WEDNESDAY
24 MARCH
2021

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KOLKATA | **NEW DELHI** | SILIGURI | BHUBANESWAR

PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT, ALWAYS IN SESSION

PAKISTAN MUST SET ITS HOUSE IN ORDER

P7

ISRAELIS VOTE AGAIN TO DECIDE NETANYAHU FATE

P9

CHINA, NORTH KOREA REAFFIRM ALLIANCE

P9

WHEN AL HASAN PLAYS UP, HASSAN FUMES

P12

WEATHER

Partky cloudy sky. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 31 and 19 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: Nil

RELATIVE HUMIDITY
Max: 64% Min: 47%

TEMPERATURE
Max: 29.6°C (-1) Min: 21.5°C (+4)

SUN RISES	SUN SETS
06:19 hrs	18:35 hrs
MOON RISES	MOON SETS
13:58 hrs	04:08 hrs

THUMBNAILS

A man rows his 'shikara' amidst rain at Dal Lake, in Srinagar on Tuesday. ■ AGENCIES

IIM-C Director quits: First woman Director of Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta (IIM-C) Anju Seth has stepped down from her post against the backdrop of confrontation with the teaching faculty. She resigned from the post one year before the end of her tenure in the premier institute. A section of teachers of the 60-year-old IIM-C had recently complained to the Union Ministry of Education about Seth's conduct. Seth had countered the accusation, saying that the faculty was trying to curb her powers as the director of IIM-C.

Debutants shine in India win: Debutants Krunal Pandya and Prasidh Krishna made the big stage their own in Pune to give India a 66-run victory over England in the first of three ODI matches on Tuesday. After Shikhar Dhawan delivered with a solid 98, Krunal (58 n.o. off 31) smashed the fastest fifty by a debutant to fire India to 317 for five. Krishna then turned it around after being taken to the cleaners early on to register figures of 4/54 in 8.1 overs, the best by a debutant, as England folded for 251. P12

Vaccine for all above 45 yrs from 1 Apr

Second dose of the vaccine can be taken between four and eight weeks, which was earlier allowed between four to six weeks

SNS & PTI
NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

All people above 45 years of age will be eligible to get Covid-19 vaccines from April 1, the government announced on Tuesday and requested them to get registered for the inoculation.

Briefing reporters on the decisions taken by the Cabinet after its meeting, Union minster Prakash Javadekar said now even people without comorbidities who are more that 45 years of age can get vaccinated.

He requested eligible people to get themselves registered to take the jabs.

He said the Cabinet also decided that the second dose of the vaccine can be taken between four and eight weeks, on the advice of doctors. It was allowed to be taken between four to six weeks earlier, but scientists have now said that taking the second dose between four and eight weeks gives improved results.

The Union Cabinet discussed about the vaccination drive which has already achieved speedy and good progress, Javadekar said.

He said till this day, 4.85 crore vaccines have been administered and more than 32 lakh people administered the vaccine in last 24 hours.

Vaccines are available in enough numbers and there is no scarcity and the supply chains and supply line is intact, he said, adding that "I am sure everyone will welcome this decision and come forward to get vaccinated."

One has to continue using masks and maintaining social distancing and washing hands is also important, but vaccination is the only shield
PRAKASH JAVADEKAR
UNION MINSTER

To a question on cases of Covid-19 rising in some states, he said, the Central government is in touch with them and there will be effective management of the situation.

"One has to continue using masks and maintaining social distancing and washing hands is also important, but vaccination is the only shield," he noted.

More than 32.53 lakh doses of vaccine were administered on March 22, which is the highest single-day vaccination so far, taking the total number of people inoculated to over 4.8 crore.

Meanwhile, the doubling time of Covid cases in India has decreased from 504.4 days on March 1 to 202.3 days on March 23, the Health Ministry said, highlighting that six states have reported a surge in daily new cases and together account for 80.90 per cent of the new infections reported in a day. Maharashtra, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh and Tamil Nadu collectively account for 80.90 per cent of the 40,715 infections reported in a span of 24 hours.

Maharashtra continues to report the highest daily new cases at 24,645, followed by Punjab with 2,299 cases and Gujarat with 1,640 new cases.

India's total active caseload is rising after touching its lowest mark in mid-February, the ministry highlighted.

India's cumulative recoveries surged to 1,11,81,253, with 29,785 recoveries being registered in a span of 24 hours.

Besides, 199 deaths were reported in a day.

Delhi's Covid cases spike to 1,101: Delhi today logged a spike of 1,101 fresh coronavirus infections ~ the highest single-day figure in more than three months ~ while 4 more people succumbed to the contagious, deadly virus which is again surging through various parts of the country including the national capital.

SEE P2

FACT FILE

TOTAL CASES	1,16,86,796
ACTIVE CASES	3,45,377
NEW CASES	40,715
NEW RECOVERIES	29,785
TOTAL DEATHS	1,60,166

UNION HEALTH MINISTRY FIGURES AS OF 8.00 A.M. TUESDAY 23 MARCH 2021

81% of Punjab samples positive for UK variant

CHANDIGARH, 23 MARCH

With 81 per cent of the latest 401 samples sent by the Punjab government testing positive for the new UK variant, chief minister Captain Amarinder Singh on Tuesday appealed to the people to get themselves vaccinated, and urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to widen the vaccination ambit to cover those less than 60 years since this mutant has been found to be infecting young people more.

The CM stressed the need for the Central government to expedite the vaccination process, saying that experts had found the existing Covishield vaccine to be equally effective against the UK variant - B.1.1.7.

Amarinder also urged the people to strictly adhere to Covid safety protocols. The state government, which has already announced fresh restrictions, would be forced to impose more curbs if the people do not follow Covid appropriate behaviour, he warned.

His appeal came after the state's Covid expert committee head, Dr KK Talwar, apprised him of the developments on the variant in the state. SNS (SEE P3)

A medic collects swab sample, in the Capital on Tuesday. ■ SNS

Enforce the Test-Track-Treat protocol: Govt amidst upsurge

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Taking note of the fresh surge in coronavirus cases in some parts of the country, the Central government has asked states and Union Territories to strictly enforce the Test-Track-Treat protocol, ensure Covid-19 appropriate behaviour, boost proportion of RT-PCR tests and to scale up the vaccination drive to cover target groups.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)'s Covid-19 Guidelines for April, issued today, emphasised the need "to strictly follow the prescribed containment strategy, and strictly observe the guidelines/SOPs issued by MHA and Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MOHFW) and other Ministries/Departments of the Central Government and State/UT Governments."

The MHA order will be effective from 1 April and remain in force up to 30 April, 2021.

The government has launched the world's largest vaccination drive against Covid-19, MHA said. While the vaccination drive is proceeding smoothly, the pace is uneven across different States and UTs, which is a cause for concern, it added. Vaccination against Covid-19, in the present scenario, is critical to break the chain of transmission, the MHA said.

States were told to take all necessary measures to promote Covid-19 appropriate behaviour in work places and in public, especially in crowded places. For strict enforcement of such rules, States and UTs may consider administrative actions.

The guidelines said the states and UTs, where the proportion of RT-PCR tests is less, should rapidly increase it, to reach the prescribed level of 70 per cent or more. The new positive cases need to be isolated/ quarantined at the earliest and provided timely treatment; all their contacts should be traced and similarly isolated, the guidelines said.

Waze 'prime accused' in Hiran case, will seek his custody: ATS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 23 MARCH

Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) on Tuesday said suspended police officer Sachin Waze was a "prime accused" in the Mansukh Hiran murder case and it will approach the special NIA court here to get his custody.

More arrests were likely in the case, said ATS chief Jaijeet Singh.

Waze, arrested in connection with the recovery of explosives-laden SUV near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence in south Mumbai, is currently in the custody of the National Investigation Agency (NIA). The NIA custody will expire on March 25.

The ATS had last week arrested suspended policeman Vinayak Shinde and cricket bookie Naresh Gaur in the Hiran murder case.

"After the arrest of both these men, ATS found Waze is a prime accused in the case and played a vital role," the ATS chief told reporters.

"We need his custody and will approach the court on March 25," Singh added.

Waze's statement was recorded in the Hiran case on March 8 when he flatly denied any role in the crime, but probe revealed that he was lying, the ATS chief said.

It was Waze who had contacted Shinde when the latter walked out of jail on parole and took his help, he said.

Gaur procured 14 SIM cards and some of them were activated and used in the crime, the ATS chief said.

According to ATS, Shinde contacted Hiran, posing as 'Tawde saab from Mumbai crime branch' on the evening of March 4, the day before Hiran's body was found in a Thane creek. "Preliminary investigation suggests that Shinde along with others was involved," the ATS chief said.

Govt raises PF threshold limit for earning tax-free interest to ₹5 lakh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday raised the limit for tax exemption on interest earned on provident fund contribution by employees to Rs 5 lakh per annum in specified cases as against Rs 2.5 lakh proposed in the Budget.

However, the minister in her reply to the discussion on Finance Bill 2021 in the Lok Sabha said the concession would be available to employees only in cases where his or her employer does not make any contribution to the retirement fund.

The Finance Bill was later passed by the Lower House with 127 official amendments by voice vote.

With the passage of the Finance Bill, which contains tax proposals for the next financial year, the Lok Sabha has completed the budgetary exercise for 2021-22.

The Bill is scheduled to be taken up by the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday.

Replying to the debate, she said the Budget proposal taxing interest income on contributions more than Rs 2.5 lakh per annum would affect less than 1 per cent of the total number of EPF subscribers.

But there were also cases where EPF contributions were as high as Rs 5 crore, she said.

"This Rs 2.5 lakh (limit) is covering majority of 92-93 per cent of the people who are depositing and for whom assured interest is tax free under this scheme. So the limits have been kept keeping in mind that small and medium taxpayers are not impacted by the step," she said.

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has over six crore subscribers.

"I intend to raise this limit to Rs 5 lakh only in those cases, where there is no contribution by the employer in that fund.

"So, most often, it is employee contribution and employer's contribution, but there are contributions which are only employee and no employer contribution is made, in such cases that amount is raised to Rs 5 lakh," she said.

This would come into effect from April 1.

"In order to rationalise tax exemption for the income earned by high income employees, it is proposed to restrict tax exemption for the interest income earned on the employees' contribution to various provident funds to the annual contribution of Rs 2.5 lakh," Sitharaman said in her Budget 2021-22 speech.

No compound, penal interests during moratorium period: SC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

In a relief to borrowers, the Supreme Court on Tuesday directed that no compound or penal interest be charged during the six-month loan moratorium period announced last year amid the Covid-19 pandemic and the amount already charged shall be refunded, credited or adjusted.

The apex court refused to interfere with the Centre's and the Reserve Bank of India's decision to not extend the loan moratorium beyond August 31 last year, saying it is a policy decision.

A bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan said that the top court cannot do judicial review of the Centre's financial policy decision unless it is malafide and arbitrary. The apex court said it cannot interfere with the government's decision to fix priorities for relief during the pandemic which has affected all across the country and the government has been under severe financial constraints.

The bench said this in its verdict on a batch of pleas filed by various trade associations, including from real estate and power sectors, seeking extension of loan moratorium and other reliefs in view of the pandemic.

The RBI had on March 27 last year issued the circular which allowed lending institutions to grant a moratorium on payment of instalments of term loans falling due between March 1, 2020 and May 31, 2020, due to Covid.

Later, the moratorium was extended till August 31 last year.

In its verdict, the top court said that complete waiver of interest is not possible as it will have huge financial implications. The Centre had earlier submitted before the top court that if it were to consider waiving interest on all the loans and advances for the six-month moratorium period, then the amount foregone would be more than Rs 6 lakh crore.

Mass tragedy: Colorado shooting leaves 10 dead

BOULDER, 23 MARCH

A shooting at a crowded Colorado supermarket that killed 10 people, including the first police officer to arrive, sent terrorised shoppers and workers scrambling for safety and stunned a state that has grieved several mass killings. A lone suspect was in custody, authorities said.

Hundreds of police officers from throughout the Denver metropolitan area responded to the Monday afternoon attack, converging on a King Soopers supermarket in a busy shopping plaza in southern Boulder.

SWAT officers carrying ballistic shields approached the store as others quickly escorted frightened people away from the building, some of its windows shattered. Customers and employees fled through a back loading dock to safety. Others took refuge in nearby shops.

One suspect was in custody, a tearful Boulder Police Chief Maris Herold said late Monday. Authorities didn't identify the suspect, though Boulder County District Attorney Michael Dougherty said the suspect was the only person injured and was receiving medical care.

Officers had escorted a shirtless man in handcuffs, blood running down his leg, from the store during the siege.

Authorities would not say if he was the suspect. Foothills Hospital in Boulder was treating one person from the shooting scene but refused further comment, said Rich Sheehan, spokesman for Boulder Community Health, which operates the hospital.

DETAILS ON PAGE 10

Chaos in Bihar House, Patna streets over 'draconian' Police Bill

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PATNA, 23 MARCH

In unprecedented chaos in the Bihar legislative Assembly, Opposition legislators on Tuesday laid siege to the Assembly Speaker's chamber and virtually held him captive to protest the introduction of the Special Armed Police Bill, 2021, which they say is 'draconian', resulting in police being call in to physically evict the agitating MLAs.

The Bill seeks to give the police force more teeth, and allegedly empowers it to arrest people without a warrant.

As the House assembled for the day, the Opposition legislators resorted to slogan-shouting in protest against the Bill, leading to adjournment of the House. The chaos led to further adjournment after the House resumed after some time.

Irked at the government not taking note of their complaint, the Opposition members later laid siege to the official chamber of Speaker Vijay Kumar Sinha by sitting on dharna just outside his office. The protesters remained unmoved despite repeated requests by the Speaker's office and police had to be called in to remove them.

TV footage showed riot gear-clad police personnel carrying legislators by their arms and legs, and physically removing them. Many legislators said they were shabbily treated by the police and assaulted although they were protesting in a democratic manner.

