# 98 Crore Voters

21 Assembly  
Elections | 1 Loksabha  
Election

(used EVMs & VVPATs since December 2017)



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## Pride of Indian Democracy

### EVM & VVPAT



dvpp52/01/13/0017/2021



WOK IN THE CLOUDS

“PAMPER  
YOURSELF”  
AT

KHAN MARKET | CONNAUGHT PLACE | RAJOURI GARDEN | PUNJABI BAGH

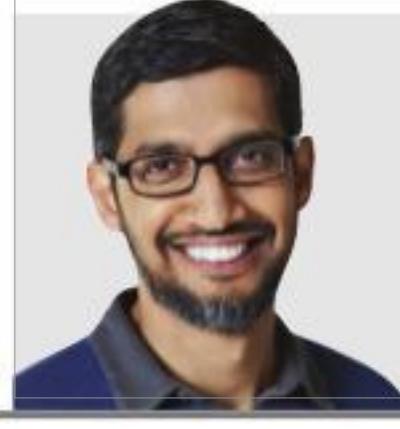


For reservations call 4322 22 22



'PM NOT SADDENED  
BY FLOOD-RAVAGED  
PEOPLE OF ASSAM'

P4



LESSON FROM  
AUSTRALIA

P6



DECODING SASIKALA'S  
BOLD GAMBIT

P7



WEATHER

Partly cloudy sky. Very light rain/thundershower accompanied with hails and gusty winds. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 34 and 18 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: Nil

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Max: 90% Min: 30%

TEMPERATURE

Max: 35.2°C (+4) Min: 16.2°C (0)  
SUN RISES 06:22 hrs SUN SETS 18:33 hrs  
MOON RISES 12:03 hrs MOON SETS 02:31 hrs

THUMBNAILS



Pre-holi celebrations at Maidan area in Kolkata on Sunday.

BHASKAR MALLICK

NHAI, NHCL asked to tighten security system: The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways on Sunday alerted NHAI, NHCL, Indian Road Congress (IRC), Indian Academy of Highway Engineers (IAHE), State PWDs, Testing agencies besides automobile makers to augment their IT security systems after reports regarding threats of possible cyber attacks targeted at the Indian transport sector. The ministry said it has received an alert from the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) about possible cyber attacks.

5 kids die after getting trapped in container: In a tragic incident, five children suffocated to death after they jumped into a grain storage container while playing at Himmatgarh village in Rajasthan's Bikaner on Sunday, police said. According to police, the container was almost empty and the children jumped into it one after another while playing. The container got closed accidentally, trapping the kids inside. The children were rushed to a government hospital where doctors declared them brought dead, SP (Bikaner) Priti Chandra said.

The allegations leveled by Singh against Deshmukh are serious and require an in-depth probe, Pawar said.

Singh has claimed that Deshmukh wanted police officers to collect Rs 100 crore monthly for him from bars and hotels.

# No question of Maha HM resigning: NCP

Sharad Pawar had said allegations made against Anil Deshmukh were serious

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI, 21 MARCH

## MURKY ROAD AHEAD

**T**here is no question of Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh resigning, NCP state chief and senior minister in the Maha Vikas Aghadi government Jayant Patil said on Sunday against the backdrop of ex-Mumbai police chief Param Bir Singh's corruption allegation.

Following a three-hour meeting held at NCP president Sharad Pawar's residence here, Patil said there is no need to divert attention from the main incident of bomb scare outside Mukesh Ambani's residence and the killing of Mansukh Hirani, a Thane-based businessman.

The focus is on these two events and after that appropriate steps will be taken, he said. "The question of Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh resigning does not arise," Patil said.

During a media briefing earlier in the day in New Delhi, NCP president Sharad Pawar had said that Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray will decide the fate of Deshmukh.

Pawar's comments came amidst speculation in state political circles that Maharashtra may soon have a new home minister.

The allegations leveled by Singh against Deshmukh are serious and require an in-depth probe, Pawar said.

Ribeiro rejected the idea, saying he is unavailable for this kind of work. "I am 92 years old. Nobody goes around doing this work at the age of 92. If the inquiry is against the home minister of Maharashtra, then Mr Pawar

should make it because he is the head of the (ruling) party," Ribeiro said.

Pawar said Singh had complained to him about political interference in police department. He said Singh had spoken of reports about his transfer, saying it would be an injustice to him. Pawar said Singh made the allegations after his transfer on March 17 to the Home Guards.

There is no impact on the MVA government because of Singh's allegations, Pawar said. Efforts are on to destabilise the Shiv Sena-NCP-Congress government in Maharashtra but they will prove futile, he added.

In the eight-page letter to chief minister Uddhav Thackeray, Singh alleged that Deshmukh used to call police officers to his official residence and give them a "collection target" from bars, restaurants and other estab-

lishments. Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut admitted that the allegations made by Singh against Deshmukh and about the Waze case have tainted the image of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in the state.

Former chief minister and BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis said Pawar was trying to save the Maha Vikas Aghadi government amidst allegations of corruption leveled by Singh against Deshmukh.

"How were important postings and cases given to Waze without the knowledge of the chief minister and the home minister?" asked Ex-CM Fadnavis.

Waze is in the custody of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) for his alleged role in placing an explosive-laden SUV outside the south Mumbai residence of industrialist Mukesh Ambani last month. The NIA is also probing the alleged murder of Thane-based businessman Mansukh Hirani who was in possession of that SUV.

"As the architect of the MVA government, Pawar is trying to save it. Fadnavis said and reiterated his demand for resignation of Deshmukh and a court-monitored probe into the allegations made by Singh. "Waze (a former encounter specialist who was suspended after the alleged custodial death of bomb blast suspect Khwaja Yunis in 2003) was reinstated by Param Bir Singh," he added.

In the eight-page letter to chief minister Uddhav Thackeray, Singh alleged that Deshmukh used to call police officers to his official residence and give them a "collection target" from bars, restaurants and other estab-

MORE ON PAGE 4

# India records 43,846 new Covid-19 cases, highest in 115 days



Aspirants stand in a queue for thermal screening as they arrive to appear for the Madhya Pradesh Public Service Commission exams, in Jabalpur on Sunday.

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Delhi sees a spike of 823 cases

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Delhi today recorded 823 coronavirus infections and 1 Covid-linked fatality, even as it registered 1.03 per cent positivity rate, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin.

Amid the fresh upsurge of coronavirus cases in the national capital, this was the second consecutive day when the city witnessed more than 800 single-day Covid cases.

The active cases tally in the city today rose to 3,618 from yesterday's 3,409, the health bulletin said.

Delhi had yesterday reported over 800 coronavirus infections for the first time this year, while logging 2 Covid fatalities. The city had recorded 813 Covid cases and its positivity rate had then risen to 1.07 per cent from Friday's 0.93 per cent. The positivity rate had breached the 1 per cent-mark after over two months.

SEE P4



Meanwhile, the Rajasthan government has decided to impose night curfew in eight cities and ordered closure of markets by 10 pm from Monday and made it mandatory for people coming to Rajasthan from other states to possess a Covid-19 negative test report from 25 March.

## B'desh rules out security threat to PM Modi's visit

DHAKA, 21 MARCH

Bangladesh has ruled out any security threat to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to the country later this week and said "few" leftwing and hardline Islamist groups are against his trip but there is "nothing to worry" about them.

Prime Minister Modi will visit Bangladesh from 26 to 27 March to attend the celebrations of the golden jubilee of the country's independence and the birth centenary of its founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. This would be his first trip to a foreign country since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. "We are proud to invite him (Modi). People are with us (the government)," Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen said.

## UNBROKEN



Farmers during a protest against the Centre's new farm laws at the Ghazipur Border, in the Capital on Sunday.

# Ashoka University admits 'lapses in institutional processes', expresses regret

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Ashoka University on Sunday acknowledged "lapses in institutional processes" and expressed "deep regret" at the recent events surrounding the resignations of political commentator Pratap Bhanu Mehta and noted economist Arvind Subramanian from its faculty.

Meanwhile, Mehta wrote a letter to students, urging them to not "press" for his return asserting that the circumstances that led to his resignation will not change in foreseeable future.

The university in Haryana's Sonipat became the centre of a controversy earlier this week,

"We acknowledge there have been some lapses in institutional processes which we will work to rectify in consultation with all stakeholders. This will reaffirm our commitment to academic autonomy and freedom which have always been at the core of Ashoka University ideals."

UNIVERSITY STATEMENT

► Pratap Bhanu Mehta wrote a letter to students, urging them to not "press" for his return asserting that the circumstances that led to his resignation will not change in foreseeable future

when Mehta, who had resigned as its vice chancellor two years back, chose to step down as professor, saying that the founders made it "abundantly clear" that his association with the institution was a "political liability".

Subramanian, the former chief economic advisor to the government, had resigned from the university two days later in solidarity with Mehta.

"We acknowledge that there have been some lapses in institutional processes which

we will work to rectify in consultation with all stakeholders. This will reaffirm our commitment to academic autonomy and freedom which have always been at the core of the Ashoka University ideals," the institution said in a statement.

In a strong counter to the narrative, Ashoka University Chancellor Rudrangshu Mukherjee has said the institution remains committed to academic freedom and intellectual independence while its Board of Trustee Chairman Ashish Dhawan promised an open line of communication.

Dhawan said the Board of Trustees stands for free enquiry, academic freedom and intellectual independence.

# BJP promises 1 job per family, CAA, free education for women

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
KOLKATA, 21 MARCH

Union home minister Amit Shah unveiled the BJP's poll manifesto for the Bengal Assembly elections in Kolkata on Sunday, promising jobs for every family, free education and 33 per cent reservation in government jobs for women, and vowing to clear the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act in the first Cabinet meeting of a BJP-led state government.

The party's manifesto is not just a manifesto, Mr Shah said, but a 'Sankalp Patra', a pledge of commitment from the country's largest party, to transform Bengal into "Sonar Bangla".

Referring to the manifesto, the BJP leader said: "We have decided to provide free edu-



Union Home minister Amit Shah releases the election manifesto of the BJP. At EZCC hall in Kolkata on Sunday.

cation to women from KG to PG. There will be free travel for women in public transport. Nine women police battalions and 3 women police reserve battalions will be raised to ensure security for women. Widow pension will be increased from Rs 1,000 to Rs 3,000."

On the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in Bengal, Shah said, "We are sincerely trying to provide citizenship rights to the refugees and Mamata Banerjee is opposing it. CAA will be implemented in the first Cabinet meeting and refugees who have been staying here for 70 years will be given citizenship. We have another resolution in our party's manifesto that refugee families will get Rs 10,000 every year," he said.

Mr Shah said that the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana would be extended to the

every household in Bengal and Rs 18,000 each will be transferred to 7.5 million farmers' bank accounts. Every landless farmer will get Rs 4,000 yearly, he said. Fishermen will get Rs 6,000 every year and Rs 3 lakhs accident ben-

efits. He said that Ayushman Bharat will be implemented in the state. "Three new AIIMS hospitals will be built in North Bengal, Jangalmahal and Sunderbans. We will invest Rs 20,000 crore to develop infrastructure of hospitals," he

said. The party will also run cheap "annapurna" canteens to provide meals at Rs 5.

The manifesto said that a Tagore Prize at par with Nobel Prize and Satyajit Ray International awards at par with Oscars will be instituted to bring back the state's cultural richness. "A Sonar Bangla fund worth Rs 11,000 crore will promote art, literature and other such sectors will be constituted," Mr Shah said.

The party said that to transform Kolkata into an international city, it will set up a Kolkata Development Fund worth Rs 22,000 crore and also ensure that the metropolis becomes a UNESCO Heritage City. The manifesto also said Bagdogra Airport will be elevated to an international Airport and another airport would be set up in Purulia.

# Adhikari patriarch joins BJP

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
EGRAG, 21 MARCH



him and his sons, of late, have forced him to switch camp.

"The way our family was driven out of TMC will be forever written in history. We will rise against all political attacks and atrocities in Bengal. We will work under Modiji and Amit Shahji," he said.

Reacting to the development, Miss Banerjee said she blamed herself for not recognising the 'true face' of the Adhikari family. "I am a big donkey (Ami ekta boro gadha) for having failed to recognise them, she told an election rally at Contai.



Central govt wanted to snatch the income and future of farmers and hand it over to two-three big businessmen

CONGRESS LEADER RAHUL GANDHI

ATTACKING ON THE BJP-LED CENTRE OVER THE THREE NEW FARMS LAWS

**THUMBNAILS**


Police punish commuters for flouting lockdown norms, imposed by authorities to curb the recent surge in coronavirus cases in Jalandhar on Sunday.

AGENCIES

**Pak intruder arrested :** BSF on Sunday arrested a Pakistani intruder in the Samba Sector of Jammu. A BSF official said that on the International Border of Samba the BSF trooper observed suspicious movement of a Pakistani national who crossed the border. He was nabbed ahead of fencing.

**Om Birla admitted to AIIMS:** Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla was admitted to the AIIMS Covid Centre in Delhi for observation on 20 March after testing positive for coronavirus, and he is presently stable, the hospital said on Sunday. PTI

**Kids die inside grain container:** Five children suffocated to death after they jumped into a grain storage container while playing in Bikaner district of Rajasthan on Sunday, police said. The children were in the age group of 3 to 8 years, they said. The children included four girls and a boy.

PTI

## Controversy erupts over Rawat's 'big family gets big ration stock' comment

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

DEHRADUN, 21 MARCH

Uttarakhand chief minister Tirath Singh Rawat made a controversial comment on big families by giving an example of ration distribution made per unit at a function in Ramnagar (Nainital) on Sunday.

After getting heavily trolled for commenting on woman wearing ripped jeans recently, the new Uttarakhand CM created another flutter by claiming that people with big families getting five kilo ration per head built their own stores and sold it in their neighbourhood.

Without mentioning any community, CM Tirath Rawat narrated ration distribution system. "Every family got 5 kilo ration per head. A family of 10 got 50 kilo ration each, 20 got 100 kg and two-member family got 10 kg ration."

Rawat said, "Family with high income have their own store and found customers in their neighborhood. They never used the fine quality rice received for their daily consumption. Why do you envy the big families getting larger stock of ration? They have 20 members. When you had the chance you too should have

## Cong a loot engine that wants to come to power: Modi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
BOKAKHAT (ASSAM), 21 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday called Congress a "lootengine" which is desperate to come to power in Assam "at any cost" to fill its "empty coffers".

Making fun of the grand old party giving guarantees to the people if they are voted to power in Assam, Modi said they gave "false guarantees" of providing jobs and empowering women but did nothing when it was in power at the Centre and also in Assam at the same time earlier.

The Congress can go to any extent for coming to power and this is evident from the "lies" that they are spreading through their manifesto and the alliances they are entering to gain power, the Prime Minister said at an election rally in Bokakhat in Golaghat.

"When there was a Congress government at the Centre and the state at the same time, there was double neglect, double corruption and double infiltration", he mockingly said.

The Congress is now giving guarantees...their manifesto is guarantees of lies, of confusion, instability, 'bomb, bandook aur blockade' (bomb, guns and blockades), insurgency and separatism, corruption and nepotism", Modi said.

"The party's coffers are empty and they want to come to power at any cost to fill it. They have no vision and for them the chair is the friend (unke toh kursi hi dost hain) and to attain that they can go to any extent", he added.

They have entered into alliances with the sole motive of coming to power.