A group of female legislators from the Opposition camp rushed near the Speaker's chair in a bid to stop him from taking his seat. Female police personnel swing into action to bodily carry away the legislators gheraoing the Speaker's chair.

"This had not happened in the past. The chief minister who claims to be working for the welfare of women ordered the police to remove us by force. We were only protesting in a democratic manner," alleged Sangeeta Kumari, RJD legislator from Mohaniya seat.

She said the Bill was Draconian as it allows police to enter anybody's house and arrest them without any warrant. "We fear this provision could be misused to settle personal scores. We strongly oppose this," she said.

While Opposition legislators created a ruckus in the House, hundreds of people led by Opposition leader Tejashwi Yadav protested on the streets.

Eventually, he was taken into custody by police after the protest march reached Dak Bungalow crossing and the protesters tried to move towards the Assembly premises.

Reports said the protesters fought a pitched battle with the police which resorted to mild force and also water cannon to disperse the mob.

RJD legislators stage a dharna outside Speaker Vijay Kumar Singh's chamber during the Budget Session of the Bihar Assembly, in Patna on Tuesday. AGENCIES

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They (BJP government) are closing down all central concerns. Only one factory will be there, that of Narendra Modi's lies and the BJP's fraud

MAMATA BANERJEE
WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER

A year after disputed meet, Markaz chief yet to join probe

PTI
NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

A year after Tabligh-e-Jamaat's Markaz in Nizamuddin West came under criticism for holding a religious congregation amid the COVID-19 outbreak, its cleric Maulana Saad Kandhalvi against whom an FIR was registered in connection with the incident is yet to join the probe despite several notices by Delhi Police.

The meet in March 2020 was attended by thousands of Jamaat members from different states, along with hundreds of foreigners.

After several of them tested positive for the infection, a nationwide search operation was carried out by respective state governments to locate and quarantine them on the direction of the Centre.

Taking action against the organisers of the congregation, Delhi Police's Crime Branch on March 31, 2020 lodged an FIR against seven people, including Kandhalvi, on a complaint by Station House Officer Nizamuddin under sections of the Epidemic Diseases Act, Disaster Management Act (2005), Foreigners Act and other relevant sections of Indian Penal Code.

Kandhalvi was later booked for culpable homicide not amounting to murder after some of the attendees of the congregation died due to coronavirus.

According to the police, Kandhalvi is yet to join the probe despite several notices issued to him by the investigators but statements of his sons and office-bearers of the Markaz were recorded in connection with the case.

Most of the forensic reports of documents and electronic devices seized from the centre have been received while a few is still awaited, a senior police officer said.

Covid cases spike in Delhi to 1,101, highest since 19 Dec

Authorities order there'll be no public celebrations in the city during festivals like Holi, Shab-e-Barat, Navaratri

SNS & PTI
NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Delhi today logged a spike of 1,101 fresh coronavirus infections ~ the highest single-day figure in more than three months ~ while 4 more people succumbed to the contagious, deadly virus which is again surging through various parts of the country including the national capital.

It is the first time since 24 December last year that Delhi has recorded more than 1,000 Covid cases. And today's 1,101 cases are the highest in the city since 19 December when 1,139 cases were recorded, according to official data.

The new infections pushed Delhi's Covid tally to 6,49,973, while 6.34 lakh patients have recovered from the virus in the city so far, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin.

The active cases rose to 4,411 from yesterday's 3,934. The positivity rate remained over 1 per cent for the fourth consecutive day, the health bulletin said.

The city had recorded 888 cases yesterday, 823 on Sunday, 813 on Saturday, 716 on Friday, 607 on Thursday, and 536 on Wednesday, according to official data.

Today's four recorded deaths pushed Delhi's Covid toll to 10,967, the bulletin stated.

A total of 84,237 tests, including 52,099 RT-PCR tests, were conducted to detect fresh cases, even as the positivity rate stood at 1.31 per cent, the bulletin said. The positivity rate was 1.32 per cent yesterday and 1.03 per cent on Sunday.

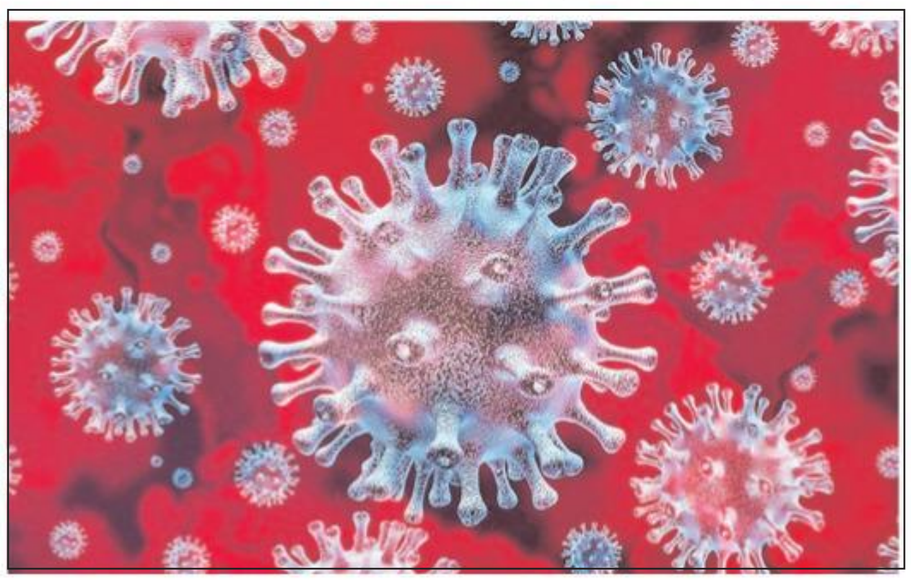
The number of patients under home isolation rose to 2,316 from 2,067 a day ago. The containment zones rose to 871 from 805, the bulletin added.

As of today, there were 5,740 hospital beds meant for Covid patients, but 4,760 beds remained vacant.

Meanwhile, amid a sharp rise in coronavirus cases in the national capital, the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) today ordered that there will be no public celebrations in the city during upcoming festivals such as Holi and Navaratri.

Delhi chief secretary Vijay Dev directed authorities to ensure strict compliance of the order.

"All authorities concerned will ensure that public celebrations and gatherings, congregations during upcoming festivals like Holi, Shab-e-Barat, Navaratri etc shall not be allowed in public places/public grounds/public parks/markets/religious places etc in NCT of Delhi," Dev said in the order.



We need to learn to live with coronavirus: Jain

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Delhi Minister for Health Satyendar Jain today felicitated 'Corona Warriors' from Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Hospital and GTB Hospital at Delhi Vidhan Sabha in the presence of Speaker of the Delhi Vidhan Sabha Ram Niwas Goel and various senior doctors.

Speaking on the occasion, Jain said coronavirus is a recurring infection and the minute it is felt the situation is getting better, there is a sudden surge. "We need to be aware, but also we need to learn to live with it", he pointed out.

Jain said, "Doctors are the messengers of God who have been given the responsibility to try and save people's lives. If they fail in that, one should still thank them instead of blaming them because they tried their best."

The minister said, "I would like to thank doctors, nurses, paramedics and other staff members for their contribution to the task of combating the Covid-19 pandemic that has been going on for over a year. Nobody had anticipated or experienced what has happened. This disease was first witnessed in 1918, almost 100 years ago, but nobody was well versed with the protocol. This is a recurring infection."

He said Delhi was witnessing 200 cases per day sometime back, but

again the number has risen to 800-900 per day. Just like the other diseases, we will have to learn how to protect ourselves. If we continue to follow proper precautions like washing our hands, wearing a mask and maintaining social distancing, a lot of other diseases too can be kept at bay.

"I feel if doctors fail in saving anyone's life, one should still thank them instead of blaming them because they tried their best.

During the corona pandemic, many of our doctors, paramedics and nurses have lost their lives in pursuit of saving someone else's life. This in itself is a supreme sacrifice", added Jain.

Commenting on the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Amendment (GNCTD) Bill, 2021, Jain said, "In the British era too, there was a parliament and elections were conducted. Even at that time MPs were elected. But the decision-making powers were not in their hands.

It was the Viceroy who took all the decisions. The same thing is being brought back. The people of Delhi elected their MLAs but governance lies with the Lt-Governor. I believe people need to be aware of the fact that their vote is being disrespected."

'Kejri govt's new excise policy will ruin youths, families'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

The Delhi Congress has opposed the new excise policy approved by the Arvind Kejriwal-led Delhi Cabinet and demanded its rollback, saying it will "destroy youths and ruin families" in the national capital.

The party unit, led by its president Anil Kumar, is going to hold a protest against this excise policy tomorrow outside the Delhi Chief Minister's residence.

Addressing a press conference at the party office here today, senior Congress leader Alka Lamba said, "It is ironic and shocking that Deputy Chief Minister-cum-Finance Minister Manish Sisodia, who is also the Education Minister, announced the new excise policy to lower the liquor consumption age from 25 to 21 years, very well knowing that at this age, most youngsters would be pursuing their education, and dependent on their families for sustenance."

She said that the minimum age for drinking is pegged at 25 years with a specific purpose, as by then most young people would be in a position to take mature decisions.

Lamba further said, "The new excise policy of the Kejriwal government, intended to boost the revenue collection by an additional Rs 2000 crore, will not only ruin the lives of the youth, but many families as well, who are already stressed out by the Covid-19 pandemic crisis."

She alleged that Delhi has already "earned notoriety for being number 1 in pollution, Corona deaths on the basis of per lakh population, unemployment, price rise, crimes against women, and number 3 as the worst-affected in the fourth Covid wave, behind Brazil and the United States".

"The Congress party strongly objects to this destructive policy and has demanded its rollback," said Lamba.

She said that ex-PM late Rajiv Gandhi gave voting rights to 18-year-olds while the Kejriwal government was "giving liquor bottles to the youth of the national capital".

Lamba also alleged that CM Kejriwal had "lied" when he had said that the AAP government did not give licence to open new liquor vends since 2016, though "the truth is that around 420 new liquor vends have been opened and there are overall 1845 liquor shops in the Capital, and not 850, as claimed by the Chief Minister".

Man shot dead

PTI
NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

A 43-year-old man was shot dead allegedly by two unidentified men in west Delhi's Jaffarpur Kalan area, police said on Tuesday.

The deceased has been identified as Mukesh alias Fauzi, a resident of Jaffarpur Kalan, they said. Around 5.30 pm on Monday, Mukesh was singing along with his friends in a field of one Rajender near Firni Road in Jaffarpur Kalan, where two unidentified men came on a motorcycle and enquired them about one Rakesh, a senior police officer said. They said that Rakesh was not with them, police said.

"Meanwhile, the man who was inquiring about Rakesh, opened fire at Mukesh with a country-made pistol. He shot at Mukesh and fled on his motorcycle," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka) Santosh Kumar Meena said.

Lab technician recalls 'uncertain' days and frantic pace of work during lockdown

PTI
NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

LOCKDOWN-ANNIVERSARY

Lab technician Ananta Kumar Saha still vividly remembers the days of COVID-19-induced lockdown in the country, and recalls the initial months when he frantically moved around Gurgaon for long hours to collect and ferry swab samples to labs for testing.

In this tough period, while performing his duty he faced rudeness from a few people, but he says the "positive spirit to serve humanity" overpowered the "negative episodes". "In the initial days, everything was uncertain, no one could fathom what the virus was, let alone its behaviour. And, everyone was scared. In the health department, other lab technicians were afraid to go to private homes and housing societies to collect samples," recalled Saha, a West Bengal native who resides in Gurgaon near here.

The 37-year-old works in the health department of the Haryana government, and memories of the pandemic outbreak and the ensuing lockdown and nearly empty streets are still fresh in his head.

"I was willing to go and collect samples despite rising number of cases. Our jawans fight in inhospitable terrains for the country, and this was also a nation's call for duty, and I responded," he told PTI.

Saha claimed that in the first couple of months he worked "alone" as a lab technician, and on an average daily collected samples ranging from 50-60 to sometimes 300 in a day.

"I used to sleep in the car or used to take some rest during day time. The routine used to be so frantic, I would literally run from house to house or society to society after a positive case of Covid would get reported. And, then I had to ferry the samples to designated labs in good time," he said.

Saha, who hails from Malda district, said he had to ferry samples kept in ice boxes to any of the three designated testing centres in Haryana, whichever would be the nearest.

"So, in the initial days, I used to collect samples and deposit them at PGI Rohtak, Kalpana Chawla Medical College, Karnal or the government medical college at Khanpur in Sonipat. Each centre could take at max 100 samples a day only. It was exhausting to travel throughout the day in hot summer, especially in a PPE kit," he recalled.

After three months, a few more lab technicians "joined work" and eased the burden a bit, he said.

Asked how many samples he has taken so far, Saha claims, "It should be in excess of 30,000."

"During Independence Day celebrations last year, it felt humbling that the Haryana government acknowledged my efforts and I was felicitated at a function," he added.

The first case of COVID-19 in Delhi was reported on March 1 when a businessman from east Delhi who had returned from Italy tested positive for the new virus that had left the world puzzled and in a grip of extreme fear.

Nearly one year ago, Haryana had reported its first COVID-19 case in Gurgaon, and soon in the rest of the state that neighbours Delhi. A nationwide lockdown was imposed by the Centre from March 25 onwards, as people were confined to their homes, while the infected ones were traced and isolated by health authorities.