In West Bengal, they have entered into alliance with the

PM sad for tweet by 22-yr-old woman, but not for flood-hit people in Assam: Priyanka

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
JORHAT (ASSAM), 21 MARCH

Launching a frontal attack on PM Narendra Modi, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Sunday alleged he is sad about a tweet by a "22-year-old woman" (climate activist Disha Ravi) but not for the flood-ravaged people of Assam.

Gandhi lamented that Modi was silent on people's suffering in perennial flood and "attack on culture" by the CAA. "I was listening to the PM's speech yesterday. He very seriously said that he was very sad about a development. I thought he would speak about Assam's development or how BJP worked in Assam.

He said the Congress conspired to finish the tea industry of Assam. He was also sad about the Congress' mistake only putting two wrong pictures on social media," Vadra said. Gandhi questioned Modi why he was not sad for the people affected by the flood and the anti-CAA movement, in which five youths were killed. "Why didn't you come to Assam when people were drowning? Why were you not sad when all the big promises by BJP were not fulfilled? Did you go to tea gardens and talk to workers about their problems?" she asked Modi.

Vadra on 2 March visited a tea garden in Biswanath to interact with the workers and also tried her hands in plucking tea leaves, which was serious about a development. I thought he would speak about Assam's development or how BJP worked in Assam.

On her visit to a tea garden in Assam, Gandhi said she came to know about their lifestyle and realised that "the tea garden sisters are the protectors of culture and identity".

Left and in Kerala they are fighting against them, he said to drive home the point.

"In Assam, Kerala and West Bengal, the Congress has entered into alliances with the communal forces as they cannot look beyond power and they claim to be secular. Nobody in the country now believes them", he alleged.

Congress has a tie-up with the AIUDF of MP Badruddin Ajmal in Assam, while in Bengal it has joined hands with the Left and Indian Secular Front of the Muslim cleric Abbas Siddiqui and in Kerala its part-

ner is Indian Union of Muslim League.

On the other hands, the double engine NDA government in Assam has ensured that the foundation for developments is laid and the state is connected with the rest of the country, while during the next five years, there will be more development, the PM said.

During Congress rule, people thought Assam would be ever free of bomb blasts, guns or violence and peace will prevail, but the NDA government has ensured that there is peace and stability in the state, he said.

ment (FDI) in the sector from 49 per cent to 74 per cent.

The Bill was passed despite the Opposition demanding its reference to a Select Committee. Deputy Chairman Harivansh ruled that members had not given any notice for this in advance, and so their request could not be entertained. After several adjournments before the discussion, the Opposition staged a walk-out when the Bill was passed.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman made out a strong case for raising FDI in the sector, giving vital data how the private sector had contributed to employment and a positive growth of the sector.

She said the Opposition's fears were groundless as all FDI-rich entities would be subject to Indian laws, their key management persons

## Capital logs over 800 Covid cases for 2nd day in a row

'Unregistered but eligible people in Delhi will be able to take Covid jabs between 3 pm and 9 pm'

SNS & PTI  
NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Delhi today recorded 823 coronavirus infections and 1 Covid-linked fatality, even as it registered 1.03 per cent positivity rate, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin.

Amid the fresh upsurge of coronavirus cases in the national capital, this was the second consecutive day when the city witnessed more than 800 single-day Covid cases.

The active cases tally in the city today rose to 3,618 from yesterday's 3,409, the health bulletin said. Delhi had yesterday reported over 800 coronavirus infections for the first time this year, while logging 2 Covid fatalities. The city had recorded 813 Covid cases and its

positivity rate had then risen to 1.07 per cent from Friday's 0.93 per cent. The posi-



Given day. Till now, unregistered beneficiaries were being inoculated between 3 pm and 5 pm, he said. Beneficiaries need to register themselves on Co-WIN portal to get the Covid jabs. Those who do not have access to the Co-WIN portal can go to the vaccination centre and take the Covid shot.

Only registered beneficiaries will be given the Covid shots between 9 am and 3 pm. The unregistered ones can take the jabs from 3 pm to 9 pm. They just need to carry their Aadhaar card or any other valid identity proof, Jain said.

It has also been directed that all Delhi government hospitals should increase the number of vaccination sites on their premises to at least six and depute two vaccinators at each site, he said.

Meanwhile, Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain today said that unregistered but eligible people in Delhi will be able to take the Covid vaccine between 3 pm and 9 pm on any

from 9 am to 9 pm a day, starting Monday.

Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal had earlier said that the number of vaccination centres will be doubled to 1,000 from the existing nearly 500 involving both government and private facilities.

The health minister today said the Delhi government has been conducting aggressive testing and contact tracing and that the recent spike in Covid cases will also be contained soon. Jain said district authorities and the Delhi Police have been asked to take strict action against violations at markets and public places in view of the increase in the number of Covid cases.

He appealed to people to take precautions during the Holi festival. "The number of cases had increased during the festive season last year. So, I appeal to everyone to stay safe," he said.

## Ravi Shankar Prasad tears into Maha govt over Sachin Waze episode

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
PATNA, 21 MARCH

Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad on Sunday called for a "fair and impartial probe by an outside agency" into the controversy surrounding Mumbai policeman Sachin Waze and his alleged patronisation by top leaders of the ruling Shiv Sena-NCP combine in Maharashtra.

Prasad expressed astonishment over Waze, "a mere assistant inspector", having been defended inside and outside the Assembly by none other than CM Shiv Sena-NCP combine in Maharashtra.

Charging Thackeray with having betrayed the NDA for the sake of power, Prasad wondered whether the sordid turn of events were in consonance

with the "Jai Maharashtra" (hail Maharashtra) slogan popularised by his late father and Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray, "for whom I have tremendous respect". Referring to the explosive letter written to Thackeray by former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh, the BJP MP from Patna Sahib wrote, "Extortion is a crime. A policeman indulging in it and that too at the behest of the home minister is a very serious matter. It must be probed in an honest and transparent manner by an outside agency".

"What has been alleged in the letter could be just the tip of the iceberg. Maharashtra is a prosperous state. If a policeman in Mumbai is asked to extort money for political bosses, we can surmise that there have been similar transgressions at other business hubs", Prasad added.

**Centre should intervene in SUV-Waze case:** Raj MNS chief Raj Thackeray sought Centre's intervention in unearthing the truth behind the explosives-laden car found near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence here last month. Thackeray alleged that the Maharashtra government was incapable of shedding light on several basic points in the case.

## Parliament session witnesses govt-Opp face-off on several issues



DEEPAK RAZDAN  
NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Parliament's Budget Session last week disposed of substantial government business, after the near wash-out of most business in the previous week, when the Session resumed after a break.

While there was confrontation between the Government and the Opposition on frequent increases in petroleum prices earlier, the last week had stormy scenes in the Rajya Sabha over consideration and passing of the Insurance Amendment Bill, 2021, which proposes raising foreign direct invest-

ment (FDI) in the sector from 49 per cent to 74 per cent.

The Bill was passed despite the Opposition demanding its reference to a Select Committee. Deputy Chairman Harivansh ruled that members had not given any notice for this in advance, and so their request could not be entertained. After several adjournments before the discussion, the Opposition staged a walk-out when the Bill was passed.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman made out a strong case for raising FDI in the sector, giving vital data how the private sector had contributed to employment and a positive growth of the sector.

She said the Opposition's fears were groundless as all FDI-rich entities would be subject to Indian laws, their key management persons

like directors would be resident Indians, and a specified percentage of profits would remain in India.

The Upper House passed the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Amendment Bill, 2020 too after rejecting several members' demands for referring it to a House Select Committee for wider consultations. A controversial Bill introduced in the Lok Sabha on Monday pertained to the Lt Governor's role in Delhi's governance. The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021 seeks to amend the 1991 Act on the subject and provides that the opinion of the Lt Governor has to be taken on issues specified by him in a general or specific order.

The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regula-

tion) Amendment Bill, 2021 was introduced in the Lok Sabha after Opposition by Shashi Tharoor (Congress) saying the Bill fails to acknowledge the adverse impact on environment and biodiversity by stipulating automatic transfer of rights, approvals, clearances and licences from previous lease holders to the new owners. This is a violation of the Constitution, he said. Tharoor said the Bill threatens the life and well-being of the people residing in close proximity to the mines by doing away with the requirement to obtain fresh permits despite change in prevailing conditions.

The Bill

impinges upon the federal structure of the States by clearing the demands for grants of all Central ministries, although discussions were held on a select few, including the railways, health and education.

Discussing the railways, the members expressed concern over growing "privatisation." Railway minister Piyush Goyal said the private capital would only help improving services. There was concern over not enough funds to implement the New Education Policy during the Education Ministry debate. Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank said Rs 6,000 crores were allocated for higher education alone.

Concerns were expressed on Covid-19 during the Health Ministry discussion. Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said the country had become self-reliant in testing of the virus, production of masks, PPEs, ventilators and the vaccine. The Lok Sabha passed Budgets of the Jammu and Kashmir and Puducherry Union Territories.

शहीद भगत सिंह, राजगुरु, सुखदेव के बलिदान दिवस

पर

लाइट एंड साउंड शो एवं सांस्कृतिक प्रस्तुति

एक शाम शहीदों के नाम

23 मार्च 2021, सायं 5:30 बजे

सेंट्रल पार्क, कनॉट प्लेस, नई दिल्ली

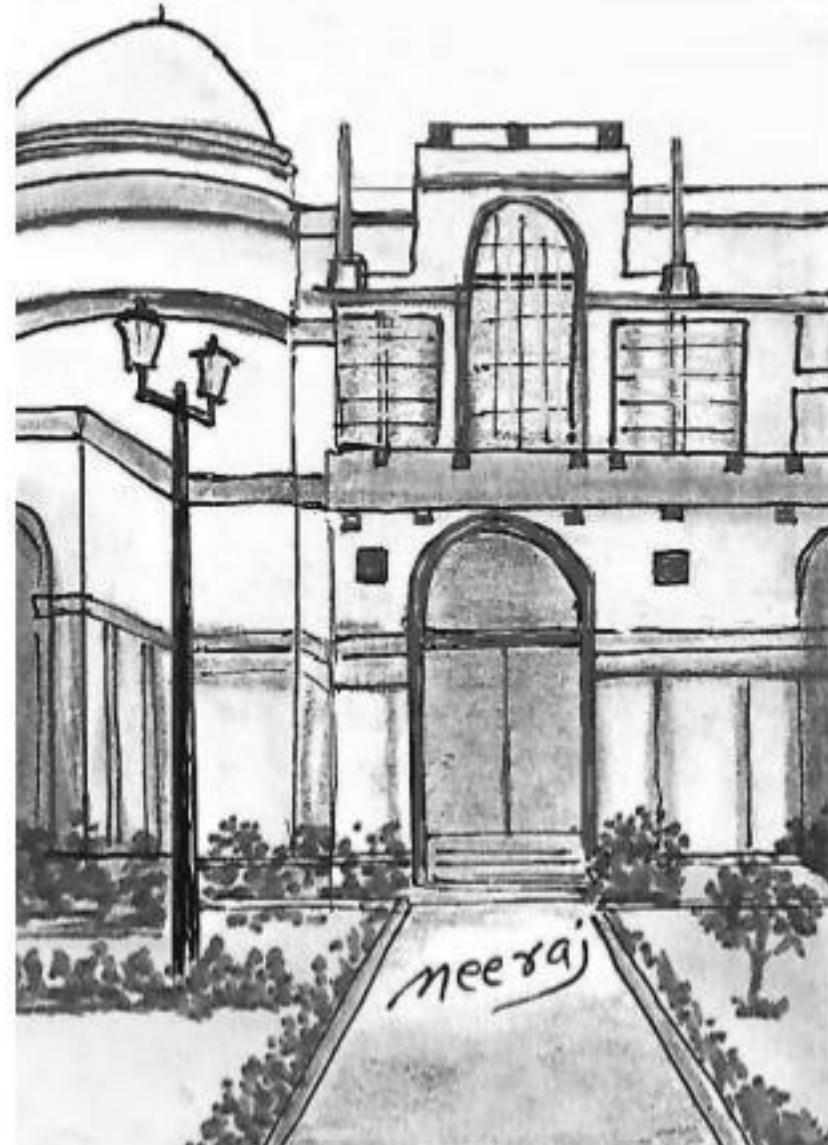
मुख्य अतिथि : श्री मनीष सिसोदिया, उप-मुख्यमंत्री, दिल्ली

विशिष्ट अतिथि : श्री गोपाल राय, कैबिनेट मंत्री, दिल्ली सरकार

सामान्य प्रशासन विभाग एवं पंजाबी अकादमी

राष्ट्रीय राजधानी क्षेत्र, दिल्ली सरकार

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How many times have we passed by Hyderabadi House on the northwest edge of the India Gate roundabout but hardly ever cared to dig into its history. In fact, there are quite a few such palatial structures on the same bend like, successively, Baroda House, Patiala House, Jaipur House, Bikaner House and also Kota and Jamnagar Houses further down Shahjahan Road—all reminders of the princely palaces inhabited by the regional satraps when they sojourned in Delhi to attend the Chambers of Princes at the beck and call of the British rulers. Hyderabadi House was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, the legendary architect and planner of New Delhi, and compares in grandeur only with the Viceroy's House or present-day Rashtrapati Bhawan, also conceived by him. It was constructed between 1926 and 1928 at a princely sum of Rs. 50 lakhs to serve as a residence of the last Nizam of Hyderabad, Mir Osman Ali Khan. Spread over 8.77 acres and built in the Indo-Saracenic style in the shape of a butterfly, it has a domed with an entrance hall beneath with symmetrical wings at 55-degree angles. It has 36 rooms out of which four are dining halls and a 'zenana' apartment. Some of the reputed companies of those days like Hampton & Sons and Waring & Gillow were roped in to decorate the building. The teak used was brought from Burma, the fur-

nishings were designed on the lines of a London luxury hotel and the electrical fittings imported all the way from New York. The carpets were procured from Asia Minor, Persia, Iraq, Turkestan and Afghanistan. The hand-paintings came from Lahore. Plush green lawns surround the magnificent structure and the evening lighting makes Hyderabadi House glitter from a distance. Despite its grandeur, the building was disliked by the Nizam and his sons for being too "Westernised" due to the heavy dose of European architecture and was rarely used. In fact, the Nizam paid a single visit here and called it a 'horse's stable' rather than a palace, despite a fair spread of Mughal motifs. It was taken over by the Indian government on lease after Independence and integration of Hyderabadi with the Indian Union. Since then, Hyderabadi House has served as a state guest house, banqueting hall and as a venue for official meetings with foreign heads of state or government and other visiting dignitaries. It has witnessed countless summit-level meetings and inkings of numerous treaties and agreements with various countries, some of which are landmark milestones in bilateral ties. It is also a venue of joint press conferences and other government events, especially of the External Affairs Ministry. Next time one passes by Hyderabadi House, let us spare a thought for its glorious history.

### VIOLATION OF CORONA NORMS

India is in the grip of a fresh wave of Coronavirus even as the vaccination drive gains momentum. The lackadaisical attitude of the people towards the deadly virus during the past two months has led to a sudden spike in Coronavirus cases. Major markets in the national capital have been overflowing

with shoppers and window shoppers throughout the day since early February. Restaurants have again been doing a brisk business. The huge crowds at public places like the India Gate and the Red Fort just don't give an impression that we are still in the midst of our fight against the virus. Many people have given a go-by to Corona norms like wearing masks and maintaining social

distancing. Even senior citizens, who are most vulnerable, can be seen not wearing masks while taking their morning walk in the parks or visiting neighbourhood markets in Delhi. A friend last week politely asked a senior citizen why he was not wearing a mask. The reply shocked him. "Corona has disappeared from Delhi. In any case, I have already taken a dose of vaccine," the senior

citizen said, looking assured that Corona would not come anywhere near him now. Even police personnel, who would penalise anyone not wearing a mask until two months back, have started ignoring those violating Corona guidelines. It's time the authorities once again became pro-active and take steps to enforce Covid restrictions lest the virus becomes uncontrollable again. The

coming festival of Holi will be a big challenge for them. People need to be sensitised about the precautions they need to take while celebrating the festival of colours.