Classified

LEGAL NOTICES

IN THE HIGH COURT OF DELHI AT NEW DELHI (Ordinary Original Civil Jurisdiction) CS(Comm) 315/2020
M/s. Hari Chand Shri Gopal
—Plaintiff
Versus
Evergreen International (Through its Proprietor)
— Defendant
To,
Evergreen International through its proprietor, Ground Floor, Property N. 103, Khasra No. 94, Street No. 2, Karaval Nagar East, Delhi-110094, India Email:evergreeninternational@gmail.com
Whereas the plaintiff abovementioned has institute an Suit for Permanent Injunction Restraining Infringement of Trademark and Trade Dress, Infringement of Copyright, passing off and Rendition of Account, Damages, Delivery UP Etc.) against you the above named defendant and and Whereas it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Court that it is not possible to serve you in the ordinary way, therefore, this notice is given by publication directing you to make appearance before the-Hon'ble Court on 06-04-2021 2020 at 10-30 a.m.
Take notice that in default of your appearance on the day beforementioned, the petition/application will be heard and determined in your absence.
Given under my hand and the seal of this court on this the 16-03-2021.
Assistant Registrar (Original)
for Registrar General
Seal of the Court

(ORDER 5 RULE 20 OF THE CODE OF CIVIL PROCEDURE) IN THE COURT OF SH. DIVYAM LILA Civil Judge-01 Addl. District Judge-01 Room No. 203, South-West District Dwarka Courts, New Delhi. Case No. CSSCJ/215/2020
State Bank of India
— Plaintiff
Versus
Khushboo Communciation and Anr.
—Defendant
To,
The Defendant abovenamed
Whereas Plaintiff has instituted the above application against you for suit for recovery of Rs. 2.33,413/- 151 C.P.C you are hereby summoned to appeear in this court in person or by a pleader on the 24th day of April of 2021 at 10:00 O'clock to answer the same failing which the suit/application will be disposed of exparte.
Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court this 19-03-2021.
Civil Judge-01
Addl. District Judge-01
South-West District
Dwarka Courts, New Delhi.
Seal of the Court

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT (Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure) In the Court of Susheel Bala Dagar Senior Civil Judge-cum-Rent Controller(West) Room No. 35 Ground Floor Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi CS. Nos. 10717/2016
Surinder Pal Singh
—Plaintiff
Versus
Vijay Kumar Suri
—Defendant
To,
(1) Smt. Asha Suri, w/o Late Sh. Vijay Kumar Suri, r/o Second Floor Property No. G-B/5, Blcok-C, Hari Nagar, New Delhi-110058.
(2) Meenu Suri, d/o Late Sh. Vijay Kumar Suri, r/o Second Floor Property No. G-B/5, Block-C, Hari Nagar, New Delhi-110058.
Whereas you are intentionally evading service of summons, it is hereby notified that if you shall not defend the case on the 25th day of May, 2021, the day fixed for the final disposal, it will be heard and determined ex-parte.
Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court on this 19th day of March, 2021.
Senior Civil Judge-cum-Rent Controller(West)
Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi
Seal of the Court

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT (Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure) In the Court of Helly Fur Kaur Civil Judge Contral-08 R. No. 231, Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi-54 CS/SCJ/217/19
ICICI Bank Ltd.
—Plaintiff
Versus
Mohd. Arshad
—Defendant
To,
Mohd Arshad, s/o Sh. Mohd Sadik, r/o 29 A/1, Gali No. 1, Govind Puri Kalkaji Delhi-110019.
Also at: House No. 24 B Top Sia Roll (South) Calcutta-700001.
Also at: Jaspel Infotech Private Limited, EMP ID-3241 Plot No. 249 Udyod Vihar Phase-IV Gurgaon ASF Tower, Gurgaon-122016 Haryana-122016.
The Defenant Abovenamed
Whereas you are intentionally evading service of summons, it is hereby notified that if you shall not defend the case on the 25th day of March, 2021, the day fixed for the final disposal, it will be heard and determined ex-parte.
Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court on this 28-01-2021.
Civil Judge Contral-08
Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi-54
Seal of the Court

IN THE COURT OF DR. SHIRISH AGGARWAL Administrative Civil Judge-cum Additional-Rent-Controller (Central) Room No. 323 IIIrd Floor Tis Hazari Courts Delhi Petition No. SC-49/2021
Chander Mohan, s/o Sant Ram, r/io 8478/25, Jaina Building, Roshan Ara Road, Malka Ganj, Delhi, North Delhi, Delhi-110007.
Versus
The State & Ors.
—(Petitioner)
FOR SUCCESSION CERTIFICATE UNDER INDIAN SUCCESSION ACT, 1925
To,
All concerned.
Where in the abovenoted petition, the applicant/petitioner has applied for Succession Certificate to the Hon'ble Court Under Section 372 of the Indian Succession Act, 1925 in respect of the debt and securities amount or Rs.xxx As per record to be standing in the name of Late Smt. Sulochana Lamba deceased.
Whereas the 26-04-2021at 10 (Ten) O'Clock in the forenoon has been fixed for hearing and the application notice is hereby given to all concerned.
Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court this 19-03-2021
Administrative Civil Judge-cum Additional Rent-Controller(Central)
Tis Hazari Courts Delhi
Seal of the Court

IN THE HIGH COURT OF DELHI AT NEW DELHI Notice Under Order V Rule 20 Code of Civil Procedure Case No. MACA No. 1084/2018 and CM No. 505757/2018 Appeal against order dated 15-05-2017 Passed by Sh. Raj Kumar, PO, MACT, (West-01) Delhi In Suit No. MACT No. 48/15 New No. 476912/16)
Bajaj Allianz Gen. Ins. Co. Ltd.
— Petitioner/Appellant(s)
Versus
Anita Devi and Ors.
— Respondents
Notice to: Respondents No. 6, Raju Sahni, s/o Parvinder Prasad (Driver), r/o Jhuggi No. 255 Gali No. 225 Gali No. A-11-12, Mayapuri Phase-I,Delhi.
Respodent No. 7, Jai Mangal Singh, s/o Nand Narayan Singh (Owenr) r/o FB-129, Mansarovar Garden, Kirti Nagar, New Delhi.
(Email-baggasuman@gmail.com & Whatsapp No. 9810167439)
Whereas the abovenoted appellants has presented an appeal under Section 173 of MV Act MV Act alongwith delay applications which was listed before Court on 0412-2018 and the Court ordered issuance of notice to you and notice of the application was also ordered tobe issued to you.
And whereas it has been proved to the satisfaction of the Court that you cannot be served in the ordinary manner. Notice is hereby issued that if you wish to defend the abovementioned appeal and application, you may cause an appearance to be entered on your behalf either in person or through an Advocate duly appointed by you for the purpose before the Court of the Joint Registrar (Judicial) on 28-04-2021at 11:00 am.
If no appearance is made on your behalf, by yourself, your pleader or someone by law authorized to act for you in the said appeal and application on the aforementioned date, no further notice of the subsequent date of hearing of the said appeal and application will be given to you and the same will be heard and determined ex-parte in your absence.
Given under my hand and the Seal of this Court, this 14th Jan. 2021.
Assistant Registrar for Registrar General
Seal of the Court

IN THE HIGH COURT OF DELHI AT NEW DELHI Case No. CUSAA No. 161/2019 & C.M. No. 17649/2019 (U/O V Rule 20 CPC for Substitution Service of Notice upon Respondent)
Appeal against the order dated 14-06-2017 in C/A/53993-54009/2017-CU(DB) Passed by The Learned Customs, Excise & Service Tax Appellate Tribunal, Principal Bench, New Delhi in Appeal No. C/225/2012.
Commissioner of Customs ICD Tughlakabad (Import)
— Appellants
Versus
Sh. Harsh Anil Vasant
—Respondents
Notice to Respondents : Sh. Harsh Anil Vasant, r/o 2/39, 2nd Floor, Sarvapriya Vihar, New Delhi.
Whereas the abovenoted appellants has presented an appeal under Section 130 of the Customs Act, 1962 which was listed before the Court on 15-04-2019 and on the other subsequent dates when the Court ordered issuance of notice to you.
And whereas it has been proved to the satisfaction of the Court that you cannot be served in the ordinary manner, notice by way of publication to you is hereby issued. If you wish to defend the abovementioned appeal and application, you may cause an appearance to be entered on your 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 23-04-2021 (Actual).
If no appearance is made on your behalf, by yourself, your pleader or someone by law authorized to act for you in the said appeal and application on the aforementioned date, no further notice of the subsequent date of hearing of the said appeal and application will be given to you and the same will be heard and determined ex-parte in your absence.
Given under my hand and the Seal of this Court, this 06th January, 2021.
Assistant Registrar (Civil) for Registrar General
Seal of the Court

IN THE COURT OF SH. ANKIT KARAN SINGH Civil Judge-01 West, Room No. 118 Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi-110054. CS SCJ/921/2018 Next Date: 27-04-2021 (O. 5 R. 1, 5) SUMMON FOR SETTLEMENT OF ISSUES
Indian Bank
Versus
Vipin Kumar
To,
Ajay Kumar, P-4, 519, Ashiana Palm Court, Raj Nagar, Extension, Ghaziabad-201017.
Also at: GF-61, Ashiana Gren Near Shanti Gopal Hospital, Indirapuram, Ghaziabad-201014.
Whereas India Bank has instituted a suit against you for you are hereby summoned to appear in this Court in person, or by a pleader duly instructed, and able to answer all material questions relating to the suit, or who shall be accompanied by some persons able to answer all such questions, on the27-04-2021 at 10-00 O'Clock in the forenoon, to answer the claim and further you are hereby directed to file on that day a written statement of your defence and to produce on the said day all documents in your possession or power upon which you base your defence or claim for set-off or counter-claim, and where you rely on any other document whether in your possession or power or not, as evidence in support of your defence or claim for set-off or counter-claim, you shall enter such documents in a list to be annexed to the written statement.
Take notice that, in default of your appearance on the day beforementioned, the suit will be heard and determined in your absence.
Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court, this 27-02-2021.
Civil Judge-01 West, Room No. 118
Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi-110054.
Seal of the Court

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT (Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure) In the Court of Nivedita Anil Sharma District Judge (Commercial Court-01 Room No. 57 Third Floor Karkardooma Courts, Delhi CS (Comm)-78/2019
Sh. Rajeev Jain, Proprietor of M/s. Vardhman Plastic, F-270 Sector-1, Bawana Industrial Area, DSIDC, New Delhi-110039
—Plaintiff
Versus
Sh. Sanjay Sharma
—Defendant
To,
Sanjay Sharma proprietor/partner or M/s. S.S. Wires & Cables H. No. 173, Gali No. 14, Balbir Nagar Extn. Shahdara, Delhi-110032.
The Defendant abovenamed.
Whereas you are intentionally evading service of summons, it is hereby notified that if you shall not defend the case on the 20th day of April, 2021, the day fixed for the final disposal, it will be heard and determined ex-parte.
Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court on this 15th day of March, 2021.
District Judge (Commercial Court-01
Karkardooma Courts, Delhi
Seal of the Court

PUBLIC NOTIFICATIONS

PUBLIC NOTICE
It is to be submitted that I, Dilip Seth, s/o Shri Kanahya Lal Seth, Working as Chief Financial Officer of M/s. Stella Indusstries Ltd. Old Khandsa Road, HSIIDC, Sector-37, Gurugram, Haryana, do hereby solemnly affirm and declare as under:-
1. That I do certifed that Original C form bearing Numbers first Quarter 361708239218776/23-08-17, IIQuarter-361708239756185/23-08-17, III-Quarter-361708231395833/23-08-17, IV Quarter-361708232048268/23-08-17 for the year 2016-2017 & First Quarter-2017-2018-361708237941788/23-08-17 respectively. They have been misplaced while in Transit of the said documents from N.H.-08, Jaipur Delhi highway to Janak Puri Office, New Delhi-110058.
2. This is also certified that after a lot of search operation we could not found the abovesaid forms and the forms stand misplced.

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CHANGE OF NAME

I, KESHAV Kumar Gupta, son of Hiralal Gupta, residing at 10/2A, Alipore Park Place, Kolkata-700027, solemnly affirm that Keshav Kumar Gupta and Keshav Gupta is the same and one identical person, vide Affidavit No. "17479" dated: 18.03.21 before the Ld. Judicial Magistrate Alipore.

I, PULAK Kumar Ghosh, S/o. late Chunilal Ghosh, R/o. Vill.: Paschim Daspara, Rajpur Sonarpur Municipality, South 24 Parganas, Pin-700150, do hereby declare 'Pulak Kumar Ghosh' and 'Puluk Ghosh' is same and identical person and my actual D.O.B. is 07.07.1950 and not 07.01.1950, vide affidavit sworn before Ld. 1st Class Judicial Magistrate, Alipore dated: 19.03.2021.

I, MONIRUL Islam Mondal, S/o. Lt. Golam Rahaman Mondal, Vill.: Bharadanga, P.O.: Panchpota, P.S.: Gaighata, 24 Pgs(N), declare that in some documents my name is recorded otherwise. As per affidavit before Executive Magistrate, Bangaon, 24 Pgs(N) dt. 18.01.21 Monirul Islam Mondal, S/o. Lt. Golam Rahaman Mondal, Manirul Mondal, S/o. Golam Mondal, Monirul Mondal, S/o. Golam Mondal is same and identical person.

IN MY Army record my wife Kumari Bani Barman name is wrongly written. Her correct name is Bani Ray Barman, W/o. Service No.-14640074L Hav Anil Barman, S/o. Bishnu Pada Barman, Unit-Hq Sqn 16(i) Armd Bde C/O 56 APO.

The Statesman

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The BJP will gradually grab regional parties by using its leaders and imposing policies

HARKA BAHADUR CHETTRI, LEADER, JAN ANDOLAN PARTY

ON THE SELECTION OF BJP ELECTION CANDIDATES FOR THE THREE HILL SEATS

81% of Punjab samples test positive for UK Covid variant

CM Capt Amarinder appeals to people to get jabs, urges PM Modi to widen vaccination ambit

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 23 MARCH

With 81 per cent of the latest 401 samples sent by the Punjab government for genome sequencing turning up positive for the new UK Covid variant, Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh on Tuesday appealed to the people of the state to get themselves vaccinated, even as he urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to widen the vaccination ambit to cover those younger than 60 since this mutant has been found to be infecting young people more.

Expressing concern over the emerging situation in Punjab, the CM stressed the need for the central government to urgently open up the vaccination for a bigger section of the populace. The process needs to be expedited, he said, pointing to the fact that experts had found the existing Covishield vaccine to be equally effective against the UK variant B.1.1.7. It was essential to vaccinate more and more people to break the chain of transmission, the CM added.

Capt Amarinder also urged the people to strictly adhere to all Covid safety protocols, including wearing of masks and maintaining social distancing. The state government, which has already announced fresh restrictions, would be forced to impose more curbs if the people do not adopt the Covid-appropriate behaviour, he warned.

The appeal from the CM came after the state's Covid expert committee head, Dr KK Talwar, apprised him of the developments on the new UK coronavirus variant in the state, which has been witnessing a surge in the number of Covid-19 positive cases during the last few weeks.

The Punjab health department had sent 478 Covid positive samples to NIB (National Institute of Biologicals), IGIB (Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology, Delhi), and NCDC (National Centre for Disease Control) for genome sequencing, of which results of 90 samples were received and those showed only two samples for N440K variant.

Subsequently, a team from the Union ministry of health and family welfare, visited the state to review the increase in positivity. The team was informed about the pending results of genome sequencing. Thereafter, 401 more samples, collected between 1 January to 10 March this year, were sent to the NCDC for genome sequencing. The result of these samples was worrying as it showed presence of B.1.1.7 variant in 326 COVID samples, said Dr Talwar.

The CM said he had been informed by Dr Talwar that though this UK variant B.1.1.7 is more infectious yet not more virulent. Further, the Oxford (Covishield) vaccine is equally effective against this new UK variant.

The B.1.1.7 variant is now spreading rapidly in many parts of the world, representing 98 per cent of the new cases in UK and 90% in Spain. The UK authorities have suggested it is up to 70% more transmissible than the original virus.

Jai Ram launches various e-services for Lahaul Spiti

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 23 MARCH

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur virtually launched from Shimla e-Office, e-Heli Service, e-Aagman and e-Lahaul for the tribal Lahaul-Spiti district on Tuesday.

HP CM virtually launches from Shimla e-Office, e-Heli Service, e-Aagman and e-Lahaul for tribal Lahaul-Spiti district

The chief minister said that all these services would go a long way in providing people friendly services to the people of Lahaul-Spiti district at a click of button.

He said that these initiatives were the best examples of optimum use of Information Technology for good governance. He said that the e-Heli service would go a long way in providing details of the flights available from different Blocks/ Sub-Division of Lahaul and Spiti, Detailed Policy about the Flight Service, Eligibility and Fee Structure, Integration of Payment Gateway and Online Approval and Rejection of Applications. He said that the service is Multilingual, easy to use and easy to access on both Mobile and Web.

Thakur said that the e-Office aims to improve operational efficiency of government departments by transitioning to a "Paper Less Office" environment by implementing e-Office application in the district with which the overall working of the district administration will become more effective and efficient. He said that e-Office would ensure that the file work in the departments and inter-departmental movement of files would be done electronically. He said that with this system, movement of receipts and files would become seamless and would ensure more transparency in the system since each and every action taken on a file would be recorded electronically. He said that this would also ensure maintaining a proper and effective record.

The chief minister said that e-Lahaul web application has been developed for registration of local vendors for setting up temporary stalls of their business in Lahaul & Spiti district. He said that the main objective behind the application is to identify legal vending and to make the process of registration transparent and efficient.

He said that the application would ensure automatic registration of vendors, auto fees calculation for different categories of vendors and payment gateway integration.

Thakur said that web application "e-Heli Service" has been developed by district administration with the help of IT department which would go a long way in facilitating the people of the district in getting helicopter services particularly during the month of winter. He said that the Atal Tunnel Rohtang which was dedicated to the nation last year by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has opened new vistas of tourism for the people of this tribal district. The Atal Tunnel Rohtang has emerged as a big tourist attraction and with launch of e-Aagman proper check on flow of tourists would be ensured.

Information Technology Minister Dr Ram Lal Markanda said that Lahaul-Spiti would become the first district of the State in effective adopting of e-office in the State. He said that district administration Lahaul & Spiti with the help of Department of Information Technology has been working on many IT initiatives to provide citizen services digitally to the citizens of district. He said that the e-office would help in ensuring transparency in official functioning particularly in landlocked hinterlands of the State. He also thanked the Chief Minister for giving due consideration to the district in the Budget for the year 2021-22.

Haryana to pay 9 pc interest to farmers for delayed payments of their procured crops

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 23 MARCH

Days after making provision for direct payments into the verified accounts of farmers, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Tuesday said about 9 per cent interest (bank rate plus one percent) would be paid to the farmers if their payments are delayed during the upcoming Rabi season commencing from 1 April.

"Any delay in payment would not be tolerated. Responsibilities should be fixed to ensure that farmers are timely paid," said Khattar.

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal presiding over a review meeting regarding preparation for Rabi procurement season 2021-22 at Chandigarh on Tuesday. Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala is also seen in the picture.

Presiding over a review meeting of officers engaged in the upcoming procurement season today, the CM said farmers must receive payment of their procured produce within a stipulated time period. "Any delay in payment would not be tolerated. Responsibilities should be fixed to ensure that farmers are timely paid," said Khattar.

During the meeting, the CM also reviewed the arrangements being made for the smooth procurement of crops and directed the concerned departments and procurement agencies to ensure that farmers do not face any inconvenience while selling their produce in different mandis (grain markets) across the state. "Hassle-free and timebound procurement should be ensured by making advance scheduling plans so that farmers do not face any problems" directed Khattar.

The CM said in view of the sudden surge in Covid-19 cases, like last year, the required number of procurement centres should also be increased ensuring hassle free procurement. Procurement of wheat and mustard would commence on 1 April while procurement of other crops would commence on 10 April.

The CM while giving directions regarding strengthening of Mandi system said that along with making timely arrangements for availability of labourers in the Mandis, adequate number of weighing scales, gunny bags, sewing machines, etc should also be ensured.

"Suitable transportation arrangements should be made for lifting of the crops from the Mandis on time and if any transporter fails to lift the crops within 48 hours, then the Deputy Commissioners should remain ready with any alternative transport arrangements," directed Khattar.

During the meeting, additional chief secretary, food civil supplies and consumer affairs department, Anurag Rastogi said this time payment module has been made a part of "e-Kharid" and several banks will be empanelled for this purpose.

Rastogi shared the advance directions regarding timely lifting of the crops, smooth functioning of the procurement process and ensuring that no Arhtiya (commisison agens) or farmer faces any problems.

He informed standard operating procedures have been issued to every deputy commissioner for strict implementation throughout the procurement season. Besides this, health safety arrangements have also been made in advance to minimize health risk to those engaged in procurement operations.

The deputy commissioners have been directed to ensure Covid-19 safety protocols are strictly followed at each procurement centre, Rastogi informed.

Himachal CM asks HPTDC to 'think out-of-box' to make profit

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 23 MARCH

The Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (HPTDC) must "adopt a proactive approach and think out-of-the-box" to ensure that all the units of HPTDC become profit making ventures.

This was stated by Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur while presiding over the 156th meeting of Board of Directors of HPTDC here on Tuesday.

The chief minister said that the tariff of hotels must be reviewed and revised by keeping an eye on the tariff of the other hotels situated in the vicinity. He said that the Corporation must also revise its menu by introducing new dishes in its units and removing unnecessary items. He said that this would help in competing with other restaurants in the vicinity.

Thakur said that the officers of the Corporation should study tourism units of other states to bring desired results. He said that steps should also be initiated to increase occupancy of hotels upto 50 percent. He said that the Corporation has earned revenue of Rs. 35.56 crore and incurred an expenditure of Rs. 73.76 crore for the period from 1 April, 2020 to 28th February, 2021. He said that this was due to covid-19 pandemic which resulted in huge losses to the tourism industry.

The chief minister said that Kunzum, Manali and Hotel Holiday Home, Shimla should be renovated so as to attract tourists in the prime properties of the Corporation. He said that stress must be laid on effective marketing of hotels to reach out to the consumers. He said that greater use of new media must be ensured for attracting maximum tourists.

Thakur also felt the need for creating parameters and goals so that they could be achieved in a professional way so that units could be made economically viable.

Managing Director, HPTDC, Kumud Singh conducted the proceedings of the meeting.

Chief Secretary Anil Khachi, Additional Chief Secretaries Prabodh Saxena and JC Sharma, Secretary Tourism Devesh Kumar and other senior officers attended the meeting.

Haryana launches Tatkal deed appointment service

This portal will ask the type of appointment i.e. normal or Tatkal. This applicant should choose Tatkal and enter details of the E-challan.

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 23 MARCH

To make the registration of land deeds in tehsils across the state easier, the Haryana government has launched "Tatkal" (immediately) deed appointment service.

Disclosing this on Tuesday, Haryana additional chief secretary and financial, commissioner revenue, Sanjeev Kaushal said the provision had been made to enable an applicant to book deed registration appointment on a Tatkal basis for getting the deed registered on an urgent basis.

Those wanting to make use of this service can book Tatkal appointments online for getting the deed registered by paying Tatkal fee of Rs 25,000 in the form of E-challan. Such an appointment can be booked only on the day of registration from 8 a.m. onwards.

In each tehsil, 10 appointment slots have been reserved for Tatkal service in addition to the 100 normal appointment slots, Kaushal added.

For making use of this service, an applicant should visit egrashry.nic.in portal and click on the link, pay Tatkal appointment service charges. Then, they should enter the details asked by the system and generate the E-challan by paying Rs 25,000 online using net banking, debit card etc.

Then, the applicant should book the deed appointment by visiting the Jamabandi.nic.in portal. This portal will ask the type of appointment i.e. normal or Tatkal. This applicant should choose Tatkal and enter details of the E-challan.

They should enter details of the property and parties to complete the appointment booking. On successful booking of the appointment, the applicant will get SMS on the mobile.

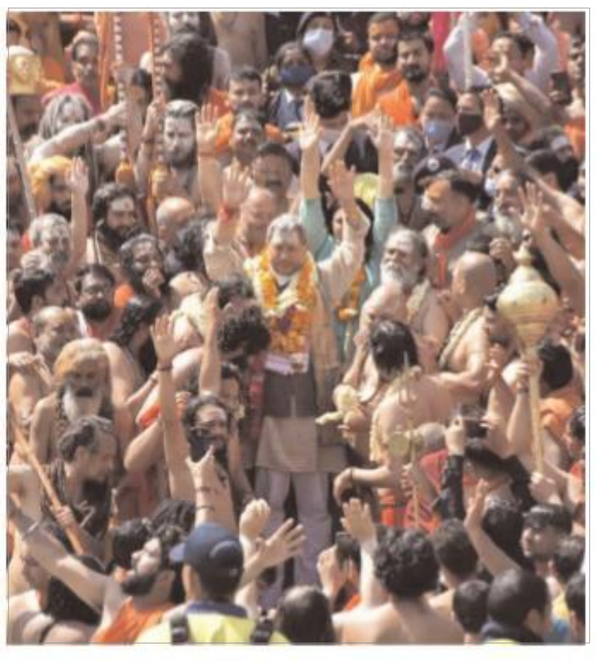
Helpline no. for Kumbh Mela launched

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
DEHRADUN, 23 MARCH

Uttarakhand Police launched a helpline number for Kumbh Mela in Haridwar on Tuesday. The helpline number, 1902, will remain active round the clock. By dialling the number the devotees could obtain information about traffic, Covid-19, hotels, Kumbh Mela, 'Shahi Snan,' and could also register complaints about missing persons and get other details.

Uttarakhand Police's Inspector General (Kumbh Mela) Sanjay Gunjyal said, "The helpline will turn helpful for the devotees visiting Haridwar for attending Kumbh Mela."

After conducting the first Shahi Snan of the Kumbh Mela successfully on 11 March, Uttarakhand Police is all prepared for the next Shahi Snan slated for 12 April.



Uttarakhand CM Tirath Singh Rawat at Kumbh Mela in Haridwar recently. FILE PHOTO/SNS

On 11 March, Haridwar was packed with devotees and it is estimated that about 37 lakh pilgrims took holy dip in Ganga on that day.

RAIN IN THE HILLS

People with their umbrellas walking during a spell of rain at the Ridge. In Shimla on Tuesday. LALIT KUMAR

epaper.thestatesman.com

Centre must answer for 'insult' of 'martyrdom' of farmers protesting at Delhi borders...

CONGRESS LEADER RAHUL GANDHI
ON THE OCCASION OF 'SHAHEED DIWAS'

THUMBNAILS

A man uses a shield to protect himself as women beat him with sticks during a ritual as part of 'Lathmar Holi' celebrations, at Barsana in Mathura district on Tuesday. ■ AGENCY

Silence for 'martyred' farmers: Congress MLAs on Tuesday observed a two-minute silence for "250 farmers who were martyred" at Delhi borders during protests against the three farm laws in the Gujarat Assembly even as members of the BJP refused to join and a minister accused the Opposition party of politicising the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh and others. SNS

BJP leader booked : A case has been registered against a local BJP leader after a video went viral on social media in which he can be seen misbehaving with a police sub-inspector during a vehicle checking drive here.that they would instead focus on their real est focus on their real est business. PTI

RS returns Central govt's two Appropriation Bills

Anurag Thakur tells House fiscal deficit had fallen, would remain under control

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

The Rajya Sabha today returned the Central government's Appropriation Bills for 2020-21 and 2021-22, after minister of state for finance Anurag Thakur told the House that fiscal deficit had fallen and would remain under control.

The House discussed the Budgets of the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Puducherry also and returned Appropriation Bills for them for the current and the coming financial year. The Puducherry Bill for 2021-22 would cover expenditure for a part of the year.