### TAILPIECE

Overheard: Ever since the Corona vaccination drive was opened for the public, a common

man goes to a hospital and becomes a VIP (vaccine inoculated person)!

**Contributed by:**  
Deepak Razdan, Bhaskar Roy, Ashok Tuteja and Asha Ramachandran

# Iconic Parliament Library

Parliament Library, the repository of books for the Indian Parliament, is completing 100 years this year. It is the largest library in Delhi, and the second largest in the country, after the National Library of India, Kolkata. Being part of Parliament, the vast resources of the Library are primarily meant for members of Parliament. But they don't appear to be making much use of that. Otherwise Rajya Sabha Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu would not have said, "I am told that the footfall of the Members of Parliament in this source of information and knowledge is not very encouraging." The Library has a rich collection of about 14 lakh books besides hundreds of journals in several languages. Located in the Parliament Library Building built in 2002, the Library has large open spaces to sit, easy accessibility to journals and stacks of books and rare volumes in the basement. There are reprographic facilities to take copies of the required material. In fact, there are MPs who are seen making liberal use of the material available in the Library. The fact is clear from their speeches as they refer to old records and speeches made during historic proceedings of Parliament. The Library has complete records of the Constituent Assembly debates which give the background and deliberations undertaken in the framing of different sections of the Constitution. The Rajya Sabha, called the Second House of Parliament, has had many debates where members, taking a second look at proposed legislations, showed deep research and appreciation of various issues. Unfortunately, the time limits imposed as part of the rules and frequent disruptions over political issues do not often let the members warm up to speeches worth remembering. As the Rajya Sabha resumed the second part of the Budget Session some days ago, Naidu said



PARLIAMENT LIBRARY BUILDING

books to its collection regularly, and has now developed into what is referred as the 'Library and Reference, Research, Documentation and Information Service', more familiar by its acronym, LARRDIS. The Library is accessible to research scholars, officials recommended by universities, colleges, ministries and departments after security clearance.

# India

## HP CM honours people jailed during Emergency

The Jai Ram Thakur govt holds 'Loktantra Prahari Samman' event to honour the contributions made to Indian democracy by people who had struggled against Emergency, raised their voices against it and were jailed

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
SHIMLA, 21 MARCH

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur on Sunday honoured 66 persons who were jailed during the Emergency. The CM said the Emergency is a significant episode of Independent India and that those who had raised their voices and struggled against it in that period should always be remembered.

He was addressing the Loktantra Prahari Samman function at Shimla, which was organised to pay respect and to honour the immense contributions made to Indian democracy by the persons who were jailed during the Emergency.

Thakur said generally people have a tendency to forget the past, especially hard times, but the Emergency period should never be forgotten as it had taught several lessons.

"The Emergency is an important part of our history and the youth and future generation should also get acquainted with it," the CM said.

He also said that in 2019 the HP government had decided to start the Loktantra Prahari Samman Yojna to honour the per-



HP CM Jai Ram Thakur during the 'Loktantra Prahari Samman' function in Shimla on Sunday. SNS

sons who were put behind bars during the Emergency.

"On 20 March 2021, the state government passed the HP Loktantra Prahari Bill 2021 in Vidhan Sabha and with this, people of the state who were jailed during Emergency would get honorarium. Emergency was imposed at midnight on 25 June 1975 which remained in

force till 21 March 1977 for 21 months. Every person was performing their respective job and circumstances were normal and law and order situation was also under control so there was no such need of imposing Emergency. Nobody had ever thought of it, which was a tough and difficult phase of Independent India," he said.

The Allahabad High Court found Indira Gandhi guilty of electoral malpractices and declared the election verdict in the Rae Bareilly constituency

"null and void", and barred Gandhi from holding elected office for six years. Indira Gandhi was not willing to give up power, and thus imposed the Emergency in the country, Thakur said.

He said during the Emergency the government had deprived the common people of their fundamental rights and nobody could raise their voice against the government.

A large number of leaders and people including many innocent persons were jailed without any valid reasons and even censorship was imposed on newspapers and other media during that period 45 years ago.

"This year being HP's 50th Statehood Day and to mark its Golden Jubilee, the government has decided to organise 51 events in the state. The main objective of organising these functions is to make the younger generation aware about the developmental journey of Himachal Pradesh during last 50 years," the CM said, adding the state has made "immense progress and development" in various sectors. On this occasion, out of 81 "Loktantra Prahari" about 66 persons were honoured by the Chief Minister.

## Research work on natural farming reviewed at UHF



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
SHIMLA, 21 MARCH

The annual review meeting of the research activities work on Subhash Palekar Natural Farming (SPNF) being undertaken by the scientists of Dr YS Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry (UHF), Nauni, was held on Sunday at the campus.

Dr Parvinde Kaushal, UHF Vice-Chancellor, Rakesh Kanwar, Special Secretary Agriculture-cum-State Project Director SPNF, Dr Rajeshwar Chandel, Executive Director, State Project Implementing Unit, and Dr Ravinder Sharma, Joint Director Research attended the meeting.

The team of scientists working on SPNF at the university main campus, Mashobra, and Tabo took part in the meeting. Dr. Subhash

Verma, Coordinator of the SPNF at the university presented the progress report of the research activities on various crops carried out over the past year. Speaking on the occasion, Rakesh Kanwar congratulated the university scientists for working towards establishing science-based findings on the farming technique.

The work done by the university will help to develop the Package of Practices for the farmers in the future.

Over 1.2 lakh farmers from all districts in majority of the panchayats of the state have adopted natural farming and the feedback received from them is very encouraging," he added. He suggested that the university could link up with these farmers to broaden their field study. Dr. Subhash

view that the university should also develop some agroforestry models under the SPNF so that a five-layered system could be made. Collaborations with farmers for seed production of local varieties under this were also discussed.

UHF Vice Chancellor Dr Parvinde Kaushal said the university would collaborate to find out the effectiveness of the low-cost storage and processing technologies and protocols developed by the university under the natural farming technique. He was of the view that research on traditional crops grown in the state could also be undertaken under this system.

Dr Kaushal urged the scientists to sincerely work towards the sustainability of nature by developing a credible alternate system of farming for the farmers.

## Pole position

USA's diplomatic docket has been pretty full over the past couple of weeks as the Biden Administration's foreign policy officials made their first overseas trips to allied countries and simultaneously engaged with adversaries. On 15 March, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin met officials in Japan; on 17 March, they met their counterparts in South Korea. On 18-19 March, Mr Blinken and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan travelled to Alaska for talks with the Chinese while Mr Austin went in the other direction, spending a couple of days in India meeting the Prime Minister, Defence Minister, External Affairs Minister and NSA. All of this is to say the initial signs are that India is one of the two countries (Japan being the other) that has emerged in pole position in Washington's plans. In this context, the strong US-backing of India's position on its boundary dispute with China and the recent ceasefire announced between India and Pakistan are both significant. While Washington does not have a direct role in either situation, the imprimatur of the USA as friend and backchannel facilitator, is all over the recent diplomatic moves in the Sino-Indian and Indo-Pak theatres.

On China, the Biden Administration has cast itself as the only power capable – and now willing – to take on Beijing's alleged bullying in the region and its attempt to overturn the rules-based global order. The just-concluded and rather combustible US-China talks in Anchorage provided more evidence of Washington's hardening stand. The American strategic emphasis on bolstering the heft of 'natural ally' India in the Indo-Pacific in particular and as an Asian power in general as well as promoting Japan to flank China is showing. India, apart from being accorded a key role in the Quad, has been publicly backed by the USA on measures it has taken in response to Chinese intrusions. Crucially, despite pressure on President Biden from ideological opponents of India's ruling dispensation in the USA, he has, at least till now, stood fast in backing India against China. A word here to commend South Block for showing pretty adroit footwork in utilising US backing to de-escalate the border row with China while keeping the pressure on Beijing through other means would not be amiss. On the India-Pakistan front, the perceived softening of stands on either side with the announcement of the ceasefire and the possibility of bilateral talks in the not-too-distant future is an outcome devoutly wished for by Washington. The reason can be elucidated in one word: Afghanistan. President Biden has a big decision to make come May on whether he will honour the Doha deal and pull out the last 3,000 US troops from that country or retain some presence on the ground. Whatever he decides, Mr Biden wants Islamabad entirely focussed on its western border to prevent a Taliban-hosted revival of Al-Qaeda and other terror groups on Afghan soil that prioritise US/Western targets. It is not insignificant that despite Pakistan's protests, the USA has made place for India at the regional high table on the Afghanistan issue. Interesting times.

## Unlimited freebies

Freebies abound in the election manifestos of the ruling AIADMK and the Opposition DMK in Tamil Nadu that goes to the polls on 6 April. Distribution of freebies of any kind influences people and shakes the roots of a free and fair election to a large extent. The Supreme Court in its judgment of 5 July 2013 in S Subramaniam Balaji vs the Government of Tamil Nadu and others directed the Election Commission of India to frame guidelines with regard to the contents of election manifestos in consultation with all recognized political parties in order to ensure level playing field and also to ensure the purity of the election process does not get vitiated. Article 324 of the Constitution mandates the EC hold free and fair elections. The guidelines issued by the EC under para viii of the Moral Code of Conduct relating to manifestos say, "Political parties should avoid making promises which are likely to vitiate the purity of the election process or exert undue influence on the voters in exercising their franchise, and in the interest of transparency, level playing field and credibility of promises should broadly indicate the ways and means to meet the financial requirements for it." Trust of voters should be sought only on the promises which are possible to be kept. As extravagant promises were made in their 2016 election manifestos, the EC, by its order No 437/6/Manifesto/2016, advised both the AIADMK and the DMK to be "more circumspect and adhere to the provisions of the Moral Code of Conduct, particularly para viii of the guidelines relating to manifestos in future."

Apart from vitiating free and fair elections, freebie distribution falls foul of Article 14 of the Constitution as there is no reasonable classification of the people. The right to equality requires the State must make a reasonable classification and must have a nexus with the object of the law. The EC's 2016 censorship order had as much effect on the AIADMK and the DMK as pouring water on a duck's back. They have shown renewed enthusiasm for the freebie culture in their 2021 manifestos. The DMK has promised a monthly honorarium of Rs 1,000 for women heads of families if voted to power while the AIADMK increased it to Rs 1,500 a month if the party was retained in power. In addition, the AIADMK promised six free LPG cylinders a year and gold for the thali women wear and door delivery of rations. MC Sampath, Industries Minister, was so carried away by his party's gender-oriented freebies that he said at an election rally in his Cuddalore constituency, that with all basic requirements met by the AIADMK government, "a situation will arise where women will not have to depend on husbands!"

# Lesson from Australia

News and its free dissemination constitute the most essential feature of democracy, and by using the news content without paying for it, the tech giants are not only killing the newspapers but weakening the very foundation on which democracy itself rests



In February 2021, the Australian Parliament passed a landmark legislation – the News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code – mandating that technology giants like Facebook and Google pay news outlets a negotiated fee to link to or use their news contents on their platforms. The legislation obligates them to engage in compulsory arbitration if any settlement can't be reached with the news publishers on payment terms for sharing their news content, failing which the arbitrator decides the terms of such agreement. Failure to negotiate and settle attracts a stiff penalty – the highest of \$10 million, 10 per cent of turnover or thrice the monetary benefits derived from the news contents.

Given the untrammelled power of tech giants, their ability to propagate harmful content and violation of privacy rights of users for their own commercial benefits, Governments in different countries have been trying to regulate them for quite some time now, without much success. In the USA itself, there are at least half a dozen anti-trust lawsuits against Facebook and Google. Last year, the US Justice Department sued Google for resorting to monopolistic practices and the Federal Trade Commission sued Facebook for buying and freezing out small start-ups to choke competition, demanding it to unwind its acquisitions of WhatsApp and Instagram. Many US states have also filed antitrust lawsuits against them.

But the entire world was watching with bated breath to see the outcome of the legislative process in Australia which may become a global template for regulating the tech giants' relations with news publishers. The companies tried their tricks to intimidate the Government – Facebook blanked all news on its platform in Australia and Google threatened to shut down its services in the country. But in the face of the Government's resoluteness, both the companies backtracked – Facebook restored the news pages after five days and struck a deal with some publishers before restoring the news pages.

Prior to the legislation, an inquiry by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) found that tech giants were appropriating a disproportionately large share of the online advertising revenue at the expense of media houses even before the pandemic hit the media industry hard, shutting down many and/or laying off journalists or stopping printing altogether by the others. ACCC found that "for every \$100 spent on online advertising, Google captures \$53, Facebook takes \$28 and the rest is shared among others", which is a

and Google and Facebook so far managed by paying publishers on their own terms while evading the core copyright issue, on the pretext that they automatically help publishers by directing users to their sites through links, and that requiring them to pay would violate the principles of web-linking that drives the internet. Publishers argue that tech giants have immense asymmetric power to force their terms. But the real issue actually strikes at the very root of democracy and that is why governments are concerned. The arguments proffered by the publishers also do not hold: in the early days of Google, searches turned up links that directed users to the websites, but now Google itself answers the queries, filling the top of its results page with images and large amounts of text borrowed from the publishers, sparing the users the necessity of further opening the links.

Similarly, comments posted by Facebook users on the linked news-pages do not automatically ensure directing the users to those, but enable Facebook to monetize the attention generated by the post with its own ads. Thus while the two giants have grown into ad-behemots, their stranglehold on advertisement revenues are decimating the news-publishing industry. With their ad-revenues steadily declining all over, they are struggling for bare survival. Many have already perished, and many more have been forced to erect a paywall which further erodes their reader base. The two tech behemoths together account for 80 per cent of external traffic to news websites and appropriate around 80 per cent ad revenue from the digital distribution of news contents generated by news publishers and further squeezing their survival space.

It agreed to pay Seven West Media – a major Australian media firm – for using its news content, while starting negotiations with another media company called Nine Entertainment. Google also fell in line, striking a multi-million dollar three-year deal with Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, the parent company of the Wall Street Journal.

The dispute between the tech giants and news publishers has been going on for years now,

pittance – the lion's share being cornered by the tech giants who bear no cost for producing the news that get them the bulk of revenues that rightfully belongs to the media houses. Indeed, their revenues from digital advertising registered steep increases between 2019 and 2020 – Facebook's revenue increased from \$71 billion to \$86 billion while that of Alphabet which owns Google increased from \$161 billion to \$182 billion. In Australia alone, Google made \$4.3 billion in ad revenues, while FB made \$700 million. Hopefully the new law will now give the asphyxiated media houses a fresh lease of life.

News and its free dissemination constitute the most essential feature of democracy, and by using the news content without paying for it, the tech giants are not only killing the newspapers but weakening the very foundation on which democracy itself rests. Internet has emerged as a most significant democratising tool in our age by providing a universal open forum to disseminate

news and opinions. Advertisement revenues rather than subscriptions are the lifeblood of the newspaper industry which invests heavily in men and equipment for creating news content, but companies like Google and Facebook that control the internet have no obligation to pay for the news while garnering all the revenues from them, and robbing the news producers of those revenues. Unless the newspaper industry which is key to any vibrant democracy becomes financially viable, meaningful discourses and debates cannot provide inputs to governmental policy formulation, it also imperils democracy besides causing losses in jobs and taxes.