Several members complained during the discussions that the government claimed not to have raised taxes but prices of petrol, diesel and gas had risen substantially, putting burden on the common man.

Thakur said the fiscal deficit of the government had fallen from 5.4 per cent to 3.5 per cent and the government was following a plan to keep it under control.

The Goods and Service Tax (GST) collections were up following steps taken by the government.

The government steps like productivity linked bonus for manufacturing would yield results. India had become the second largest producer of mobiles.

The minister said Defence expenditure had taken care of bullet proof jackets, Rafale jets, tanks and helicopters. The farmers were provided fertilisers with ease, and Rs 6000 paid to needy farmers in three instalments a year.

The MGNREGA budget during the UPA's rule was Rs 30000 crore and it had risen to Rs 1.10 lakh crore now.

BSNL and banks were helped to be financial strong. Jammu and Kashmir had elections at several lower levels from sarpanches and was given funds to recover financially.

Three thousand Kashmiri Pandits were resettled, 44000 were getting Rs 13000 per month and 6000 more would get houses.

The Puducherry expenditure would cover the period till the coming elections in the Union Territory.

Cong slams govt in Parl

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

The Congress on Tuesday slammed the government in Parliament for changing the focus of the Budget from welfare of the people to elections.

Piloting a debate on the Appropriation Bill as well as on the issues of Puducherry and Jammu and Kashmir in the Rajya Sabha, Congress leader Shaktisinh Gohil said there cannot be an election-oriented Budget. "The budget can never be an election speech. It is meant for the welfare of people. But this tradition has been changed".

Gohil said the government mentioned four states ~West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam and Kerala ~ repeatedly in the General Budget where Assembly elections are scheduled next month.

Further, the government allocated Rs 300 crore for celebration of 60 years of Goa's liberation, keeping in view the Assembly elections due in 2022, he added.

The Congress leader said the common man will be badly affected with the increase in the target of union excise duty at Rs 3,61,000 crore during the 2021-22 fiscal from Rs 2,67,000 crore last year.

He said the UPA government, too, had its plans to disinvest in the public sector units but could not do much. Thakur said the corporate tax was reduced with a view to encourage Make in India.

Railways launches drive against smoking, carrying inflammable material

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

A massive drive has been launched by the Indian Railways against smoking and carrying inflammable material and legal action will be taken against violators.

The drive has been launched in view of several recent incidents of fire in various Zonal Railways. These incidents resulted in the loss of property and posed a grave danger to life, said Railway Ministry in a Press release.

According to IR, some of these incidents appeared to have been caused by smoking onboard or transportation of inflammable material by train. The drive was officially launched on 22 March, 2021. The ministry will start taking legal action against violators from 31 March, 2021. The drive is expected to continue till 30 April, 2021.

The Railways has instructed all Zonal Railways to launch a week's 'Intensive Awareness Drive'. During the drive, all railway stakeholders will be educated about precautions to be taken against fire incidents like enforcing "No Smoking" and preventing carriage of inflammable material through rail. According to the release, this is expected to be achieved through direct interaction, distribution of leaflets, pamphlets, pasting of stickers, conducting *nukkad natak*s, announcement through public address system at stations, advertisement in print, electronic media and social media.

MP: 12 women among 13 killed in road accident

BHOPAL, 23 MARCH

Twelve women, travelling in a single autorickshaw, were killed along with the autorickshaw driver when a bus hit the three-wheeler in Gwalior city of Madhya Pradesh early morning on Tuesday.

Gwalior Road Transport Officer (RTO) MPS Chauhan has been suspended after the incident. MP CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan announced ex-gratia financial relief of Rs 4 lakh each to the families of the deceased.

According to police and district administration officials, the women were mostly cooks and helpers at a government Aanganwadi Centre in the Chhawni area of Gwalior. They were initially supposed to travel by two autorickshaws but one of the three-wheelers broke down.

Consequently, all the 12 women sat in one auto. The bus hit them around 5.30 AM. It was on its way to Morena from Gwalior when the accident happened. All the bus passengers were safe while the bus driver fled the spot. SNS

YSRCP plans to turn Vizag into capital city

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD, 23 MARCH

After Kolkata, Visakhapatnam is all set to to be the country's second city to run trams after Andhra Pradesh chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy proposed to introduce the environment-friendly public transport system along with the much-awaited Metro in the port city which is gearing up to be the executive capital of the state.

Addressing a meeting to discuss prioritised projects for Vishakapatnam the chief minister proposed to set up both Metro and trams in order to beautify the city along with the task of providing an efficient public transport system. YSRCP has recently won the Greater Vishakapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) and claimed that it was a mandate for developing the city as an executive capital.

While reviewing the Vishakapatnam Metro Rail Project, officials said a detailed project report was being prepared for Metro between the Vizag Steel Plant and Bhogapuram where the airport was located covering about 76.9 kilometer stretch with a total of 53 stations. Proposals were also being prepared for 60.2 kilometer long tram corridor and both would cover nearly 137 km. It has been estimated that the cost for construction of Metro would be Rs 14,000 crore and another Rs 6,000 crore will be required for the tram services.

He instructed officials to start construction work for the Bhogapuram Airport, Beach Corridor Project and improve water supply by diverting from Godavari in Polavaram to Visakhapatnam through pipelines immediately and then to focus on Metro projects. The existing Visakhapatnam-Bhimili Beach Road will be expanded.

Covid: T'gana closes edu institutions

HYDERABAD, 23 MARCH

Telangana government today announced that all educational institutions in the state, barring medical colleges, will be shutdown temporarily from tomorrow in view of the increasing cases of Covid-19. Eduction minister Sabitha Indra Reddy made the announcement in the Assembly due to apprehensions about the spread of virus after quite few cases were detected in residential schools and universities. SNS

Sex scandal controversy dominates K'taka House

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

The Congress today stalled the Assembly proceedings over sex scandal allegedly involving a BJP minister. Opposition MLAs, who were brandishing a compact disc of the alleged scandal, were demanding a court-monitored probe into the incident.

Leading the protest, former chief minister and leader of the Opposition, Siddaramiah, said as the government was not listening to its demand, "we will not cooperate with it." This, after home minister Basvaraj Bommai urged the Opposition to allow the proceedings, especially as the government had already instituted a probe into the alleged scandal.

The House, adjourned by the Speaker for about 10 minutes, assembled again though there was no let up in the protest by Congress. The Speaker's pleas that the House belonged to the 224 MLAs and not just the Opposition, did not cut much ice with the agitated Congress members.

BJP has been placed in an embarrassing situation following the release of a CD recently which allegedly showed footage involving its former minister Ramesh Jarikholi and a woman.

Chief minister B S Yediyurappa criticised the Congress, arguing the minister had taken moral responsibility and even tendered his resignation after the controversy. The government had set up a SIT to probe the charges and to find the truth. "What is the party protesting about? What else does the Congress want? Obviously, the party did not have any other issue."

The Congress, however, wants the probe to be conducted under the aegis of the HC with Siddaramiah asserting "the party's intention was to ensure truth comes out."

TENDER

EAST DELHI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION
Office of the Executive Engineer-(E)-II SSZ
IInd Floor, Technical Laboratory, Disaster Management Centre, Ghaizpur, Delhi-96
No. : E.E.(Elect.)-II/Shah(S)/2020-2021/B-794 Dated : 23.03.2021
CORRIGENDUM-II Press Notice Inviting Tender
NIT No. : 30 EEE-II/EDMC/Engg./2020-21 Dated : 25.02.2021, Tender No. : 319687
The last date of re-encryption of online bid for Item No. 1 has been extended till 30.03.2021 up to 2:00 PM.
Other details/information can be seen on website http://mcdetenders.com
R.O. No. 90/DPI/East/2020-21 Executive Engineer (E)-II/Shd.(S)
EDMC's Citizens Helpline No. : 155303

NORTHERN RAILWAY
CORRIGENDUM
Sub: Cancellation of Tender for the work of "Housekeeping and Cleaning (including cleaning, dusting, washing, mopping & sweeping) of Toilets, Corridors, Open Areas including roads in STC complex, and WTC".
Ref: 1. **Tender No.-** 121-M-STC-Tender-6-2021 opening date: 12.04.2021.
2. **Tender Noitce No.:** N.R./STC/CB/March/Cleaning/2021, Date: 16.03.2021
3. Published on different news papers on dated: 18.03.2021
In reference to above, the tender for the work of "Housekeeping and Cleaning (including cleaning, dusting, washing, mopping & sweeping) of Toilets, Corridors, Open Areas including roads in STC complex, and WTC" **has been cancelled on administrative ground.**
No.: N.R./STC/CB/March/Cleaning/2021 Date: 23.03.2021 674/2021
Serving Customers with a Smile

GOVERNMENT OF HIMACHAL PRADESH
JAL SHAKTI VIBHAG
NOTICE INVITING e-TENDERS

Online bids on item rate basis are invited by the Executive Engineer Jal Shakti Division . Pragpur on behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh, in electronic tendering system in two covers for the under mentioned work from the contractors/firms of appropriate class enlisted with Himachal Pradesh Jal Shakti Vibhag.

S. No.	Name of work	Estimated cost	Earnest money	Cost of tender form	Time limit
1	Construction Of Junior Engineer office building in Karoa in Tehsil Dehra Distt. Kangra HP (SH:- Construction of JE office building and Construction of Septic tank)	2366581/-	43000/-	400/-	Six months

1. Tender documents and other instructions can be downloaded or viewed online from the portal **http://hptenders.gov.in**, by the interested bidders/firms/individuals registered on the website which is free of cost.
2. Competitive Bidding will be conducted in accordance with "Single Stage Two Envelope" Bidding Procedure. Bid security, and eligibility documents as per eligibility information and criteria and Financial bid should be put in separate envelop and all two separate envelops should be put together in a single envelop. The bids shall be submitted online electronically.
3. Bid evaluation of criteria- Technically Qualified lowest evaluated bidder (L1) will be considered as a successful bidder. However, the acceptance of the proposal will rest with the IPH Department who does not bind itself to accept the lowest proposal, and reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the proposals received without assigning any reason.
4. As the bids are to be submitted online and are required to be encrypted and digitally signed, the bidders are advised to obtain Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) from suitable venders or from any authorized agency at the earliest.
5. **KEY DATES WILL BE AS UNDER:-**

a	Date of Online publication	23.03.2021 at 5:00 PM
b	Downloading of e-tender Documents	From 23.03.2021 at 5:00 PM to 30.03.2021 at 11:00 A.M.
c	Date of submission of e-tender	From 23.03.2021 at 5:00 PM to 30.03.2021 at 11:00 A.M.
d	Physical submission of eligibility criteria, pre-qualification documents, earnest money deposit and cost of tender documents (in original)	Upto 11:00 A.M. on 30.03.2021.
e	Date of opening of bids:	
	1) Cover-1 Eligibility information and Criteria	**On 30.03.2021 at 11.30 A.M.**
	2) Cover-2 Financial Bid	Shall be intimated separately

6. TERMS AND CONDITIONS:-
(1) The e-tender documents shall be uploaded online in 2 (Two) covers:-
1. Cover- 1 shall contain Scanned copies of "eligibility information and criteria
2. Cover-2 shall contain the "Financial bid" on the prescribed format.
(2) Cover-1 shall contain Scanned copies of following "eligibility information and criteria" (Scanned copies to be uploaded):
(i) The Earnest Money **(unless Exempted) (through online (e-payment) or offline mode)** duly pledged in favour of Executive Engineer, Jal Shakti Division, . Pragpur in the shape of National Saving Certificate in any Post Office in H.P. or Time Deposit Receipt/FDR of any Scheduled/ Nationalized Bank, having its branch at Dehra or certificate of exemption of earnest money.
(ii) The cost of tender form **(through online (e-payment) or offline mode)** as shown above in shape of Demand Draft, only drawn in favour of Executive Engineer, Jal Shakti Division, . Prapur payable at Pragpur
(iii) Copy of Certificate of registration with I&PH Department (Now JSV) in appropriate class and latest renewal thereof.
(iv) Income Tax, PAN No. (Permanent Account No.), GST registration, EPF registration and latest clearance certificate thereof, are to be submitted with the eligibility criteria.
(v) Copy of similar Work done, Experience Certificates. office building work.
(vi) The authorization letter regarding digital signature certificate (DSC) of the person authorized by the registered renderer to upload the bid, be uploaded along with the other documents online.
(vii) A scanned copy of undertaking that I have carefully studied all the terms and conditions Stipulated in the contract document before quoting the rates.
4. **Cover-2** shall contain "Financial Bid" which will be opened at a later date to be notified separately & shall be opened only of those contractors /Firms whose documents as per eligibility Information "Cover-I" are found in order. The Financial Bids shall contain only Financial Bid /Offer on departmental schedule of quantity/BOQ where contractor /firms will quote his /their offer for each item.
7. Earnest money of L1, L2 and L3 shall be retained for a period of 120 days.
8. No subletting of work by the contractor is permissible.
9. In case, opening day is a holiday, the tenders shall be opened on next working day.
10. The offer of the tender shall be kept open for 120 days.
11. Ambiguous/telegraphic/ Conditional tenders or tenders by Fax /E-mail shall not be entertained/ considered in any case.
12. Conditional bids are liable to be rejected without assigning any reasons.
13. The Executive Engineer, reserves the right to reject/cancel any or all the tenders/bids without assigning any reason(s).
14. Any enquiry regarding tender can be obtained on e-mail of the divisional office under e-mail address i.e xeniphpragpur@gmail.com and office telephone No. 01970-245045.

Executive Engineer
Jal Shakti Division
Pragpur

6725/2020-2021 HIM SUCHNA AVAM JAN SAMPARK

BJP names Lahiri for Balurghat seat

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BALURGHAT, 23 MARCH

The BJP has finally chosen its candidate who would contest the Assembly elections in the Balurghat Assembly constituency. Following the announcement of the name today, party leaders in the district have started preparations to campaign for noted economist Ashok Lahiri.

This morning, BJP's Balurghat MP Sukanta Majumder met the Press and announced local issues with which the BJP plans to go before the public. Along with the BJP election manifesto, Mr Majumder also published a separate list of local issues.

The development has, meanwhile, put to rest speculations and ended the dreams of several aspirants who had been hoping for the candidature. Moreover, party leaders and workers in some constituencies have openly opposed the selection of election candidates and are demanding local faces. The protests from disgruntled party leaders and workers prompted state BJP general secretary Sayantan Bose to rush to the district and talk with the leaders to control the situation. However, it seemed that no protest met the announcement of Mr Lahiri as the Balurghat candidate.

"Mr Lahiri has been selected by the Prime Minister of India. So we have no other option. We have to fight against the TMC and we will try our best," a district leader said today.

BJP sources said Mr Lahiri is likely to arrive in Balurghat tomorrow and right away start his election campaign.

On the other hand, MP, Mr Majumder, published a 15-point list of local issues for the poll campaign. Issues like problems faced by border areas, election in local bodies, development of National Highway-512, Hili Tura Corridor through Bangladesh, medical college and university figure in the list.

"Ashok Lahiri is such a personality who can change the district and fulfill the dreams of the people. He is the only person who can put forth our issues before central leaders. From development of the railway services to development of local areas, the BJP will try to fulfill all proposed projects and issues. There is no conflict among our leaders. We will start campaign from day after tomorrow," Mr Majumder said.

The Trinamul Congress, on the other hand, criticized the BJP selection of an "outsider" for the Balurghat seat.

"In the year 1971, Jotin Chakrabarty, the CPIM leader, was defeated from this seat as he was an outsider. Now, this time, the same thing will repeat.

NORTHERN RAILWAY
E-TENDER NOTICE
Sr. DEE/EMU/GZB for and on behalf of President of India, Invites open e-tender under single packet system for the under noted work :

1	NIT No.	232-Elect-EMU-WC-11-19-20
2	Name of the work	Annual Maintenance and operation contract (AMOC) of Bio-toilet in MEMU coaches at EMU Car Shed, Ghaziabad.
3	Tender Cost	Rs. 0.00
4	Approximate Cost	Rs. 2251235.13
5	Earnest Money	Rs. 0.00
6	Completion period	18 Months
7	Validity of offer	45 days
8	Date & Time from tender advertised on IREPS website	22.03.2021 (17:23 Hrs.)
9	Date & Time from tender submission start and end	01.04.2021 (00:00 Hrs.) to 15.04.2021 (15:00 Hrs.)
10	Tender closing Date & Time	15.04.2021 (15:00 Hrs.)
11	Date & Time of tender Opening (immediately when tender submission ends)	15.04.2021 (15:00 Hrs.)

Note 1 : All participant Tenderer/Tenderers will submit their requisite documents along with their tender offer."No post tender correspondence for submission of additional document shall be entertained after opening of the Technical and Commercial offer. Even suo-moto post tender letters of the tenders shall be treated as null & void."
Note 2 : Duplicate documents should not be enclosed/uploaded.
Tender Notice is available on website of **www.ireps.gov.in**
No. 232-Elect-EMU-WC-11-19-20 Date : 22.03.2021 665/21
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

Bimal faction names Hill poll candidates

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
DARJEELING, 23 MARCH

The Gorkha Jan Mukti Morcha (Bimal Gurung faction) today named the election candidates for the three Hill Assembly seats. Amid a meeting at Malidhura in Tukvar near Darjeeling town, the party also released its manifesto for the upcoming elections.

While the party has fielded PT Ola in the Darjeeling Assembly constituency, Norbu G Lama was named for Kurseong and Dr Ram Bhujel as the candidate for Kalimpong.

Announcing the candidature, Mr Gurung also appealed to all political parties in the Hills, like the TMC, GNLF, CPRM and ABGL, to unite.

"We have to make the BJP understand the importance of local parties. I appeal to parties here to work together. We have to save our local parties," said Mr Gurung.

While Mr Ola hails from Ghoom here and is a lawyer by profession, he was earlier the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration Sabashad from the Ghoom-Jorebunglow area. He was also once the Darjeeling Municipality Chairman. Mr Lama, on the other hand, is from Takdah and runs a school and a resort. He was also a GTA Sabashad from the Takdah-Glenburn segment. Dr Bhujel, the Kalimpong candidate, hails from Hilltop and was also a GTA Sabashad in the past.

Mr Gurung, in his speech, highlighted the Kurseong seat the most and said, "Kurseong is a sensitive place and we should take it as a challenge. We have to work hard there and see that we win, along with the other three seats."

Mr Gurung was probably referring to the popularity that the leader of the other Morcha camp Anit Thapa enjoys there.

The party manifesto has 34 issues, among which are a permanent political solution for the Hill, Terai and Dooars region, for which the party said right steps would be taken towards Gorkhaland, tribal status for 11 communities, parja-patta for those living in tea gardens, cinchona plantation and DI Fund area, three-tier panchayat in Hills, up-gradation of Darjeeling Municipality to a corporation, jobs and different facilities for families of martyrs.

Both camps of the Morcha are an alliance of the TMC, but are fielding their own candidates. The Morcha (Binoy Tamang camp) has already announced the names of its candidates in the three Hill seats. With TMC supremo Mamta Banerjee not giving a clear statement on the three Hill seats, maintaining that they have left it for her "friends," it has brought about confusion among TMC supporters as to whom they should support.

Following this uncertainty, a surprise last moment development came from the TMC (Hills) youth wing today, with it announcing the name of its Darjeeling youth wing secretary Ramesh Kadaria as an Independent candidate who would contest the polls in the Darjeeling Assembly seat.

The Darjeeling sub-division TMC (Hills) youth president Dinesh Gurung said, "The youth wing of our party wanted a candidate from their own party with our main objective being to see Mamta Banerjee as the Bengal CM again. In light of this, when she has left the seats in the Hills open with both the camps of the Morcha maintaining that they have no concern about the TMC (Hills), we decided to field our own candidate. Our candidate will win the elections after which we will support Mamata Banerjee."

"Moreover, one of the main reasons for us fielding a candidate is to save our existence in the Hills and show that we exist here," he said.

On the other hand, Mr Kadaria said, "We waited a lot for directions of our higher-ups and we had to take this decision in absence of that."

According to the youth wing, the decision had been taken without consultation with the TMC (Hills) central committee.

When contacted, TMC (Hills) president LB Rai said he had no information on the development.

epaper.thestatesman.com

Congress pursuing same 'divisive politics' that led to Partition...

UP CHIEF MINISTER YOGI ADITYANATH
ON CONGRESS ALLIANCE WITH AIUDF FOR COMING ASSAM POLLS

THUMBNAILS

Jain sadhvis receive Covid-19 dose in Surat on Tuesday. ■ AGENCY

HP panchayat bans gambling: New initiatives to curb prevalent social evils are being taken by a panchayat in Kaza in Lahaul Spiti district by banning gambling and playing cards in public places. " If anyone is found violating the rules then a fine of Rs 40,000 will be imposed on erring persons," said newly elected gram panchayat pradhan Sonam Dolma. SNS

Five policemen killed: Five police personnel were killed and 13 others injured as Maoists blew up the bus in which they were traveling in Chhattisgarh's Narayanpur district on Tuesday. The landmine explosion took place between Kanhargaon and Kadenar villages under Dhaudai police station limits. PTI

Raj Assembly bypolls: No candidate filed papers for the bypolls to three Rajasthan Assembly seats on Tuesday, the first day of the nomination process for the 17 April contest. The last date for filing papers is 30 March. The scrutiny of papers will be held on 31 March and nominations can be withdrawn by 3 April. PTI

Nadda: In Assam CAA will be implemented in time

Says Cong was fooling people by saying it will not allow Citizenship Act in Assam

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
GUWAHATI, 23 MARCH

BJP president J P Nadda on Tuesday asserted that the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) has been passed by the Parliament and will be implemented 'in time'.

Nadda after releasing the party's manifesto for the Assam elections said that the law, (which does not find a mention in the manifesto), is a central legislation and the Congress claim that they will not allow its implemenation in the state, if voted to power, may be either 'due to their ignorance or they are trying to fool the people of the state'.

Referring to the issue of infiltration, the BJP president said that the party is committed to strengthening and scientific management of the international borders.

Asked about the implementation of the clause six of

the Assam accord to ensure the constitutional safeguard of the linguistic, cultural, social identity and heritage of the Assamese people, Nadda said, "it is under process and we are committed to it".

The BJP in its manifesto has made "ten commitments" for an 'Atmanirbhar Assam' which include initiation of process of correction and reconciliation of the entries under the Supreme Court mandated National Register of Citizens to "protect genuine Indian citizens and exclude all illegal immigrants". The BJP has also pedged to protect the political rights of the people of the state through a delimitation exercise.

Candidate declaration: Eleven per cent of the 345 candidates contesting in the second phase of the Assam Assembly elections this year have declared criminal cases against themselves, says a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). The Assam Election Watch and the ADR have also gave the financial status of the contesting candidates, and out of the 345 candidates, 73 (21 per cent) are crorepatis. About 209 (61 per cent) candidates have declared their educational qualifications to be between 5th and 12th standard, while 131 (38 per cent) candidates are graduates or above. It added that 26 (8 per cent) female candidates are contesting in the second phase of the Assam assembly election this year. PTI

Rajnath says BJP govt will not allow infiltrators: Appealing not to do politics over illegal immigration, defence minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday said the BJP government, if voted to power, will not allow Bangladeshi infiltrators to enter Assam at any cost.

Addressing an election rally here, he said the BJP government has started electronic surveillance across the Indo-Bangla border in Assam to stop infiltration from the neighbouring country.

Meanwhile senior BJP leader Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday accused the opposiston Congress of indulging in "divisive politics" that led to the Partition of the country in 1947 and "having the same mindset" now as evident from its alliance with the AIUDF to fight the coming state polls in Assam.

Anti-CAA activist Akhil alleges torture in custody

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
GUWAHATI, 23 MARCH

Anti-CAA activist Akhil Gogoi in a letter from jail on Tuesday alleged physical and mental torture in custody and claimed that he was offered instant bail by NIA interrogators if he joined either the RSS or BJP.

The letter released by Gogoi's newly floated political outfit Raijor Dal said that the peasant leader was taken to Delhi on December 18, 2019 without the Court's permission. "At the NIA headquarter, I was lodged in lockup no 1 and was given only one dirty blanket. I slept on the floor in 3-4 degree celsius of temperature," he claimed.

During interrogation, the NIA officials offered him instant bail if he joined the RSS, the letter claimed.

"When I was arguing against the insulting offer, they came out with another proposal of joining the BJP. They said I could contest the Assembly against a vacant seat and become a minister," Gogoi claimed.

Shah, Nadda hold roadshows

MIDNAPORE, 23 MARCH

Ahead of the first phase of Assembly election on Saturday, the BJP top leaders like Union home minister Amit Shah and the party's national president J P Nadda bolstered the election campaign in West Midnapore today.

Shah held a massive road show in Midnapore town; Nadda took part in another huge road show in Ghatal.

Thousands of supporters and workers in both the places took part in the rallies, which began at around 2pm, as residents stood on both sides of the roads and balconies to witness the rally.

Both leaders waved at the spectators and showered flowers on the participants of the road shows as the saffron party candidates stood by their sides.

While leading the roadshow in Midnapore which commenced from Keranitala and concluded at Goalkuar Chawk, Shah once again claimed BJP would win by more than 200 seats. "The people of Bengal are ready for a change. The huge crowd who attended the road show indicates that people are ready to change," said Shah. SNS

Debts Recovery Tribunal-I, Delhi
4th Floor, Jeevan Tara Building, Parliament Street, New Delhi-110001

O.A. No. 804/ 2019
STATE BANK OF INDIA Versus Applicant
Sh. Ashish Agri & Ors. Defendants
To,
1. The Managing Director, (Defendant No. 02) M/s. Tashee Land Developers Pvt. Ltd., Corp. & Reg. Office At: 517A, 5th Floor, Narain Manzil, 23, Barakhamba Road, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001. Email:- info@tashee.in
2. The Managing Director, (Defendant No. 03) M/s. KNS Infracon Pvt. Ltd., Corp. & Reg. Office At: 517A, 5th Floor, Narain Manzil, 23, Barakhamba Road, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001.