Until recently, most Indian newspapers were available free in the web – today to sustain themselves, most newspapers have erected paywalls based on a subscription model which in turn curtails their circulation and reduces their revenue further. The model becomes viable only when sharing the Facebook or Twitter links on any news content would need a subscription password, without which neither Google nor Facebook will be able to access them, defeating their very purpose – more so for a search engine like Google which in turn would demand a share of the digital revenue from news publishers.

In 2019, before the Australian legislation, the EU allowed publishers to ask tech platforms for payment. When France became the first country to implement this, Google threatened to shut down Google News but eventually struck a deal with French publishers to pay them for online news. It proved that a determined Government can force its will on big tech. The Australian case is a further vindication of this. Internet is without any national boundary and nations need to collaborate to force tech giants to behave rationally lest they become monsters out of control.

But like in every other sphere, here also we need to institute a system of checks and balances, to spread the benefits equitably across all publishers, big and small. Since presently only the big media houses like Rupert Murdoch's stand mostly to benefit from negotiations and payments, the question being raised is how to make small media organisations also benefit from the new law – here again, the might of the big may force the small without any bargaining power to accept whatever terms are being offered to them.

But one thing is certain – more countries will now brace themselves for taking on the might of big techs. Canada, UK, Germany and Spain are waiting in the wings, and many more may join soon.

In India, the Government has not yet started any course of action. Both the Copyright Act, 1957 and Competition Act, 2002 in India lack the teeth to force these companies to mandatorily share revenues with publishers. To make them adopt a uniform revenue sharing model worldwide is one option, which requires all countries to collaborate. More than 130 countries are presently negotiating to finalise a framework to prevent multinational companies evade taxes by shifting their activities and profits among countries.

Last year, India imposed a 2 per cent tax on all foreign billings for digital services provided in India, followed by a similar 3 per cent tax imposed by France. But collecting such taxes is easier said than done because the digital companies earn revenues from one country but pay taxes elsewhere. In the absence of an agreed international framework, tech companies would always exploit the situation by yielding to powerful governments while bullying the weak. Being one of the largest and fastest growing internet markets, India must lead the world in fighting the big tech companies and making them pay uniformly.

A MEMBER OF THE **ANN**  
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## Energy efficiency methods

Oil and gas processing plants in Viet-nam still face many difficulties due to many subjective or objective reasons such as fluctuations in world oil prices, inefficient production and energy saving. Optimising production and saving energy for these plants is very necessary and will significantly contribute to the efficiency of their production and business activities. In recent years, oil and gas processing units of the Vietnam oil and Gas Group (PetroVietnam) have continuously improved their production to reduce energy consumption. The ministry regularly directs production units to further improve energy saving and efficiency and has also implemented many programmes to encourage enterprises to save energy, including the National Target Programme on economical and efficient Use of energy. Two phases of the programme had been implemented and the third phase of 2019-2030 is being carried out, aiming to save five-to-seven per cent of the total national commercial energy consumption in the period of 2019-2025 and eight-to-10 per cent for 2019-2030 period. The ministry also calls on enterprises to come up with solutions to optimise and save energy through scientific research topics and programmes and awards such as the Sustainable energy award, the National Brand award. The open-door policy and the removal of tax barriers have allowed many oil products to flow into Vietnam, leading to enormous

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competitive pressure and oversupply. What is your opinion about this? The world and regional economic integration is an inevitable trend in Vietnam. Under the free trade agreements between Vietnam and other countries in recent years, Vietnam has committed to reduce import tax on petroleum products such as gasoline and diesel. The implementation of the roadmap has put a lot of pressure on prices and quality for domestically produced petroleum products. Oil and gas processing factories in Vietnam need to research and accelerate upgrades, improvement, increase productivity, minimise management and operating costs, and improve product quality as well as take advantage of the market to be able to compete with imported products.

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has descended on the party's poll blitz. Rebel Subhendu Adhikari's shrieks of defeating her have disappeared after she announced her decision to contest from Nandigram which was the cradle for their political rise.

He is in a feeble manner expressing his fear that she would destroy him politically. Nominees for the four phases by the party have stirred a hornet's nest, which will result in diversion of BJP votes to other parties, as happened to the Left parties in the panchayat elections.

Dilip Ghosh's announcement that he will not contest the election in order to organise the campaigns implies that he is out of reckoning as the next Chief Minister (even though he is a son-of-the-soil). The BJP seems to have given the Trinamul Congress a walkover before the match has started.

Yours, etc., Bibekananda Ray, Kalyani, 19 March.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

## Quad and the Dragon's wrath

SIR, Your editorial, 'Quo Vadis Quad' (17 March) is absolutely spot-on. Instead of attaching much importance to Nato to counter Russia, the United States is now obsessed with the emerging superpower – China – and is riveted to the Asian front to tame the Dragon in the Indo-Pacific. Quad, comprising India, Australia, Japan and the USA is in favour of curbing growing Chinese assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region and the South China Sea that China claims to be its fief. It won't be easy for Quad to tame the Dragon easily because Russia is now its close ally and both want to counter global dominance of America. Hence only Quad is not enough; America needs to get its Nato allies involved in Asia to counter the Sino-Russian joint military prowess. America also has a record of leaving its allies in the lurch when its interests are



met. In the event of a US deal with China, other Quad members will have to withstand the Dragon's wrath. They need to be cautious.

Yours, etc., Aranya Sanyal, Siliguri, 18 March.

### BJP'S LOW-KEY CAMPAIGN

SIR, Coincidentally the anno-

sance of election dates for West Bengal, the chorus for annexation of the State by the BJP top brass by dislodging Mamata Banerjee has slid to a low key. Their visits continue at enormous expense incurred by the party or government (or corporate houses), but one no longer hears such

crude rhetoric as shredding Ms Banerjee to pieces. The airing by a Kolkata TV channel of the two weekly private opinion polls, predicting an utter debacle of the BJP and Mamata's development trump card and the huge public response might have diminished the saffron fusillade but an ominous silence

### ASHOKA UNIVERSITY

SIR, It is doubtful whether the resignation of two eminent Professors has created the outcry in the past as has been the case with the exit of Pratap Bhau Mehta and Arvind Subramanian from Ashoka University, an institution hitherto perceived to be truly free from political interference and, therefore, providing academic and intellectual freedom to its students and the faculty. What is most disturbing is the fact that even private initiatives are falling prey to external pressures in an environment where freedom of speech and tolerance towards criticism have taken a back seat. One only hopes that good sense would prevail someday.

Yours, etc., Bhaskar Roy, New Delhi, March 18.

## Decoding Sasikala's bold gambit

ATANU BISWAS

**D**id poll-bound Tamil Nadu see rare political artistry from VK Sasikala? While the assembly elections in four states and a Union Territory are round the corner and political events are unfolding almost every day, one of the most dramatic events with tremendous potential for future – that of Sasikala staying away from politics – is a real anti-climax in some sense. However, it possibly got relatively less attention than it deserves.

Being the closest aide of J Jayalalitha, Sasikala certainly enjoyed huge political power over the years. Many experts believed Sasikala to be the effective political brain behind Jayalalitha's fantastic brand of politics. Then, after Jayalalitha's demise four years ago, in a bid to get hold of her political inheritance, O Panneerselvam launched a revolt against Sasikala and tried to stop her from grabbing Jayalalitha's political legacy and control of the AIADMK party. Subsequently, of course, Sasikala was sentenced to a four-year jail term in a criminal conspiracy case of 1990s.

However, four years on, it's a completely different political scenario in 2021. Sasikala stepped out of the Bengaluru central prison in February, and the ruling AIADMK was facing anti-incumbency. On Jayalalitha's birth anniversary on February 24 in this election year, Sasikala asked Jayalalitha's 'genuine followers' to unite, which, however, was turned down by the AIADMK leadership. With almost no top-level AIADMK leader reaching out to her, Sasikala surprised political pundits by her sudden announcement to step aside from politics, which portrayed her as a real well-wisher of Jayalalitha's AIADMK. "I have not harbored after post, title, power. I am grateful to those who have showered me with love and affection. I will step aside from politics so that AIADMK rule can continue," she wrote.

It's an audacious gambit – a truly rare phenomenon in the political arena of the country, there's no doubt about that. Many political experts, however, think that Sasikala didn't mean to 'retire' from politics at all. The operative Tamil phrase used in this



context in Sasikala's statement is 'Odhungi irundhu', meaning 'stepping aside', indicating that the room for returning to active politics is kept open. Consequently, under the assumption that Sasikala would return to Tamil politics at some opportune moment, experts got engaged to try to decode Chinnamma's big gambit for the long haul.

Some political observers even tried to compare Sasikala's move with Janaki Ramachandran's decision to retire from politics in 1989, after her faction got only two seats in the 1989 Assembly election and the Karunanidhi-led DMK grabbed power in Tamil Nadu with a massive 150 seats. But, Sasikala, on the contrary, took her dramatic decision well ahead of the Assembly election this time and thus could convey a message to AIADMK supporters that she really cares about the well-being of Jayalalitha's party and of course Jayalalitha's legacy. Thus, the situations are widely different.

Was it really an ideal moment for Sasikala to stick to politics against the AIADMK with almost no political prospects in the vicinity? It is projected that the Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK) of Sasikala's

nephew TTV Dhinakaran and Kamal Haasan's Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) will be among the pool of parties to come a distant third in the upcoming elections. And unless there is a hung assembly – which, according to the opinion polls, is quite unlikely at the moment, these parties will not enjoy much political power in the near future. Thus, it might be sensible for Sasikala not to disturb the poll prospects of AIADMK at this moment, if she aspires to get hold of that party in future.

If she had fought this election against the AIADMK, she would have been portrayed as a spoiler of the electoral prospects of that party, which, according to various opinion poll surveys and the belief of many political analysts, is not great, in any case. As per major opinion polls at the moment, come May 2, AIADMK is not too likely to return to the power. Still, one must admit that staying away from politics is a very rare phenomenon. And that's why Sasikala sounds special. "As Amma used to say, defeating the evil force DMK should be the main aim of all obedient cadre of Amma's party," Sasikala could thus elevate her personal image by putting

party before her own ambition. Consequently, this may nullify any negative image that she might have.

Is this really a masterplan of Sasikala? Nobody knows. But, given the belief that Sasikala hasn't taken permanent 'sanyas' from politics, she might fancy some opportune moment to strike back. In that case, for the time being, she must be convinced that AIADMK is not likely to win in the upcoming elections. She must be willing to create a sense that AIADMK's likely dismal fate in the upcoming elections is due to the fact that she was disrespected in the party. And that may even pave the path for her return, maybe scripting a royal comeback to the helm of the party. Who knows, Sasikala may eventually play a significant role in Tamil politics as the AIADMK supremo in the next decade or so.

Will Sasikala eventually emerge as a 'Baaazigar' out of this gambit? Some political commentators even recalled the popular dialogue from the Shahrukh Khan starrer movie: "Kabhi kashaa jeetne ke liye kuch haarna padta hai. Aur haara kar jeetne waale ko baaazigar kehte hai", meaning: "Sometimes one needs to lose to win eventually,

ally, and one who loses to win is called a gambler."

Overall, such an act is not very common in Indian politics. Her supporters and political pundits are visibly shocked. And it is a jolt to Dhinakaran's poll prospects also. However, one must keep in mind that even if she intends to come back, Sasikala's political 'sanyas' might be prolonged if AIADMK becomes victorious in this election. However, that's the calculated risk one has to take in exercising such a step. And, if Sasikala really aspires to come back, that's the stake she has taken.

We are often tired of watching politics as a game of chance and also sometimes as an application of brute force. This might be one of those occasions when it is possibly played with sheer artistry. Yes, 'Queen's Gambit' is a chess opening. And, if political commentators predicting Sasikala's royal comeback in Tamil politics at some opportune moment are right, Sasikala's present move might also be an opening of a classic political script in the history of the country. The game is on.

The writer is Professor of statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata.



IT CAME TO MIND | MANISH NANDY

## A Room for Me

**W**hen I was a kid, my parents complained that I occupied the bathroom for a long time. My brother, with his gift for hyperbole, would say, "If he enters the bathroom now, we will not see him until tomorrow." He must have passed on the idea to his wife when he married, for I remember getting a birthday card from her twenty years later that pointedly quoted from Martin Luther's diary, "The more you wash, the dirtier you get."

I am sorry to report that neither the complaints nor the sarcasm had the intended effect of reforming my behavior. I continue to tarry in the bathroom. I simply love the place. Buddhadev Basu wrote a charming essay years ago explaining why the bathroom was his favoured place. He said that that was the spot where he felt the most untroubled, immune from others' intrusion. Nobody could reach him; family members hesitated to knock on the door. He was totally free of the world. To my family's annoyance, I read the essay aloud to them after dinner.

I don't quite have the same problem now. I live alone in a three-story home, where there are two bathrooms, and, in addition, what Americans call, two half bathrooms, that is, bathrooms without a shower. I am never in the way of a guest or a visitor who feels an irresistible urge. Basu certainly had a point. Once you close the bathroom door, you have a world of your own, private and peaceful. Whatever mansion or hotel you live in, that remains a reassuring refuge.

A neighbour across the street, a widower, lives with his brother. The brother lost his job and his apartment, and came to live with his sibling – temporarily. That temporary period

has now extended to seven years and looks certain to continue. My neighbor, though clearly very fond of his brother, has a recurrent theme in his conversation: he does not have a space to himself. He cannot speak on a phone, sure that he will not be overheard. He cannot be in a room, sure that his brother will not walk in. He dreams of the day he can again have his space to himself, though the prospect seems unlikely.

I have all the space I need to myself, in fact much more than that. Having grown up in India, where people live in smaller houses with smaller rooms, I have a recurrent sense of guilt for wasting so much space. I know I will be content with a smaller, one-level apartment, where all I need is an independent study or office. But, even in that smaller lodging, I would prefer two bathrooms, so that I don't have to share it with a visitor. I would like the unhurried use of my bathroom behind a firmly closed door.

My family, including my sister-in-law, was quite right: I shower for a long time. I thrill to the abundant sprinkling of modern shower heads, where you can regulate the volume and power of the water jets. I confess I am not yet used to the more modern types where the water jets come at you at various levels in different angles. I am sure they are very hygienic and serve to massage distinct parts of the body. My world-weary body is not yet ready for this cutting-edge innovation.

I am guiltily aware that I use more water than I need to clean myself. UNICEF tells me that one billion people in the world don't have access to clean water. At least I am not using the large bathtub in my other bathroom. I have used it sometimes, but



ILLUSTRATION: DEBABRATA CHAKRABARTY

the long ritual of filling it with warm water, putting in bath salt and immersing myself, while refreshing, is not for my everyday routine. I like the simplicity of a dial or a couple of faucets, and the next moment you are delightfully drenched from head to toe in warm water.

In Japan, I was impressed by the practice of scrubbing and cleaning oneself before getting into the bath, which is really for relaxing. I use the shower for both, first for cleaning and then for relaxing in the warmth of flowing water. I follow the Japanese in another way: I turn up the water heat once I have showered for a while. It is supposed to burn calories, reduce blood pressure and strengthen the heart. Whether you believe that or not,

you cannot question what one immediately feels after a warm bath. It dramatically lifts my spirits and blows away my blues. I am glad to pay a little more for my water bills if it gives me this quick track to euphoria.

There are records of people taking a bath since 3000 BCE, and the Greeks and Romans had both public baths and private bathrooms, at least in the wealthier homes. Clearly the private ones were for cleaning and resting, while the public ones were for relaxing and chatting. From the sixteenth century, public baths went out of fashion, but the Japanese were smart and kept their wonderful sento and onsen. I loved the onsen in Chiba, though the locals clearly did not like that, unlike the Japanese, I had not

waxed my bodily hair before immersing. Nor did they care for my daughter's large tattoo.

My children may laugh at my long shower and my beloved sister-in-law may continue to send me sardonic notes. I tell myself that Homer's heroes took baths to gain strength before a major encounter. The great Achilles's mother Thetis bathed him in river Styx to make him invincible; sadly, she held him by his heel, which remained vulnerable. I too am vulnerable, very vulnerable, and not just in the heel.

But if I must have a room to myself, it has to be the bathroom.

The writer is a Washington-based international development advisor and had worked with the World Bank. He can be reached at mnandy@gmail.com

100 YEARS AGO

### OCCASIONAL NOTE

The published programme of work for the coming conference of the Moderate party to be held in April has the merits of being practical, constructive, and directed to matters which come home to the daily life of the people. The best way of combating the evils of the non-cooperation movement is one of the subjects set down for discussion, and the importance of this question is clear. There are two methods of counter-propaganda – one by warning the people of the dangers inherent in non-cooperation, and the other by attracting the people to a better policy. Neither of these methods should be neglected; and both will be brought to bear on the case if the Moderate programme be carried into effect with the requisite energy and enthusiasm. The Moderate policy will be directed to the development of the resources of the country, which means the enrichment of the people; to the combination of economy with efficiency in the public finances; to the improvement of the economic condition of the people by the increase of production and of remunerative employment as well as by the encouragement of vocational education; to the improvement of sanitation, general education, and medical relief, with the help of village union boards. Administrative reforms are not neglected, and a useful suggestion is that the Conference shall take up the question of improving the Police force and increasing its popularity.

### NEWS ITEMS

### SACRED SHRINES IN MESOPOTAMIA

Lucknow, Mar 21  
H.E. Sir Harcourt Butler has already stated that the rumours of Mujahids had been poisoned and that the sacred place of Najaf had been bombarded by the British were totally false. Two Mujahids had died of old age after long illness without any suspicion whatever of poisoning. Najaf had not been bombarded by British troops or by troops under British Officers. With regard to the other statements, the High Commissioner of Baghdad has telegraphed that there is no foundation for the rumour that the mosque at Najaf Ashraf was damaged by shells or rifle fire, or that the mosque at Qufa was ever occupied by Sikh troops. Not only was there not a single shot fired at Najaf Ashraf, but guards were posted at all gates.

### WAGON SUPPLY FOR COALFIELDS

Delhi, Mar 21  
A Press communiqué states: In consequence of representations as to the necessity for an alteration in the existing system of distribution of coal wagons in the Bengal and Bihar and Orissa coalfields, the Government of India took the opportunity of the presence in Delhi of Members of Council and Members of the Legislative Assembly who were interested in this matter to refer the question for discussion to an informal committee, the members of which represented producers and consumers. Subsequent to the submission of the report a meeting was held by the Hon. Members for the Commerce and Railway Departments, at which the Hon. Sir A.R. Murray, Mr. N.C. Sircar, the Hon. Mr. Froom and Mr. A.M. Clark, Member of the Railway Board were present.

### TRIAL OF OTTAMA CAUSES "HARTAL"

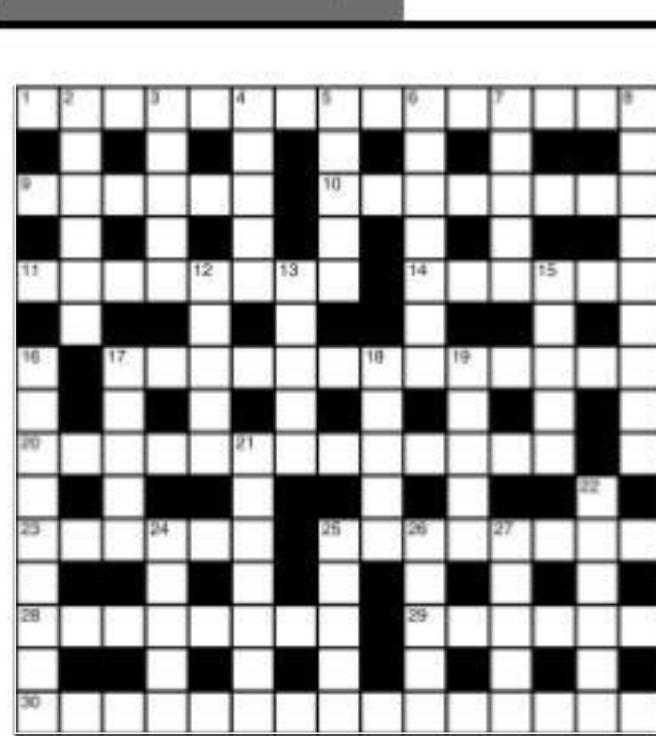
Rangoon, Mar 21  
U. Ottama's trial commences today at Pyapon near Rangoon. There is a hartal in Rangoon in sympathy with the accused man. Employees of some of the large firms and several smaller ones, owing to intimidation, are observing the hartal and shops are closed in the bazar. Burmans are making rickshaw passengers alight and forcing rickshaw coolies to cease work. So far no violence was reported. Hartal all over the country is reported to be complete. The Sessions Judge of the Delta Division has refused bail to U. Ottama on appeal from the order of the District Magistrate of Pyapon, who rejected the application in the first instance last week, an application being made for the transfer of the case to Rangoon.

### PUNJAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Delhi, Mar 21  
At a special general meeting of the Punjab Chamber of Commerce held on Saturday, new draft rules of the Chamber, which had been kept in abeyance for some time, were passed the main features of the Rules being election of members to be by managing committee and subject to the proviso that the number of Indian and European members must remain equal; the election of the Chamber's representative to the Legislative Council to be by the general body of members; the election of the Chamber's representative on Municipal Committees to be by those members directly representative. The Punjab Chamber of Commerce gave a dinner tonight at Maidens Hotel to meet representatives of other Chambers of Commerce who are now in Delhi.

CROSSWORD

NO 28861



#### ACROSS

- 1 Perverse aversion to whisky (7,3,5)
- 9 French left without social skills (6)
- 10 Lender cried out to Rishi initially (8)
- 11 Protesting members entering America (2,2,4)
- 14 Theatre god (6)
- 17 Partisan loyalty on organised trip so typical (5,8)
- 20 Difficulty finding somewhere to go (13)
- 23 Day in Ascot rearranged for groups of eight (6)

#### DOWN

- 2 Greek father is up and down for a drink (6)
- 3 Native American furious to lose ancestry (5)
- 4 Curse Cornish listener (5)
- 5 Wake-up call first for Cassandra? (8)
- 6 Fast car reversed inside – there's the rub (8)
- 7 Got back trouble carrying a box to Baltic state (6)
- 8 Policy advisor's banker ruins core review (9,6)
- 12 Border protection (5)
- 13 Times up in West perhaps? (5)
- 15 One learning about wine region (5)
- 16 Call for attention twice, holding vote for the masses (3,6)
- 17 Choose detailed books on decorative embroidery (5)
- 18 Gold that is left for Oxford college

- 5 Loads of headless nails (5)
- 6 Looker seen at Suffolk town dance (7)
- 7 Thick-skinned heavyweight who charges money (5)
- 8 Anxiously fixed louvres in city (9)
- 10 Looker seen at Suffolk town dance (7)
- 11 Intimate meal with no starter (5)
- 12 Is absorbed by medal – time to show guts (7)
- 13 Dream about Persia (6)
- 14 Say goodbye to a pass at university (5)
- 15 Make room at the top by trimming trellis (5)
- 16 Perform without notes from Brideshead librettist (2-3)
- 17 Saw excessive award overturned (5)
- 18 Gold that is left for Oxford college

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



*With restrictions imposed by RBI gone, we will like to go in a calibrated way and grow the business in a more profitable fashion so that my efficiency ratios improve.*

RAKESH SHARMA

MANAGING DIRECTOR AND CEO OF IDBI BANK

## THUMBNAILS

HZL reusing water at plant: Hindustan Zinc (HZL) on Sunday said that it is consciously treating and reusing sewage water to operate its plant, thereby saving water. Conserving water should not just be taken as 'need of the hour' but as an ingrained approach towards the environment, the company noted. As a major economic contributor in Rajasthan, Hindustan Zinc is constantly working on recycling, searching alternatives for use of water, and exploring alternative water sources, the company said in a statement. PTI

Visionet plans to hire 1,500 people: Business process management firm Visionet expects 50 per cent year-on-year growth in 2021 and 2022 on account of higher demand for digitisation across several verticals, mainly in banking, finance and insurance segments. The company also plans to hire 1,500 people this year. "In 2020, we have grown by almost 60 per cent overall. In 2021, we are expecting over a 50 per cent plus growth rate and we are also forecasting a very strong growth rate of 50 per cent in 2022." PTI

RINL to begin commercial production at UP: State-owned steel maker RINL will start commercial production of forged wheels at its Rae Bareli unit in Uttar Pradesh this month, a company official has said. Visakhapatnam-based Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd has set up a plant in Rae Bareli at a cost of around Rs 1,680 crore, with a production capacity of one lakh pieces of forged wheels per annum. PTI

IDBI Bank to focus on improving efficiency: Having emerged from regulatory restrictions recently, IDBI Bank is now looking at growing business in a calibrated way with more focus on profitability and in improving efficiency ratios, CEO Rakesh Sharma said. The bank is targeting Rs 3,500-4,000 cr.

# Household debt soars to 37.1% of GDP: RBI report

Household savings plunged as the pandemic led to millions losing jobs or forced to take pay cuts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI, 21 MARCH

The year-long pandemic left households more indebted, which has sharply jumped to 37.1 per cent of GDP in Q2 of FY21, while their savings rate plunged to a low 10.4 per cent, according to latest data from the Reserve Bank.

The household savings plunged as the pandemic has led to tens of millions losing jobs and almost all forced to take deep pay-cuts, forcing them to borrow more or dip into their savings to meet expenses.

This has the share of households in the overall credit market jumping to 51.5 per cent in Q2, up by 130 bps year-on-year.

In a counter-seasonal manner, the pandemic-induced spike in the household financial savings rate in Q1 of FY21, when it had touched an unprecedented 21 per cent of GDP, has plunged to 10.4 per cent in Q2, the March issue



of the RBI bulletin released over the weekend showed.

However, this was still higher than 9.8 per cent registered in Q2 of FY20, the report said.

The RBI house economists said normally when the economy stalls or contract, household savings go up and when the economy recovers it falls as people become more confident of spending. In our case, the savings jumped to an unprecedented 21 per cent in Q1, when GDP con-

tracted by a record 23.9 per cent, and when contraction moderated to 7.5 per cent in Q2, household savings plunged to 10.4 per cent.

"The inverse relation between the household savings rate and GDP growth may sound counter-intuitive, but studies have shown that households tend to save more during the economic slowdown and greater income uncertainty," the report argued. A similar trend was also observed during the global

financial crisis in 2008-09 when household savings jumped by 170 bps as per cent to GDP in FY09 and moderated subsequently as the economy picked up.

But, the report warned that the household savings rate would have further gone down in Q3, citing preliminary numbers as a result of near normal consumption and economic activity.

"The household debt to GDP ratio, which has been steadily increasing since Q1 of FY19, has jumped sharply to 37.1 in Q2 of FY21 from 35.4 in Q1. There was also a significant pick-up in the share of household loans in the overall credit market, which increased by 1.3 bps to 51.5 per cent in Q2," as per the RBI bulletin. While households' deposits and borrowings have also picked up, their holding of currency and savings in mutual funds has moderated, the report said, which has attributed the increased consumption, particularly its discretionary components,

to a resumption in economic activity following the easing of lockdowns.

The reversal in household financial savings is corroborated by the lower surplus in the current account balance.

According to the report, this indicates regression in the household savings rate to 10.4 per cent is closer to the pre-pandemic levels, mainly driven by the increase in household borrowings from banks and NBFCs, accompanied by a moderation in household financial assets in the form of mutual funds and currency in Q1, as due to the lockdown, households had no option to spend.

This is evident from the lower contraction in private final consumption expenditure as also the lower surplus in the current account in Q2.

With overall consumption growth, the pace of contraction in private final consumption eased to 11.3 per cent in Q2 from the sharp contraction of 26.3 per cent in Q1.

ty of FPI inflows improved during the period as category-I foreign investors, comprising central banks, sovereign wealth funds, pension funds, regulated entities and multilateral organisations, increased their stake to a high 95 per cent of total equity assets at end-February compared with 87 per cent at end-December 2019.

According to depositories data, FPIs were net buyers of equities so far in March at Rs 8,642 crore. FPIs poured in Rs 14,202 crore into equities but pulled out Rs 5,560 crore from debt segment between March 1 and 19, leaving net investment to Rs 8,642 crore. Prior to this, overseas investors had invested Rs 23,663 crore in February and Rs 14,649 crore in January, on a net basis.

According to analysts, domestic equities are attractive for foreign investors due to the higher returns. Also a rejig in some of the global indices has led to net inflows into domestic equities.

There is a gush of liquidity in the global financial markets after US announced a \$ 1.9 trillion pandemic relief package.

## Cargo traffic at major ports falls 7 per cent in April-Feb

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

India's top-12 ports witnessed considerable decline in cargo traffic for the eleventh straight month in February to 600.62 million tonnes, according to ports' apex body IPA.

Cargo traffic at 12 major ports that are under the control of the Centre dropped by 6.61 per cent to 600.62 million tonnes (MT) during April-February this fiscal, compared with 643.10 MT in the year-ago period, the Indian Ports Association (IPA) said in its latest report.

All ports, barring Paradip and Mormugao which recorded 0.27 per cent and 30.93 per cent increase in cargo handling to 102.90 MT and 19.28 MT respectively, saw negative growth. Cargo handling at Kam-

rajar Port (Ennore) nosedived 23.29 per cent during April-February to 22.23 MT, while ports like Mumbai and Vizianagaram saw their cargo volumes dropping by over 12 per cent during the said period.

Cochin and Chennai ports suffered a sharp decline of about 10 per cent.

JNPT saw a decline of 8.06 per cent in cargo volumes, while Deendayal Port Trust and Kolkata ports logged an over 6 per cent drop in cargo volume. Cargo handling at New Mangalore and Visakhapatnam slipped 5.30 per cent and 4.87 per cent, respectively.

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, sharp declines were witnessed in the handling of containers, coal and POL (petroleum, oil and lubricant), among other commodities.

## Rolex Rings files IPO papers

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Auto-components maker Rolex Rings Ltd has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to launch an initial share sale.

So far this year, 16 companies have filed draft papers for their respective initial public offers as these firms are expecting to benefit from an equity market which is flush with liquidity and has seen a sharp increase in new retail investors.

Rolex Rings' IPO comprises fresh issue of shares worth Rs 70 crore and an offer for sale of up to 65 lakh equity stocks by Rivendell PE LLC, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP). Proceeds from the fresh issue would be used towards funding long-term working capital requirements as well as general corporate purposes.