Whereas the above named applicant has instituted a case for recovery of **Rs. 93,20,538/- (Rs Ninety Three Lacs Twenty Thousand Five Hundred Thirty Eight Only)** against you and whereas it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in ordinary way. Therefore, this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance before Hon'ble Tribunal on **25-05-2021 at 10.30 A.M. (for further details kindly visit DRT website www.etribunal.gov.in) Phone No. 011-23748473)**
Take notice that in case of your failure to appear on the above mentioned day before this Tribunal, the case will be heard and decided in your absence.
Due to ongoing Pandemic Situation, all the matters will be taken up through Video Conferencing and for that purpose:-
(i) All the Advocates/Litigants shall download the "Cisco Webex" application / Software;
(ii) "Meeting ID" and "Password" for the next date of hearing qua cases to be taken by 'Registrar/Recovery Officer-I/ and Recovery Officer-II shall be available one day prior to the next date at DRT Official Portal i.e. "d02rt.gov.in" under the Public Notice Head.
(iii) In any exigency qua that, the Advocates/Litigants can contact the concerned official at Ph. No. 011-23748473.
Given under my hand and seal of the Tribunal on this **19th March of 2021.**
by order of this Tribunal
for Registrar
Respondent may contact under mention phone number for further enquiry.
Amit K. Dar, Ld. Registrar, DRT-I, New Delhi, Phone.: 011-23748473
E-mail: drt1delhi-dfs@nic.in

BEFORE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL - III, DELHI
4th Floor Jeevan Tara Building Parliament Street, New Delhi-110001
Notice under Section 19(4) of the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993 read with Rule 12 & 13 of the Debts Recovery Tribunal (Procedure Rules) 1993) In the matter of
OA 391/2020
CANARA BANK (Applicant_
Vs
SHAH MOHD. MUMTAZ (Defendants)
To
D1. Shah Mohd. Mumtaz
H. No. 78, 3rd Floor, Abdul Fazal Enclave
Jamia Nagar, New Delhi-110025
D2. Mrs. Khutoon Farhana
H. No. 78, 3rd Floor, Abdul Fazal Enclave
Jamia Nagar, New Delhi-110025
D3. Mr. Amardeeps S/o Rakesh Kumar
D-151, 1st Floor, Khanpur Colony, Near Sainik Farm
Sector-2, Dr. Ambedkar Nagar, South Delhi-110062
D4. M/s Vocational Education Foundation
Regd. Office:-
Plot No. 4, Knowledge Park-1, Greater Noida, UP.
Also at:
D-302, Sector-10, Noida, UP-201301
Site Office;
Plot No. II, Sector-Pi 1 & 2, Greater Noida
Whereas the above named applicant has instituted a case against you and whereas it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in ordinary way. Therefore, this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance in this Tribunal **15.04.2021** at 10.30 A.M. Take notice that in case of your failure to appear on the above mentioned day before this Tribunal, the case will be heard and decided in your absence.
Due to ongoing Pandemic situation, all the matters will be taken up through Video Conferencing and for that purpose:
1. All the Advocates/Litigants shall download the **Cisco Webex** application/software;
2. **Meeting ID** and **Password** for the next date of hearing qua cases to be taken by Registrar/ Recovery Officer-1/and Recovery Officer-II shall be available one day prior tothe next date at DRT Official Portal i.e. **drt.gov.in** under the Public Notice Head.
3. In any exigency qua that, the Advocates/Litigants can contact the concerned official at **Ph. No.23748469**
Given my hand and seal of this tribunal this the 5th day of March 2021
By Order of the Tribunal
Sd/-
Assistant Registrar
DRT-III, New Delhi

India, Pakistan hold water-sharing talks

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Amid reports that the UAE was brokering peace between them, India and Pakistan today began a two-day crucial meeting of the Permanent Indus Water Commission in New Delhi, thus returning to the dialogue table after a gap of more than two years.

The Indian delegation is being led by Indian Commissioner for Indus Waters P K Saxena while the Pakistani delegation is headed by its Indus Commissioner Syed Muhammad Meher Ali Shah.

The meeting comes a month after the two countries agreed to strictly observe all understandings and agreements to cease fire along the Line of Control (LoC) amid renewed hopes of the resumption of the stalled dialogue between them.

The two countries have not held any meeting for more than two years, a period that saw the Pulwama terror attack which was followed by the Balakot air strike on terror camps in Pakistan by the Indian Air Force.

Later in August, India abrogated article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir that put paid to any hopes of immediate reconciliation between the two countries. Official sources said today's talks were held in a cordial atmosphere.

A host of issues under the Indus Waters Treaty, including Pakistan's objections to the design of Indian hydropower projects on Chenab river, are understood to have figured in the meeting. The two sides are expected to try and narrow differences over the hydro-projects.

Bloomberg news agency and Foreign Policy magazine have reported that the UAE, with whom both India and Pakistan have close ties, might have played a role in secret efforts to bring the two countries to the negotiating table.

Bhatija & cronies swindled *Amphan* funds, says Shah

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 23 MARCH

Union home minister Amit Shah on Tuesday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government had sent Rs 10,000 crore for Amphan relief; but *bhatija* didn't let the people of the Sunderbans to see it.

Addressing a mammoth rally at Gosaba in the Sunderbans today, he said despite forest and coastal region's proximity to Kolkata, it has not seen enough development over the years as Miss Mamata Banerjee-led government did injustice to the people of the Sunderbans.

Shah also said his party will work on developing the Sunderbans and make the islands new district of the state if the saffron party is voted to power.

"Mamata has done massive injustice to the Sunderbans region and Didi cannot stop the BJP from spreading development in West Bengal. Everyone has to come together and defeat the TMC this time," he said.

At the Gosaba rally he said the BJP will bring clean drinking water to the region in South 24-Parganas.

"Gosaba is made of nine islands but it still doesn't have potable drinking water. Modiji had sent Rs 10,000 crore for Amphan relief. Did you see any of it? *Bhatija* (Mamata's nephew Abhishek Banerjee) and his associates siphoned off the funds without any of it coming to you," Shah said, accusing Miss Banerjee and her nephew.

He also added, "But you don't worry. Once we come to power, we will form SIT and probe all the discrepancies of these funds. None will be spared."

BJP will spend Rs 2 lakh crore to develop the Sunderbans region while also saying that the region will become a separate district, he added.

"We have announced a development board for the Sunderbans region and make it the most advanced region of the state," Shah said.

The BJP leader also announced that an AIIMS hospital will be established in the Sunderbans. Once BJP comes to power, the party will implement programmes and schemes worth Rs 1,500 crore in the region, he said.

"We would give Rs 6,000 as monthly grant for each fisherman who risk their lives against natural calamities. Fishermen will be given accidental benefits worth Rs 3 lakh if our party is voted to power," he said.

Shikha Mitra replaced, Mithun not in BJP final list

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 23 MARCH

The BJP today released its final list of 13 candidates for the upcoming Assembly polls in which much speculated Bollywood actor Mithu Chakraborty is missing.

In Rashbehari seat the party has fielded retired Lieutenant General Subrata Saha, who was in charge of Kashmir.

Mithun is scheduled to campaign and hold roadshow in Nandigram on 30 March for Suvendu Adhikari. Union home minister Amit Shah is likely to be present at the roadshow.

Former chief economic advisor Ashok Lahiri, fielded earlier from Alipurduar in North Bengal and then replaced, is back as candidate from Balurghat.

A key change in the list published today pertains to Gaighata in North 24 Parganas district where the new candidate is Subrata Thakur, brother of BJP MP Shantanu Thakur, representing the Matuas.

Thakur is reported to have met Shah yesterday, after which the party selected his brother. Former TMC MLA Biswajit Das will contest from Bagda; Shivajit Singha Roy from Kashipur-Belgachia, replacing an active member of TMC, and Debabrata Mazhi will fight from Chowringhee, replacing Shikha Mitra, widow of late PCC chief Somen Mitra.

Suvendu 'harbouring criminals', TMC tells EC

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
MIDNAPORE, 23 MARCH

the Trinamul Congress today lodged a complaint with Election Commission accusing BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari allegedly "harbouring criminals" in Nandigram. In the letter, TMC spokesperson Derek O' Brien has written, "It has come to our knowledge that Suvendu Adhikari, the candidate fielded by BJP in Nandigram has been harbouring criminals, who are non-residents of Nandigram. We request you to immediately intervene and direct necessary steps to be taken by police to forthwith apprehend all the outside anti-social elements hired and harboured by Suvendu Adhikari."

TMC also mentioned four locations where anti-social elements are staying.

According to the complaint, around 30 to 40 young men are residing in a two-storeyed building near Riya Para Hospital More, Nandigram since December.

They are from Kolaghat, Pingla, Kanthi and Contai and travel in 10-12 motorbikes and have a car. They are assisted by a local guide and Adhikari visits the location regularly.

In a three-storeyed house of Meglinath Pal, Haripur, an election agent of Adhikari along with 40-50 people stay a km from Chandipur-Nandigram Road. In a two-storeyed house in Teropakhira, Tengua No.2 of Pabitra Kar, Royal-1, nearly 20-30 people, from Balarampur, Jharucharan, Narsinghapur, Jatirmal, Panibitan In the house of Bhoiohari Samanta, Royal MSK area, around 20-30 people are staying, the letter read. In another complaint lodged with the EC, TMC has written against BJP candidates Siddhartha Naskar (Nabadwip) and Jagannath Sarkar (current MP from Ranaghat and candidate from Santipur) who reportedly tried to hold a procession with the dead body of Milan Ghosh, a resident of Fakirdanga, Gholapara panchayat in Nabadwip yesterday.

The TMC also alleged that BJP workers had threatened local police officers who wanted to stop it and continued the procession.

Farmers, BKU activists show black flags to UP BJP chief; five detained

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
MEERUT, 23 MARCH

Uttar Pradesh BJP state president Swatantra Dev Singh was shown black flags by the farmers led by members of Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) near Rasheedpur Garhi village in Bijnor district on Monday evening. They raised anti-BJP slogans and tried to stop the cavalcade.

Five of the protesting farmers were detained by the police and taken to Bijnore Kotwali. They were however released on Monday night itself followed by a strong protest of the BKU at Kotwali.

BKU leader Rakesh Tikait in his tweet on Monday night had also instructed the protesting BKU men to be ready for a 'Jail Bharo' if those arrested were not released .

Praveen Ranjan, SP of Bijnore comfirmed that the protesters detained were released in the night .

The BKU activists had raised anti BJP slogans and showed black flags to the cavalcade of BJP president in Bijnore opposing his visit in view of the ongoing movement of the farmers against the three farm laws at Delhi borders since past four months.

BKU activists try to stop cavalcade of UP BJP chief Swatantra Dev Singh and showed black flags. ■ SNS

Swatantra Dev Singh had come to Bijnor to attend a program on Monday.

During the programme he elaborated the achievements of Modi and Yogi governments. On his way back BKU activists intercepted his cavalcade raising anti BJP slogans and waved black flags. When they attempted to stop the vehicles police tried to prevent them from doing so and detained five of them.

This enraged the protesting activists who along with hundred of farmers reached Bijnore Kotwali, where the five detained protesters were taken.

Led by BKU's district president in Bijnore Kuldeep Singh the farmers gathered outside Kotwali and demanded immediate release of detained farmers.

BKU's youth wing state president Digamber Singh threatened to announce curfew for BJP leaders in the villages if detained farmers were not released by 10 p.m. on Monday night.

Digambar Singh informed that since the farmers were released late night the decision for a curfew for BJP leaders was put on hold.

BEFORE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-III, DELHI
4th FLOOR, JEEVAN TARA BUILDING, PARLIAMENT STREET, NEW DELHI-110001
Notice under Section 19(4) of the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act. 1993 read with Rule 12 & 13 of the Debts Recovery Tribunal (Procedure Rules) 1993).
In the matter of: O.A. No.72/2019
CENTRAL BANK OF INDIA ..... **Applicant**
Versus
KANKAPALLI CHERIAN ..... **Defendants**
D-1. LATE MR. KANJAPALLI CHERIAN
THROUGH LEGAL HEIR
SHINEY KUREIN
F-1, 47 B, Dilshad Colony, New Delhi-110095.
Whereas the above named applicant has instituted a case against you and whereas it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in ordinary way. Therefore, this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance in this Tribunal **22.04.2021 at 10:30 A.M.** Take notice that in case of your failure to appear on the above mentioned day before this Tribunal, the case will be heard and decided in your absence.
Due to ongoing Pandemic situation, all the matters will be taken up through Video Conferencing and for that purpose:-
(i) All the Advocates/Litigants shall download the **"Cisco Webex"** application / Software.
(ii) **"Meeting ID"** and **"Password"** for the next date of hearing qua cases to be taken by Registrar / Recovery Officer-I/and Recovery Officer-II shall be available one day prior to the next date at DRT Official Portal **i.e. "drt.gov.in"** under the Public Notice Head.
(iii) In any exigency qua that, the Advocates / Litigants can contact the concerned official at **Ph. No.23748469.**
Given under my hand and seal of this Tribunal on this the **16th Day of March 2021.**
SEAL OF COURT
BY ORDER OF THE TRIBUNAL

SEARCH FOR MISSING

Faim Ahmad

General public is hereby informed that a man namely **Faim Ahmad, S/o** Mohd Shakir **R/o** H.No. 500/22E/4C, 1st Floor Floor Bhikam Singh colony Shahadra, Delhi has been missing since 01.03.2020 from his house. In this regard a **DD No. 41-A dated 14.03.2021 has been registered at P.S. Farsh Bazar, Delhi.** Sincere efforts have been made by the local police to trace out the missing man but no clue has come to light so far. The description of the missing man is as under:
Name: Faim Ahmad, **Gender:** Male, **Age:** 36 years, **Height:** 5'8", **Complexion:** Shallow, **Face:** Oval, **Built:** Medium, **Wearing:** Grey colour shirt, brown colour pant, black colour shoes.
If anyone has any information regarding this missing man, kindly inform SHO/ Farsh Bazar, Delhi.
E-mail : cic@cbi.gov.in
Ph.: 011-24368638, 24368641
Fax : 011-24368639
DP/401/SHD/2021
SHO
P.S. Farsh Bazar, Delhi.
Ph. No. 011- 22303600

SEARCH FOR MISSING

Kajal

General Public is hereby informed that a lady namely **Kajal W/o** Mangal Prasad **R/o** B-436, Jhuggi RPF Line, Daya Basti, Delhi, **Age:** 25 years, **Height:** 5', **Face:** Round, **Complexion:** Sallow, **Hair:** Black, **Wearing:** T-Shirt and White Pyjama is missing from the area of **P.S. Sarai Rohilla, Delhi.** In this regard a case **vide DD No. 48A** dated **29.06.2020** has been registered at **P.S. Sarai Rohilla, Delhi.**
Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing lady but no clue has come to light so far. If any one having any information about this lady please inform undersigned.
E-mail : cic@cbi.gov.nic.in
Ph.: 011-24368638,24368641
Fax : 011-24368639
DP/335/N/2020
SHO
P.S. Sarai Rohilla, Delhi.
Ph.: 011-23691106
011-23693611

PUBLIC NOTICE

Alongwith COVID-19 it is necessary to take precautions against DENGUE, MALARIA CHIKUNGUNYA

DO's
- Keep water tanks & container tightly covered with lids.
- Empty & scrub dry the Cooler weekly. Put temephos Granules, Petrol or Diesel in the coolers which can't be emptied.
- Chanalise the water from construction site to prevent, water stagnation & mosquito breeding.
- Use mosquito net and other mosquito repellant, Wear full sleeved clothes.
- In case of fever, take Paracetamol and plenty of oral fluids.