## Future Group moves division bench of Delhi High Court against single-member bench

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

The Future Group has moved the division bench of the Delhi High Court against the order passed by the single-member bench, which has directed to stay its Rs 24,713 crore deal with Reliance Industries to sell its retail and wholesale business.

The Kishore Biyani-led group firm, Future Retail Ltd (FRL) has now filed an appeal before the higher bench of the same High Court against the orders passed by a single-member bench of Justice J R Midha, Future Retail said in a regulatory filing.

"The company has filed an appeal before the High Court of Delhi against the impugned order dated 18 March, 2021 passed by Single Judge...," said Future Retail.

Earlier, in a statement on



Friday, Future Retail had said the order of the single-member bench would have no impact on the ongoing proceedings before the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), which is presently going through the scheme of arrangement between the Future Group and Reliance Retail.

The NCLT has reserved its

order over the scheme of arrangement that entails the consolidation of Future Group's retail and wholesale and transferring it to Reliance with a Rs 24,713 crore deal that was announced in August last year.

The Future-Reliance deal, which is contested by global e-commerce major Amazon, has already received clear-

ance from the Competition Commission of India (CCI), SEBI and bourses, and the scheme of arrangement is now awaiting the nod from the NCLT and shareholders.

Passing a 134-page long judgement, Justice Midha had on Thursday directed Kishore Biyani-led FRL not to take further action on the deal with Reliance and held that the group willfully violated the EA's order.

The high court had rejected all the objections raised by the Future Group and imposed a cost of Rs 20 lakh on it as well as its directors.

It had directed them to deposit the amount in Prime Minister's Relief Fund within two weeks for being used for providing Covid-19 vaccination to senior citizens of Below Poverty Line (BPL) category of Delhi.

## Potato prices crash 50% to ₹ 5-6/kg in both producing and consuming areas

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Potato prices in both producing and consuming areas across India have crashed 50 per cent to Rs 5-6 per kg this year on account of good rabi (winter) crop, as per the government data.

While consumers are getting potato, the key kitchen staple, at very low prices at present but farmers are struggling to even recover their production costs.

As per the analysis of data on potato prices maintained by the Food Processing Ministry, the wholesale rates in 25 out of 60-odd key producing areas spread over Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Punjab, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Bihar were ruling 50 per cent lower on March 20 when



compared to the year-ago period.

In fact, wholesale prices of potato on March 20 were ruling below three years' average at Rs 6 per kg in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh as well as in Deesha, Gujarat.

In the year-ago period, wholesale potato prices were at Rs 8-9 per kg on a low side, only in some districts of Uttar Pradesh alone. Whereas in other states, the prices were

## Airtel adds 6.9 mn active users in Jan, extends gain: TRAI data

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Telecom operator Bharti Airtel added 6.9 million active users in January, extending its market lead on this count even as Jio's active subscribers tally declined by about 3.4 million, according to TRAI data.

With this, Bharti's active subscribers rose to 336 million, most of which was driven by total net adds, thereby indicating the improving quality of user addition, ICICI Securities said in a note crunching January telecom subscription numbers released by the sector.

For instance, wholesale prices of potato were ruling as low as Rs 5 per kg in Amritsar (Punjab) and Delhi on 20 March. The maximum price quoted for potato was Rs 17 per kg in Chennai, the data showed.

A similar trend was seen in retail markets.

The data maintained by the Consumer Affairs Ministry showed modal retail prices ruling as low as Rs 10 per kg on 20 March as against Rs 20 per kg in the year-ago period.

## 449 infra projects cost overruns worth ₹ 4.29 lakh crore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

As many as 449 infrastructure projects, each worth Rs 150 crore or more, have been hit by cost overruns totalling more than Rs 4.29 lakh crore, observed a report.

The ministry of statistics and programme implementation monitors infrastructure projects worth Rs 150 crore and above.

Of the 1,736 such projects,

449 reported cost overruns and 547 were delayed.

"Total original cost of implementation of the 1,736 projects was Rs 22,32,019.72 crore and their anticipated completion cost is likely to be Rs 26,61,205.74 crore," the ministry's latest report for February 2021 said.

According to the report, the cost overrun for com-

61 months and above.

The average time overrun in these 547 delayed projects is 44.59 months.

Reasons for time overruns as reported by various project implementing agencies include delay in land acquisition, delay in obtaining forest and environment clearances, and lack of infrastructure support and linkages.

Delay in tie-up for project financing, delay in finalisation of detailed engineering, change in scope, delay in tendering, ordering and equipment supply, and law and order problems, among others, are the other reasons, the report said.

The report also cited 'state-wise lockdown due to Covid-19' as a reason for delay in implementation of these projects.

## Irdai asks insurers to be more transparent in health insurance claims settlement

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

Insurance sector regulator Irdai has asked all insurers to be more transparent in their health insurance claim settlement process and apprise the policyholders of reasons in case of denial of claims filed.

It is essential that all insurers establish procedures to let policyholders get clear and transparent communication at various stages of claim process, Irdai said in a circular.

"All the insurers shall ensure putting in place systems to enable policyholders track the status of cashless requests/claims filed with

the insurer/TPA through the website/portal/app or any other authorised electronic means on an ongoing basis. "The status shall cover from the time of receipt of request to the time of disposal of the claim along with the decision thereon," said the regulator.

The circular on 'Health Insurance Claims Settlement' is addressed to life, general and standalone health insurance companies including the third party administrators. Irdai has asked the insurance companies to ensure that repudiation of the claim is not based on "presumptions and conjectures".

a viable player in the country. The automaker, which currently sells just two products in the domestic market, plans to launch four products, including the recently unveiled compact SUV Kushaq, over the next one year.

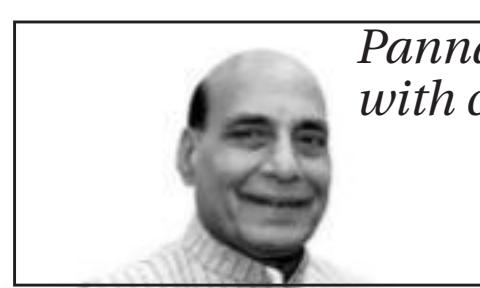
The company also plans to enhance its dealership count to 150 by this year-end.

Skoda Auto Volkswagen India Managing Director Gurpratap Boparai said the group's current efforts were in tune with its medium-term plan to garner around 5 per cent market share in the Indian passenger vehicle segment. He said the Volkswagen Group is investing 1 billion euros to strengthen its presence in the Indian subcontinent. Skoda Auto India Brand Director Zac Hollis said the company is gearing up to enhance its position in the domestic market where it continues to be a niche player with negligible market share with just two products -- Rapid and Superb -- in its portfolio.

He noted that in order to gain market share, the company aims to drive in four products in the country over the next 12 months.

Outlining the company's long term ambitions for the Indian market, he also noted that the automaker is preparing its sales network to sell one lakh cars per year in the coming years.

"Our market share at the moment is very small but of course our plan is to expand hugely. This year we aim to sell 30,000 cars in the country and next year we will more than double of that. Also, we aim to have 150 dealers



Panna pramukh should be deployed in Delhi... I can say it with conviction it can take the BJP to a win here

SENIOR BJP LEADER AND DEFENCE MINISTER RAJNATH SINGH

SAYING PANNA IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN PARTY PRESIDENT, THAT HE SHOULD BE HONOURED

The Statesman

NEW DELHI MONDAY 22 MARCH 2021

09

Narayanasamy  
cites coordination  
work as reason for  
not contesting polls

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
PUDUCHERRY, 21 MARCH

Senior Congress leader and former chief minister of Puducherry V Narayanasamy on Sunday said he was not contesting the 6 April Assembly elections as there was need to coordinate party's poll-related works and programmes in the Union Territory.

He told reporters at the PCC office here that the president of the Pradesh Congress Committee AV Subramanian was contesting the poll from Karaikal (north) and so he (Narayanasamy), along with Congress member of Parliament V Vaithilingam, had to coordinate election-related party activities.

The Congress, heading the Secular Democratic Alliance (SDA), has been earmarked 15 constituencies of the total 30 segments in the Union Territory. The party has fielded its candidates in 14 seats leaving out Yanam where it would support an Independent.

He said Malladi Krishna Rao of the Congress, who was the health minister, had announced support to the AIURC nominee N Rangasamy seeking election from Yanam. Rao had also quit the post of health minister and that of MLA.

## TN polls: BJP 'charge sheet' lists 100 reasons to reject DMK, allies

Accuses DMK of 'deceiving' people on a plethora of issues such as language and 'jallikattu', Cauvery water dispute

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
CHENNAI, 21 MARCH

**S**tepping up its poll battle in Tamil Nadu, the BJP on Sunday released a 'charge sheet' against the DMK listing out 100 reasons to reject the Dravidian major-led combine in the 6 April Assembly elections.

Accusing the DMK of 'deceiving' the people on a plethora of issues such as language and 'jallikattu', the party appealed to Tamil 'Makkal' (people) to ensure a massive mandate to the AIADMK-led NDA in these elections for a better future of Tamil Nadu.

The document, which listed out the DMK's 'betrayal' under 11 subjects, including Cauvery water dispute with Karnataka, Tamil society and social justice, besides its 'antagonistic' stand towards the majority Hindus, alleged that the party 'abused' power when it was at the helm.

BJP national general secretary-in-charge of Tamil Nadu CT Ravi unveiled the 'charge sheet' in the form of a booklet in the presence of party's state elections in charge and Union minister V K Singh and others at Kamalayam, the state party headquarters here.

BJP is contesting 20 Assem-



bly seats as part of the AIADMK-led alliance.

The charge sheet accused

the DMK of being behind the 'Karuppur Kootam' which allegedly depicted the "Kandha Shashthi Kavacham" hymn in praise of Lord Muruga, in a derogatory manner.

"DMK president M K Stalin shows his contempt for the Hindus at every instance, be

it the *kumkum* (vermilion) which he wiped off when it was applied on his forehead by the Srirangam temple priests or the *vibuthi* (holy ash) that he hurled when it was offered to him in Pasumpoon," it said.

Throwing a barb on the language issue, the document claimed the DMK was responsible for creating a situation wherein learning Tamil was not 'compulsory' thus deviating from Tamil as medium of instruction (in schools).

"The BJP-led government at the Centre created an opportunity for students to learn Tamil in Hindi-speaking states through its new National Education Policy,

but the DMK ruined their prospects," it said.

On the emotive Sri Lankan Tamils issue, the 'charge sheet' accused the DMK of miserably letting them down during the last phase of the ethnic war in 2009 and held it "fully responsible" for the 'massacre' of nearly 1.5 lakh innocent Tamils in the island nation.

Though DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi was in power then, instead of taking steps to prevent the killings, he resorted to a "fast between breakfast and lunch and fooled the people," the BJP document said, calling it a "historical disgrace".

## Palaniswami hits back at Stalin for 'crawl' remark

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
TIRUVANNAMALAI, 21 MARCH

party leader V R Nedunchezhiyan.

Following the death of DMK founder CN Annadurai in 1969, when everyone expected him to be buried in front of K Sasikala, close aide of late AIADMK supremo J Jayalalithaa, Palaniswami said it was the practice of Stalin to berate leaders and the DMK chief never spoke the 'truth.'

"Am I a snake or lizard to crawl?" he asked adding he walked up to the podium to take the oath of office

Stalin has been alleging

that Palaniswami became the CM by crawling in front of V K Sasikala, close aide of late AIADMK supremo J Jayalalithaa. Palaniswami said it was the practice of Stalin to berate leaders and the DMK chief never spoke the 'truth.'

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Stalin has been alleging

## Classified

### LEGAL NOTICES

IN THE COURT OF  
MS. RICHA GUSAIN SANKLI  
JSCC-cum-ASCI-cum-  
Guardian Judge  
Dwarka Courts, New Delhi  
PUBLICATION NOTICE  
DEFENDANTS  
(Order 1 Rule 8 (2) of the  
Code of Civil Procedure)  
CS No. 55/2021  
Silk Ram & Ors.

— Petitioner  
Versus  
The Commissioner SDMC  
(South) & Ors.  
— Respondents.

To,  
1. The Commissioner  
(South) South Delhi Nunicpal Corporation Civic Centre, Minto Road, New Delhi.  
2. Executive Engineer (Bldg.) South Delhi Municipal Corporation, Nafajgarh Zone, New Delhi-110043.

3. M/S. S.S. Builder and Associates, through its Proprietor/Partner/Principal Officer Having its Office at Plot No. 10/1, T-Block, Main Bindupur Matals Road, Utthan Nagar, New Delhi.

Whereas, the Plaintiff Sh. Silk Ram & Ors. have filed a Suit against the defendants for illegal construction done by the defendant No. 3 and the plaintiffs have claimed the relief of Permanent Prohibitory Injunction against the defendant No. 3 and its agents for restraining them from carrying out unauthorized construction over the suit property i.e. A-4 & 5, Jain Park, Uttam Nagar, Ward No. 375, New Delhi-110059 and also claimed the mandatory injunction directing the defendants No. 1 & 2, to remove the illegal and unauthorised construction.

If anybody is having any objection regarding the filing of the aforesaid suit or

the relief claims, he/she can appear before the Hon'ble Court on the next date, i.e. 20-03-2021, at 10.00 a.m. i.e. the date fixed in the matter.

Given under my hand and Seal of the Court on this 15th day of March, 2021.

JSCC-cum-ASCI-cum-Guardian Judge  
Dwarka Courts, New Delhi  
Seal of the Court

In the HIGH COURT OF  
DELHI AT NEW DELHI  
(Noticing Under Order V Rule  
20 Code of Civil Procedure)  
CM App No. 5723/2021 IN  
RSA No. 145/2016  
Appeal against the order  
dated 15-02-2016

Passed by Sh. Ashwani Kumar Sarpa, ADJ-01, North-East District, Karkardooma Courts, Delhi in RCA No. 33/2015.

Ani Kumar Pancholi deceased tht L's Appellant(s)

Versus  
M/s. Mahabir Steel Rolling Mills & Ors.

— Respondent(s)

Notice to Respondents :  
R-3. Smt. Om Ranji, w/o Sh. Surender Kumar Goyal, r/o 30 New Awas Vilas Colony, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Marg, Delhi Road, Saharanpur, U.P.-R-5. Mrs. Roma Jain, w/o Sh. Suresh Chander, r/o 27, Hauz Khas, New Delhi.

R-6. Mr. Gurjeet Gupta, w/o Sh. Prashant Gupta, r/o 14, Kalindi Colony, New Delhi.

R-8. Smt. Surma Jain, w/o Sh. J. K. Jain, w/o Sh. J. K. Jain, r/o E-159, Masjid Moth, Near G. K-II, New Delhi.

Whereas the abovenoted appellants has presented an appeal under Section 100 of CPC.

And whereas the said appeal was filed before the court on 22-02-2016 and the court ordered issuance of notices to you. And whereas it has been proved to the satisfaction of the Court that

the trustees of the aforesaid

you cannot be served in the ordinary manner, notice by issued that if you wish to defend your case by appearance or appeal, you may cause an appearance to be entered on behalf either in person or through an Advocate duly appointed by you for the purpose before the Court of the worthy Joint Registrar (Judicial) on 31-05-2021 (Actual) at 11-00 a.m.

If no appearance is made on your behalf, by yourself, your pleader or someone authorized by law fact for you, then and unless you file application date, no further notice of the subsequent date of hearing of the said appeal will be given to you and the said appeal will be heard and determined ex parte in your absence.

Given under my hand and the Seal of this Court, this 15th March, 2021.

Assistant Registrar(J)  
(Civil)  
for Registrar General  
Seal of the Court

IN THE COURT OF  
SH. HEM RAJ  
Additional District Judge-08,  
Central  
Delhi District  
Room No. 152,  
Tis Hazari Court, Delhi

CNR DLCT0108764-2019

Plot 3A, Zone B, Sector A,  
Bhupender Industrial Estate,  
Bhupender-751 010.

Tel: (0674) 2588060/61/62/ 2586371,  
Telefax: 0674-2588061

Email:  
bhupender@thestatesmangroup.com

SILIGURI  
13A, Dabgram Industrial Growth  
Centre,

trust are annexed herewith as  
Annexure-A.

i. Mr. D. M. Sawhney, Tirath

Ram Shah Charitable Trust, at  
2-A, R.B.L. Isher Das Sawhney Marg, Rajpur Road, Delhi-110054.

ii. Dr. Anand Prakash, Tirath

Ram Shah Charitable Trust, at  
2-A, R.B.L. Isher Das Sawhney Marg, Rajpur Road, Delhi-110054.

iii. Dr. Rati Sawhney, Tirath

Ram Shah Charitable Trust, at  
2-A, R.B.L. Isher Das Sawhney Marg, Rajpur Road, Delhi-110054.

iv. Mr. S. Taneja, Tirath

Ram Shah Charitable Trust, at  
2-A, R.B.L. Isher Das Sawhney Marg, Rajpur Road, Delhi-110054.

v. Mr. Tarun Sawhney, Tirath

Ram Shah Charitable Trust, at  
2-A, R.B.L. Isher Das Sawhney Marg, Rajpur Road, Delhi-110054.

vi. Mr. Nikhil Sawhney, Tirath

Ram Shah Charitable Trust, at  
2-A, R.B.L. Isher Das Sawhney Marg, Rajpur Road, Delhi-110054.

vii. Mrs. Geeta Rajpal, Tirath

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## WEATHER

CITY	MAX(°C)	MIN(°C)
SINGAPORE	32	26 R
HONG KONG	18	16 H
TOKYO	17	9 CL
LONDON	13	4 H
DUBAI	26	24 S
SAN FRANCISCO	15	8 H
NEW YORK	15	5 S
MOSCOW	2	-5 H

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

## THUMBNAILS



A pedestrian poses for a photo with accountant Tercio Galdino and wife Alicea, dressed in their astronaut costumes, as they walk along Ipanema beach in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Saturday. AP

**Profits drop:** Saudi Arabia's state-backed oil giant Aramco announced Sunday that its profits nearly halved in 2020 to USD 49 billion, a big drop that came as the coronavirus pandemic roiled global energy markets. AP

**Travel ban:** Pakistan imposed a complete ban on travel from 12 countries, including South Africa, Rwanda and Tanzania, in a bid to curb the spike of coronavirus cases as the country on Sunday recorded 3,667 new cases, taking the national tally to 626,802. AP

**Australia floods:** Australia's most populous state of New South Wales on Sunday issued more evacuation orders following the worst flooding in decades. AP

## Iran threatens US Army base, top general

WASHINGTON, 21 MARCH

Iran has made threats against Fort McNair, an Army base in the nation's capital, and against the Army's vice chief of staff, two senior United States intelligence officials said.

They said communications intercepted by the National Security Agency in January showed that Iran's Revolutionary Guard discussed mounting "USS Cole-style attacks" against the base, referring to the October 2000 suicide attack in which a small boat pulled up alongside the Navy destroyer in the Yemeni port and exploded, killing almost 17 sailors. AP

## Turkish police free politician after detention in assembly

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
ISTANBUL, 21 MARCH

Turkish police on Sunday detained a prominent pro-Kurdish party politician who was staging a days-long protest in parliament. He was released after questioning several hours later.

Omer Faruk Gergerlioglu, from the Peoples' Democratic Party, or HDP, refused to leave parliament after he was stripped of his status and immunity as lawmaker on Wednesday.

The party said around 100 police officers entered parliament to detain him. Video of his detention showed police officers dragging him away.

The party, which is in the throes of a government crackdown, said Gergerlioglu was detained as he was performing his ablutions for morning prayers.

The police insisted on detaining him, and took him away in his pajamas and slippers, the HDP said in a statement.

A statement by the prosecutor's office, quoted by official Anadolu news agency, said Gergerlioglu was detained for not leaving parliament

# US defense secretary arrives in Kabul

Lloyd Austin's first trip to Afghanistan as Pentagon chief comes amidst swirling questions over how long US troops will remain in the country

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
KABUL, 21 MARCH

**S**tate media reported that US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin arrived Sunday in Kabul on his first trip to Afghanistan as Pentagon chief, amidst swirling questions about how long American troops will remain in the country.

State-owned Radio and Television Afghanistan and popular TOLO Television reported Austin's arrival in Kabul from India.

He was expected to meet with Ghani and the newly appointed defense chief Army Chief of Staff Gen.

President Joe Biden said last week in an ABC News interview that it will be "tough" for the US to meet a May 1 deadline to withdraw troops from Afghanistan.

But he said that if the deadline, which is laid out in an agreement between former President Donald Trump's

administration and the Taliban, is extended, it wouldn't be by a "lot longer."

In response, the Taliban on Friday warned of consequences if the US doesn't meet the deadline.

Suhail Shaheen, a member of the Taliban negotiation team, told reporters that if US troops stay beyond 1 May, "it will be a kind of violation of the agreement. That violation would not be from our side. ... Their violation will have a reaction."

Austin was expected to meet with Ghani and the newly appointed defense chief Army Chief of Staff Gen.

Yasin Zia, who was appointed acting defense minister this week. Washington is reviewing the agreement the Trump administration signed with the Taliban last year.

In a sharply worded letter to Ghani earlier this month, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said it is urgent to make peace in Afghanistan and all

options remain on the table. He also warned that it is likely the Taliban would make swift territorial gains if US and NATO troops withdrew. United States spends \$4 billion a year to sustain Afghanistan's National Security Forces.

The Taliban warned America against defying the May 1 deadline at a press conference in Moscow, the day after meet-

ing with senior Afghan gov-

ernment negotiators and international observers to try to jumpstart a stalled peace process to end Afghanistan's decades of war.

Washington has also given both the Taliban and the Afghan government an eight-page peace proposal, which both sides are reviewing. It calls for an interim so-called "peace

government" which would shepherd Afghanistan toward constitutional reform and elections.

Ghani has resisted an interim administration, causing his critics to accuse him of clinging to power.

He says elections alone would be acceptable to bring a change of government.

Both the US and Kabul

have called for a reduction in violence leading to a cease-fire.

The Taliban say a cease-fire would be part of the peace negotiations. However, the insurgent movement has not attacked US or NATO troops since signing the agreement.

However, US military commanders and NATO leaders have argued that the Taliban have not lived up to their part of the peace agreement, which includes a reduction in violence and a separation from al-Qaeda and other terror groups.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said last month that the alliance "will only leave when the time is right" and when conditions have been met.

"The main issue is that

Taliban has to reduce violence, Taliban has to negotiate in good faith and Taliban has to stop supporting international terrorist groups like Al Qaeda," he said.

Austin has said little on the record about the ongoing

stalemate. After a virtual meeting of NATO defense ministers, Austin told reporters that "our presence in Afghanistan is conditions based, and Taliban has to meet their commitments since signing the agreement."

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# North-East Election fever grips Assam

With polling set to begin in a few days, the major political parties undertook shrill campaigns to garner votes



NAVAA THAKURIA

The stage is set for the three-phase Assam Legislative Assembly elections on 27 March, 1 and 6 April. The ruling alliance is seeking a fresh mandate based on its development activities alongside security for indigenous families of the North-east. The opposition alliance is looking to capture power in Dispur with five guarantees to the electorate.

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party is contesting for 92 seats, out of a total of 126 Assembly constituencies, while leaving the remaining to its political allies, namely the Asom Gana Parishad (26 seats) and United People's Party Liberal (eight seats). The saffron party has dumped one of its erstwhile pre-poll allies, the Bodoland People's Front, which has instead joined hands with the Congress Party-led grand coalition.

The BJP-led alliance has been proclaiming victory in more than 100 seats this time, which is a sharp increase from the 60 seats it garnered in 2016. The AGP had won 14 seats. Now in the opposition alliance, the BPF had got 12 constituencies. The Congress Party won 26 seats and its present ally, the All India United Democratic Front had succeeded in 13 constituencies.

The massive campaign rallies by various party leaders in support for their candidates have helped people in Assam reaffirm their expectations for the decades-long infiltration prob-

lem, recurrent floods and erosion, and the dearth of overall development in the state. The BJP campaigners targeted the misrule of the Congress Party during its tenures, both in New Delhi and Dispur, and emphasised on development activities while effectively addressing persistent problems like floods.

On the other hand, the Congress Party has been rigorously campaigning with five guarantees to voters including a commitment to nullify the Citizenship Amendment Act, which triggered massive public demonstrations in the Brahmaputra Valley. It also promises to create 500,000 government jobs, hike tea plantation workers' daily wage to Rs 365, provide free electricity up to 200 units for every household and approve a monthly package of Rs 2,000 for every housewife.

The saffron party engaged a number of political heavyweights including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP president JP Nadda, Union home minister Amit Shah, Union defence minister Rajnath Singh, Union ministers Jitendra Singh and Smriti Irani, Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath, Madhya Pradesh CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan, former Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis, and its national general secretary Dilip Saikia, among others for election rallies.

Addressing his first poll rally in Assam's Barak Valley, PM Modi termed the Congress Party as a "no

leader, no policy and no ideology" party. Arriving in the Bhatgram area of Karimganj locality, PM Modi described the Barak Valley as a gateway for the BJP in the North-east. He stated that the Bengali-dominated southern region of Assam has remained a support base for the saffron party for long. Starting his speech with "Namaskar Karimganj" in the Bengali tone, he lauded the great Ahom general Lachit Borpujan for his bravery during the Battle of Saraighat and Subhas Chandra Bose for his incomparable patriotism.

Shah promised to make Assam free from infiltration, terror and recurrent floods while maintaining relentless development activities. He assured that the "menace of illegal migrants" in Assam would be a matter of the past within the next five years. He asserted that only the PM Modi-led Union government could keep Assam safe from infiltrators. He claimed that both the governments in New Delhi and Dispur have played a pivotal role in bringing down insurgency.

Shah repeated the Centre's promise to deal with the problems of flood and erosion pragmatically if the saffron party is voted to power in Dispur once again. He criticised former PM Manmohan Singh, who represented Assam in the Rajya Sabha, for doing a little to solve the problem of infiltration and annual floods.

Rajnath Singh, during several

public rallies, assured the people that the wheel of development would be continued in the coming days as the saffron party was expecting to be re-elected. He remembered legendary cultural personality Bhupen Hazarika during his speech. Similarly, Adityanath mentioned Shrimanta Shankardev, the 15th century Vaishnava philosopher who shaped Assamese culture, and paid tributes to him as a preacher of great Indian cultural entity.

Fadnavis criticised the Congress Party for forging an alliance with the AIUDF and urged everyone to remain alert against divisive forces. Speaking about the vision document for Assam (2016-2025), he claimed that the ruling party has achieved over 60 per cent of those promises. He also added that the government in Dispur had worked to transform the state's socio-economic scenario during the last five years.

Nadda targeted the Congress Party for its false promises and commented that the party can only "ensure corruption" if voted to power again. Irani highlighted the advantages of transferring money to beneficiaries directly through their bank accounts. She also mentioned that the BJP government had hiked the daily wage of tea labourers from Rs 97, during the Congress Party days, to Rs 217; increased the maternity benefit to Rs 18,000 from Rs 12,000, offered student scholarships to thousands of beneficiaries, and two-wheelers to meritorious girls.

Meanwhile, the All India Congress Committee general secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala termed the announcements made by PM Modi as a big lie. He cited the destructive implications of the CAA over the identity and land of Assam. He also questioned the fate of the four-year-old promise of the BJP-led government in Dispur for a 1,300-km-long expressway on both banks of the Brahmaputra at a cost of Rs 40,000 crore.

Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel, who addressed a number of poll rallies seeking votes for Congress Party candidates, commented that the BJP has two chief ministers in Assam. He tried to highlight the personal conflicts between CM Sarbananda Sonowal and Himanta Biswa Sarma. Baghel precisely

told the electorate to remember that Sarma had left the former Congress Party government as he was denied the post of chief minister.

The Congress Party, along with the AIUDF, BPF, CPI(M), CPI, CPI(ML) and Anchalik Ganu Morcha as its allies, is hoping for electoral benefits from the campaigns of party chief Sonia Gandhi, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, top leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra alongside

Parliamentarians Gaurav Gogoi, Pradyut Borodoloi, state Congress chief Ripun Bora, senior leaders Debabrat Saikia, Rakibul Hussain, Bharat Narah, Rupjyoti Kurni, Ramen Barthakur, Wajed Ali Choudhury and Pranjali Ghatak.

A newly launched regional political party named the Asom Jatiya Parishad, led by former All Assam Students' Union leader Lurinjoty Gogoi, is expected to pose electoral challenges to both the BJP and Congress Party-led alliances in the Eastern Assam constituencies. Another new party named Raijor Dol, led by peasant activist Akhil Gogoi, who incidentally remains behind bars since December 2019 on sedition charges, has joined hands with the AJP to make a difference to the poll outcomes.

By now, several incidents related to pre-poll violence have been reported from various localities. Assam witnessed the murder of a saffron leader in Tinsukia as 47-year-old Devananda Gogoi succumbed to his injuries in a Borduma government hospital. The police have already arrested the attacker Joichandra Gogoi, who reportedly belongs to a newly formed regional political party.

The electoral authority has adopted all necessary precautionary measures due to the pandemic. Besides implementing the facility of postal ballots for senior citizens, disabled persons and individuals with suspected coronavirus infections, it has prioritised voters' safety. Additional polling stations have also been arranged to ensure greater access.

The writer is the Guwahati-based Special Representative of *The Statesman*

PLUS POINTS

Power woes



The fund-starved Meghalaya power department is yet to avail the second installment of the Rs 1,345.72-crore "Atmanirbhar Bharat" loan despite expiry of the Centre's deadline of 15 March set for the purpose, says a report in the Guwahati-based *Assam Tribune*.

The "Atmanirbhar" loan scheme was launched for struggling power distribution companies around the country to clear outstanding dues to Central public sector undertakings. The loan has been sanctioned under the Centre's liquidity infusion scheme.

The Meghalaya Power Distribution Corporation Limited has already availed Rs 386.86 crore from the first tranche of the loan and cleared some outstanding dues to Central PSUs like the NTPC, which had earlier regulated power supply leading to load-shedding in the state. Significantly, the MePDCL has failed to send a request to the Rural Electrification Corporation Limited and the Power Finance Corporation – the sanctioning agencies of the loan – for release of the second tranche of funds.

Meanwhile, the North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Limited has threatened to regulate power supply to Meghalaya till its outstanding dues are released immediately. In a letter to the secretary to the Meghalaya power department, Pravin Bakshi the joint secretary, Union ministry of power, Tamay Kumar, had warned that the remaining amount of the loan would be liable to be withdrawn unless the MePDCL requested disbursal of the remaining amount by 15 March.

"The MePDCL may be advised to request REC and PFC to disburse the remaining installment to Neepco within 15 March 2021, failing which the sanction of the loan would be liable to be withdrawn," Kumar had said.

Meghalaya power minister James Sangma, however, maintained that the last date for withdrawal should have been 31 March "technically", but the department would now process the paper work and send the request.

Meanwhile, Kumar said the Central power generation companies, particularly Neepco, face an acute liquidity crunch. "For a small company like Neepco, the outstanding dues receivable from the MePDCL of about Rs 504 crore has become an unbearable burden as routine operational expenditure has to be borne through funds raised from the market at an exorbitant cost," he said.

Meanwhile, in another letter the Neepco posted on its website, the Genco said that it would regulate the 147.53-MW power supply to the state from 20 March unless the MePDCL cleared its dues.

The MePDCL said that dues have been pending for the last 45 days and now it is left with no other option but to exercise regulation of power. The state may go under another load-shedding regime in view of this development.

Pipeline fire



A crude oil pipeline of Oil India caught fire near Innao in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh at around 4.45 pm last week, says a report in the Itanagar-based *Arunachal Times*.

Fire tenders from Namsai and Manabhum, along with Army personnel and police rushed to the spot and managed to contain the fire. EAC Diyun S Roy informed that no loss of life or property had been reported.

"As per information available to me, a pipeline of Bordumsa was being repaired and some residue in the pipeline caused leakage from there. The officials there informed that a mere leakage should not result in a fire and that they are currently unaware as to what ignited the fire," Roy said. He said that officials in Manabhum had assured that there was no danger as the fire had been contained.

## Turning a mysterious blue

Rampant mining in the Narpuh Reserve Forest of Meghalaya has severely impacted the area's aquatic ecosystem



APARAJITA MUKHERJEE & DEBAPRIYA MUKHERJEE

Meghalaya has a generous water supply with several perennial rivers, lakes and waterfalls. On the other hand, the state is rich in minerals, particularly limestone, coal, shale and laterite.

Narpuh Reserve Forest, deep inside the Jaintia Hills and among a few good forest patches, is under intense pressure from non-sustainable development and mindless extraction of natural resources like coal and limestone. The environmental problems associated with mining, urbanisation, industrialisation, road construction and other developmental activities have been substantial because of fragile ecosystems and the richness of biological and cultural diversity.

The current *modus operandi* of surface mining in the area generates huge quantities of mine spoil or overburden (consolidated and unconsolidated materials overlying the coal seam) in the form of gravel, rock, sand and soil, which are dumped over a large area adjacent to the mine pits without any consideration for the environment. The absence of post-

mining treatment and mismanagement of mined areas are making the environment more vulnerable to degradation and leading to large-scale land use changes.

Widespread denudation of forest cover, scarcity of water for bathing, washing and cooking; pollution of air, water and soil, and degradation of agricultural lands are some of the conspicuous environmental consequences of coal mining in the Jaintia Hills.

The thousands of rat-hole pits, abandoned after coal extraction, fill with water during rainstorms. It percolates into the groundwater or flows to rivers causing severe contamination. Rivers flowing through the mining belt are now critically polluted with complex, ill-defined mixtures of contaminants due to mining activities. The precipitated iron and blue colour at the confluence of the Lukha River are evidence of abandoned mine drainage discharge and dust from the mining areas and cement industries.

In addition to coal mining, limestone mining in Meghalaya has remarkably increased from 2006 to meet the requirements of cement manufacturing units. The state possesses nine per cent of the total limestone resources of the country, distributed mainly along its southern border. Limestone is the second most important mineral extracted in Meghalaya after coal. Preliminary observations reveal that limestone mining has degraded the ecosystem through deforestation, removal of fertile topsoil, disturbance of the surrounding ecosystem near mining sites as well as contamination of water in the nearby area. The total loss of forest around the area due to mining activi-

ties was found to be around 1,260 hectares from 2005 to 2011, with maximum expansion from 2005-2009 and within a five km radius.

Loss of forest cover due to urbanisation and mining activities further increases soil erosion. The appearance of a blue colour along with fish mortality (all fish, irrespective of their size and species) in Lukha River is an example of the adverse effect of mining activities on aquatic ecosystems that deprive villagers of nutritious food and water availability for domestic use. Annual recurrence of the episode may cause mortality of all fish including vulnerable, endangered and critical species. Despite several studies into the phenomenon, no sincere effort has been made to explore the actual cause of fish mortality. After it was brought to the attention of regulatory authorities, there was much speculation about the colour, such as the presence of copper sulphate, deposition of dust originating from cement industries, and the presence of aluminium, but a clear understanding about the sources and mechanism of contamination remained elusive.

As coal mining has been done since colonial times, many villagers do not believe that it is responsible for the blue colour or fish mortality. According to them, the expansion of cement factories that have operated since 2007 has caused the problems. Therefore, the closure of those industries has been demanded.

Researchers have also been puzzled as to what makes this water pollution so poisonous to fish. They have focused on the presence of acid, sulphate and metals in the water, but they are still unable to understand the mechanism that causes the blue colour or fish mortality.

The possible reason is that earlier monitoring programmes were not properly designed. Critical analysis of data clearly revealed that there may be certain flaws and inconsistencies in the selection of variables, environment components (water and sediment) and analytical accuracy. There was a need

for reassessment of the appropriateness and effectiveness of the existing monitoring programmes with reference to defined objectives and interpretation of data based on our literature survey.

Later, considering the combined effect of pyrite oxidation on the Lunar River upstream and then mixing of slightly alkaline water originating from a limestone quarry at the Lunar downstream, a monitoring programme was framed based on a thorough survey. The study revealed that the combined effect of AMD and limestone discharge caused slow precipitation of white particles at the bottom with an increase of pH during low-flow conditions.

Mixing of that water at the confluence with the Lukha River further increased the pH and caused coagulation of aluminosilicate particles (with some calcium and sulphate) as a thin layer of white precipitate on the riverbed for five-six km downstream. Those larger aluminosilicate particles scatter light in the blue spectrum.

The cause of fish mortality is also related to the accumulation of white particles enriched with aluminium on fish gills. The blue colour disappears slowly with the onset of rainfall and increasing discharge that flushes out the white particles.

Further confirmation of this study is an emergent need so that a prudent water quality management practice may be framed to improve economic, environmental and social conditions around Narpuh Reserve Forest. River pollution not only threatens water use but also the supply of fish, an important source of nutrients to villagers.

The people in the area are also facing severe difficulties to sustain their livelihood due to a ban imposed by the National Green Tribunal on coal mining practices. Therefore, priority remediation must be based on water chemistry data, metal loads and the areas of greatest risk to the public.

The writers are, respectively, a post-doctoral fellow in the chemistry department of Jadavpur University, and a former senior scientist, Central Pollution Control Board





Depth in the team and playing in home conditions make India the favourites to win this year's T20 World Cup, believes former England skipper Mike Atherton (*in photo, left*). "They probably have more strength in depth because of the IPL and the T20 cricket they play and the fact that they have just beaten England without probably three main bowlers," Atherton said on Sky Sports. "Put all those things together, and the fact that they are playing at home, they are the team to beat."

For more updates [www.thestatesman.com](http://www.thestatesman.com)

#### THUMBNAILS

**Indian team arrives in Pune:** The Indian cricket team arrived here for the final leg of the ongoing series against England, which comprises three ODIs, beginning with the first game on Tuesday. It is reliably learnt that the Indian team, led by skipper Virat Kohli, arrived here by a Chartered Flight from Ahmedabad at around 4.45 PM.

**Archer dropped:** An injured Jofras Archer was on Sunday omitted from a 14-member England squad for the three-match ODI series against India starting in Pune on Tuesday. England captain Eoin Morgan on Saturday had revealed that Archer was likely to pull out of the ODI series and the ensuing IPL as the star player's elbow injury has worsened.

**Football Delhi Women's League:** The opening match of the Football Delhi Women's League 2020-21 will be played on Monday between Eves Sports Club and Frontier FC Delhi at the Amdavad Stadium. On the opening day there will be three matches, one at Nehru Stadium Complex and two games at the Amdavad Stadium.

**National tennis champions:** Maharashtra's Arjun Kadhe and Telangana's Rashmika Bhamidipaty emerged as the new national champions after winning their respective finals at the 2020 The Project Tennis Hard Court Championships in Gurugram on Sunday.

**National Fencing Championships:** Services retained the men's team championships, winning the top prize with all three weapons in the 31st Senior National Fencing Championships that concluded at the Delhi Public School in Rudrapur (Uttarakhand) on Sunday. Kerala retained the women's overall team prize, thanks to the Saber squad's 45-41 win over Punjab.

**Spanish league:** Another brace by Karim Benzema helped Real Madrid tighten the Spanish league title race after the defending champions secured a 3-1 victory at Celta Vigo. Sevilla got a last-gasp goal from its goalkeeper to salvage a 1-1 draw at Valladolid, while Athletic Bilbao's match against Eibar was interrupted by an air-borne drone.

**Bhagwati Cricket Academy win:** With the help of brilliant knocks of Keshav Dalal (83 runs) and Lalit Gautam (31 runs), Bhagwati Cricket Academy defeated SS Sports Club Delhi by 9 wickets in 3Cs Open T20 cricket tournament in Delhi. Man of the match Devanshu took 4 wickets while Karan Rawat took 2 wickets for Bhagwati Cricket Academy.

## Sport

# The Statesman Sport

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## Shooting WC: India on top of medal tally

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI, 21 MARCH

**L**ater in the day, the 20-year-old Sekhon, ranked 82 in the world, shot 40 to clinch the bronze medal on the shotgun range.

action, the number of COVID-19 cases rose to six after two more Indian shooters tested positive for the highly contagious virus.

The Indian women shot 16 in the gold medal round to finish way ahead of Poland's Julia Borek, Joanna Iwona Wawral, Manu Bhaker and Shri Nivetha won the top prize in the women's team 10m air pistol event. Then, the team of Youth Olympics and Asian Games gold medallist Saurabh Chaudhary, Abhishek Verma and Shahzad Rizvi bagged the yellow metal in the men's event, comfortably beating Vietnam 17-11 in the final.

Away from the sporting

Poland's sequence of scores



### Still early to rule Rahul out of T20 WC squad: Rohit Sharma

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE  
AHMEDABAD, 21 MARCH



"There's still a long time for the World Cup, so it's early days to talk about what the batting line up would be looking like. Today was a tactical move because we wanted an extra bowler to play. We had to leave one batsman out, unfortunately it was KL, which was very tough," said Rohit in the post-match press conference.

"KL, we know he's been one of four key players in the limited-over format. Looking at the current form the team management decided to go with the best eleven. But having said that, it doesn't send any signal that KL would not be considered or anything like that. It was just for one particular game," he said.

India won the five-match series against England 3-2 but Rohit said the result is not enough to judge what the team would look like at the T20 World Cup, scheduled to be played in India in October and November this year. "As and when we get closer to the World Cup, we do understand (Rahul's) ability, we do understand his contribution at the top, what he's

done for us. I'm not going to rule out anything, neither would I say this is the preferred batting line-up for the World Cup. It's still early days, we've got a good amount of time. There's the IPL in between, and I'm hearing that there'll be a few T20s as well before the World Cup. So good enough time for us at that point to judge what would be the best eleven for us," said Rohit. "What I wanted to say is, not to judge on what has happened in these five games. These five games was good for us to judge as individuals, as a team where we stand, but this particular series doesn't send any signals that this is our perfect eleven. There's a long way to go," he added.

### City into FA Cup semifinals

AGENCIES  
MANCHESTER, 21 MARCH

With an unprecedented quadruple still a possibility for Manchester City, the pressure on Pep Guardiola is intensifying heading into the final two months of the season.

So, as his superstar players head off around the world on international duty, the City manager is ready to switch off.

"This week," Guardiola said, "I promise I will not think about football. I will not watch games." Few would begrudge him the break, with an intense 34-match, four-month stretch -- featuring games every three or four days -- concluding with a 2-0 win over Everton in the FA Cup quarterfinals on Saturday. The goals came late through Ilkay Gundogan in the 84th minute and Kevin De Bruyne in the 90th but there was a certain inevitability about them inside an empty Goodison Park.

"We wanted to keep them uncomfortable we defended well, didn't concede space,

### Shafali, Ghosh take India to 158-4 against SA in 2nd T20I

AGENCIES  
LUCKNOW, 21 MARCH

Opener Shafali Verma set the platform while Richa Ghosh provided the finishing touch as India Women posted a competitive 158 for 4 against South Africa Women in the second T20 International of the three-match series here on Sunday.

Shafali (47) blasted six fours and two sixes in her 31-ball innings and forged a 79-run partnership with Harleen Deol (31) to set the foundation for a good score in their must-win game. Ghosh then provided the late charge with a 26-ball 44 not out to take India past 150-run mark. For South Africa, Sharmi Ismail (1/31), Nonkululeko Mlaba (1/27), Nadine de Klerk (1/28) and Anne Bosch (1/26) were among the wicket-

keepers. Invited to bat, skipper Smriti Mandhana (7) once again fell early as she chased an outside delivery from Ismail only to edge it to the keeper in the second over. Shafali, who

looked watchful initially, smashed three fours in the fourth over to put the bowlers under pressure.

New batter Harleen Doel, who scored a fifty in the first T20I, sent Khaka across the backward point for her first boundary as India scored 31 for one in the first five overs.

Shafali then welcomed Nadine de Klerk with a straight hit across the fence before unleashing a massive heave for a six as India ended the powerplay at 41 for one. Shafali got a life when she was dropped by Anne Bosch in the seventh over. Harleen then took Anne to the cleaners with back-to-back boundaries. In the 10th over, both Shafali and Harleen scored a boundary each as Nadine de Klerk conceded 14 runs.

**India Women Innings:** 158 for 4 wkt in 20 Overs, (Shafali Verma 47, Richa Ghosh not out 44, Smriti Mandhana 7, Harleen Deol 31; Mlaba 27/1, Ismail 31/1, Nadine de Klerk 28/1).

### Para shooter Singhraj clinches gold

AGENCIES  
AL AIN (UAE), 21 MARCH

India's Singhraj displayed his skills to win a gold medal at the Al Ain 2021 World Shooting Para Sport World Cup here.

He bagged the top honours in P1 men's 10m air pistol SH1 finals. Singhraj, the Sydney 2019 World Championships medalist, pipped Rio 2016 bronze medalist Server Ibragimov (58) with 236.8-234. In fact, after the penultimate final series, Ibragimov was leading by just 0.1 point. In the final series, the Indian had better control as he shot a 9.9 and

10.4, while the Uzbekistan shooter managed 9.5 and 7.9 to settle for the silver. Turkey's former Paralympic champion Muhammet Korhan Yama took the bronze with 214.4 points. World Championships medalist Manish Narwal, who had qualified in second place, had to settle for fourth place with 194.3 points.

Rahul Jakhar, who had claimed a bronze medal in P3 mixed 25m air pistol SH1, finished in eighth place. Singhraj's gold also pushed India (one gold, one bronze) to the third place in the medals table behind Ukraine (three gold, three silver and a bronze) and the hosts United Arab Emi-

rates (two gold). "I am very happy to win this gold after such a long time. Coming to this World Cup, I was very confident to get a good result here as I had trained very hard during the COVID-19 lockdown," said Singhraj.

"My first international was here in Al Ain 2018, but I missed out the gold. In 2019 also, I had to settle for the silver. I want to continue this momentum and get a good result in Tokyo 2020." In the P2 women's 10m air pistol SH1, the promising Rubina Francis finished in eighth place. Francis had qualified in the fourth place with a score of 562.

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