DONT's
- Don't allow accumulation of water in and around your houses and offices.
- Don't keep old tyres and containers in open.
- Don't allow water stegnations at construction site else treat the same by insecticides/diesel.
- Don't panic, Dengue, Malaria and Chikungunya are preventable.
- Don't take Asprin, Ibuprofen etc.

Symptoms of Dengue and Chikungunya
• Sudden onset of high fever • Severe frontal headache • Pain behind the eyes which worsens on eye movement • Nausea & Vomitting • Loss of Appetite • Muscle & Joint pain • Measles like rashes over chest and upper limbs • Under Malaria and OVBD by laws creating cirmustances leading to mosquito breeding is an offence. • Allowing mosquitos to breed may lead to issuance of legal notice & challan and on the spot find • Incase of repeated breeding, FIR can also be lodged under section 269 (IPC)

PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT
SOUTH DELHI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION
R.O. No. 77/DPI/S/2020-21

The Statesman
Incorporating and directly descended from THE FRIEND OF INDIA - Founded 1818

Debate must follow

The debate sparked by observations of the Supreme Court on the reservations policy extant in India should be welcomed by all thinking citizens. A five-judge Constitution Bench wondered out aloud for how many generations quotas in education and employment would continue while hearing a specific case ~ of reservations for the Maratha community proposed by the state of Maharashtra which breaches the 50 per cent quota limit laid down by the Court in the Indra Sawhney (Mandal) case. But the repercussions of this vital question for the health of Indian democracy, premised as it on the individual's right to equality and not on that of any group, are far-reaching. The query has been posed by the highest court. Now, it would behove the highest policy-making body of the country, Parliament, to debate the issue with a sense of gravitas that rises above petty considerations. The example set in this regard by the Constituent Assembly of India would be worth emulating.

The first lesson to learn from the Constituent Assembly is to define the premise of the debate. In 1949, S. Nagappa (Madras), making the case for reservations for Scheduled Castes, said: "Even today, here and now, I am prepared for the abolition of reservation, provided every Harijan family gets ten acres of wetland, twenty acres of dry land and all the children of Harijans are educated, free of cost, up to the university course and given one-fifth of key posts either in the civilian departments or in the military departments." Mohan Lal Gautam (UP) interjected: "Every Brahmin would be willing to swap places with a 'Harijan' if they could have such land." Nagappa argued that a 'Hindu' could not just convert into a 'Harijan' unless s/he was also prepared to "scavenge and sweep for others." This exchange is important for two reasons ~ first, the parameters of the debate were limited to those defined as Scheduled Castes; secondly, it was social disadvantage, including its economic and educational consequences, which was to be ameliorated by the implementation of quotas.

As with any policy of state, it is logical for legislators to review at regular intervals the success or lack thereof of the quota policy and to assess whether it is fulfilling its objectives. Is it possible, then, to lay down objective criteria to assess what progress has been made in uplifting those who were provided the benefits of reservation? After all, the concept of a 'means-test and creamy layer' was first referred to in the landmark Indra Sawhney judgment itself. Over time, Other Backward Classes and, now, even more socially dominant groups, have boarded the quota train. Their demands have been dutifully amplified by political organisations with an entrenched statist mindset. It is one thing to say all members of a particular group suffer from a disadvantage; it's quite another to assert they all suffer from the same disadvantage. It follows that only a nuanced debate which identifies specific measures to ameliorate disadvantages rather than depending exclusively on a one-size-fits-all reservations policy would serve the ends of both social justice and equality.

Painful Reality

The shootings in Atlanta on March 16 that claimed eight lives, including six women of Asian origin, isn't only a potentially mortal social problem that plagues North America. The mayhem has served to highlight a painful reality, the burgeoning anti-Asian violence not merely in America but in different parts of the world. The targeting of Asians lends a new dimension to racial attacks, that have all too frequently been provoked by the colour of the skin. Particularly ghastly was the killing of a black, George Floyd, by a white policeman. It may be sheer coincidence that the surgical strike on Asians coincides with the start of the trial into Floyd's death. Having succeeded to a depleted presidency, President Joe Biden faces a daunting menace at the threshold. There is collective trauma in parts of the United States, one that could have a wider ripple effect on the Asian diaspora worldwide. Though Mr Biden is anxious to rein in the migrants from across the Mexican border, there has been no attempt yet to contain the attacks on the class group called "Asian-Americans". The killings have sent waves of grief through the community, amid a rising spate of such attacks in recent months and a broader increase in hatred of Asians during the coronavirus pandemic. The situation in the US is but one facet of a global increase in anti-Asian attacks. For East and South East Asian (ESEA) communities around the world, the enormity of the tragedy in Atlanta is a painful reminder of the ongoing anti-Asian violence that has been on the increase over the past year. It bears recall that in May 2020, the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, had said that "the pandemic continues to unleash a tsunami of hate and xenophobia, scapegoating and scare-mongering". He had urged governments to "act now to strengthen the immunity of our societies against the virus of hate." Mr Guterres had hit the bull's eye. Nearly one year on, communities worldwide say the situation hasn't improved, with many countries reporting spikes in hate crimes. For many, the pandemic has only amplified longstanding and violent racism towards Asians. This link between hate crimes and a dreaded ailment might appear to be contrived on the face of it. The rise in hate crimes targeting Asian communities is global, with increased reports coming from Canada, and a number of cases involving anti-Asian discrimination and xenophobia reported by Human Rights Watch in Italy, Russia and Brazil last summer. In New Zealand, research by the New Zealand Human Rights Commission released last month found that 54 per cent of Chinese respondents had experienced discrimination since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Disinvestment Ahoy

Instead of selling PSUs during Covid times when their full value may not be realised, the Government could have gone in for cutting wasteful expenditure. For example, Centrally Sponsored Schemes and Central Sector Schemes that account for Rs. 14.32 lakh crore of annual expenditure, urgently call for review, with closure or modification of badly performing schemes

"Disinvestment" is the buzzword of the day. Touted as a remedy for the various malaises affecting the economy, Budget 2021 proposes the sale of Air India, Pawan Hans, BPCL, SCI, IDBI, BEML and two unnamed public sector banks and one unnamed general insurance company, as also part sale of the Life Insurance Corporation. For good measure, excess land belonging to the Defence Ministry and the Railways would also be put on the block. Additionally, the Government has asked Niti Aayog to identify the next lot of companies for strategic sale. As small change, ministries and Government departments have been asked to sell whatever is readily saleable, for example, the Aviation Ministry has finalised the sale of its residual stake in Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad airports. According to Budget Estimates, a sum of Rs.1.75 lakh crores is proposed to be realised by this asset sale. Smelling an unprecedented business opportunity, big players in India and abroad are eagerly waiting in the wings.

Expectedly, the Staff Unions of the public sector entities slated for sale, supported by Opposition parties, are crying foul, which the Government is pointedly ignoring. With its finances severely strained by the coronavirus pandemic, the Government is banking on the sale of PSUs to contain the rampaging fiscal deficit.

As on 31 March 2019, the Government's investment in PSUs stood at Rs 16.41 lakh crore, with a revenue of Rs 25.43 lakh crore during the financial year 2018-19. Net earnings of the Government from PSUs were approximately Rs 40,000 crore, which could have been much more with better management. Some PSUs are sick but many PSUs, like LIC, are efficiently run and able to hold their own against competition from private players.

Despite opening up of the insurance sector, more than two decades ago, LIC controls 66 per cent of the insurance market. LIC has a lakh employees and 29 crore clients. The annual income of LIC is Rs 6.16 lakh crore, most of which it shares with policyholders in the form of bonus and dividends. LIC has assets of Rs.36 lakh crore ~ three times that of Reliance Industries. Valuation and stake sale in LIC would definitely prove tricky, and if experience is a guide, contentious also, because disinvestment has had a somewhat chequered history in India. Soon after assuming office in 1999, the NDA government embarked on a privatisation programme, offering controlling stake in government-owned companies to "strategic partners." Till the middle of 2002, apart from 19 ITDC hotels, the Government had sold its controlling stake in nine companies at a price of Rs 5,544 crore.

Report No. 17 of 2006 of the CAG points to serious shortcomings in the disinvestment process. The CAG found that valuation of the companies' assets was done without "due seriousness." The CAG detected serious lapses in the Government's contract with its global advisers, finding that in most cases the Government had signed a formal agreement with the global advisers after the company had been sold. There was no "clear accountability regime" which meant that persons responsible for lapses, could not be held accountable. Additionally, in several instances, the CAG found that substantial "surplus land" was sold along with the company, without proper valuation.

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

Subsequent events confirmed the CAG's misgivings. Tata Communications Ltd (TCL) sold equity in three global companies ~ Intelsat, Inmarsat, and New Skies Satellite ~ inherited from VSNL, for $226 million (approximately Rs 1,000 crore) within three years of buying VSNL for Rs 1,439 crore. Moreover, TCL also got 1,200 acres of land from VSNL, of which, more than 427 acres were located in prime locations in Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Pune and Kolkata. For many years, TCL continued to hold on to the 773 acres of surplus land that was to be hived off into a separate company as part of the disinvestment deal.

Just after purchasing Modern Food Industries Ltd (MFIL), Hindustan Lever sold land belonging to MFIL in prime locations in metros, and soon enough MFIL turned sick. The CAG had found serious discrepancies in the valuation of mines owned by Hindustan Zinc Ltd (HZL), 45 per cent of whose shares were sold for Rs 739 crore in 2003. The current market capitalisation of HZL is approximately Rs 1.27 lakh crore, and the annual profit is around Rs 7,000 crore which can either be attributed to unlocking of value or cheap valuation at the time of sale.

Controversies associated with the first round of disinvestment persist. In September 2020, a CBI court found that Laxmi Vilas Hotel, which was valued at Rs 151 crore, was disinvested for a mere Rs 7.52 crore to Bharat Hotels Ltd. The court ordered that the hotel should be restored to the Union Government and also directed the issue of arrest warrants against the then Union Minister of State for Disinvestment, the then Disinvestment Secretary and several others for criminal conspiracy, cheating and transgression of provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act. Currently, this judgement has been stayed by the Rajasthan High Court.

Disinvestment by the present Government, has primarily involved the sale of one PSU or part thereof to another PSU. For example, HPCL was sold to ONGC and Rural Electrification Corporation was sold to Power Finance Corporation. The CAG has sharply criticised such sales in its Report No. 18 of 2019. The CAG observed "Such disinvestments only resulted in transfer of resources already with the public sector to the government and did not lead to any change in the stake of the public sector/ Government in the disinvested PSU."The proponents of privatisation quote a number of advantages that would flow from disinvestment. Firstly, the Government would get money to fund its ambitious infrastructure expansion drive. Secondly, listing of Public Sector Enterprises will foster greater public accountability and unlock the true value of these companies. Yet, the wholescale privatisation proposed in the current Budget raises a basic question: "Should the Government finance its current expenditure by sale of fixed assets, built over a number of years?" because the proceeds of disinvestment, Rs 1.75 lakh crore, is too puny a sum to finance the National Infrastructure Pipeline, in which the Government plans to invest close to Rs 102 lakh crore between 2019 and 2024-25. Looking to the humongous capital requirement, disinvestment proceeds would be a drop in the ocean. More likely, the Government needs the money from disinvestment to finance its revenue expenditure.

Instead of selling PSUs during Covid times when their full value may not be realised, the Government could have gone in for cutting wasteful expenditure. For example, Centrally Sponsored Schemes and Central Sector Schemes that account for Rs 14.32 lakh crore of annual expenditure, urgently call for review, with closure or modification of badly performing schemes. Notably, the Fifteenth Finance Commission has also suggested review and curtailment of Centrally Sponsored Schemes and Central Sector Schemes. Another measure could be making the tax system more efficient and productive, by levying taxes on wealth and inheritance.

The malady affecting PSUs is well-known. Bureaucrats run the show in most PSUs, making the PSU culture closely resemble Government culture ~ acting as a put-off for future clients. Further, ministers and top bureaucrats treat PSUs as milch cows, using PSU assets as their own. Recently, in a speech in the Lok Sabha, the PM roundly condemned the inefficiencies that had crept into PSUs due to (mis)management by bureaucrats. Taking a cue from the PM, before the proposed disinvestment, the Government should try to improve the working of PSUs by inducting professional management and improving work culture.Before embarking on wholescale disinvestment, we would do well to heed the warning of Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Laureate and former World Bank Chief Economist: "The rhetoric of market fundamentalism asserts that privatisation will reduce what economists call the 'rent seeking' activity of government officials who either skim off the profits of government enterprises or award contracts and jobs to their friends. But in contrast to what it was supposed to do, privatisation has made matters so much worse that in many countries today privatisation is jokingly referred to as 'briberisation.'. In country after country, government officials have realised that privatisation means that they no longer needed to be limited to annual profit skimming.

By selling a government enterprise at below market price, they could get a significant chunk of the asset value for themselves rather than leaving it for subsequent office holders. In effect, they could steal today much of what would have been skimmed off by future politicians." (Globalisation and Its Discontents, 2002).

A MEMBER OF THE ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK

ASIAN VOICES

Post-pandemic recovery

Digital vaccine certificates, also known as vaccine passports, are emerging as a solution with the potential to support business and society to continue to reopen across the country... and across the world, while minimising the risk of a new wave of infection. They present an opportunity to facilitate the return of individuals vaccinated against Covid-19 to restricted spaces such as work locations and open borders for international travel. In mid-January this year, a coalition of large technology and health companies launched the Vaccine Credential Initiative to create a system for storing and retrieving digital records of vaccinations. In the same time frame, the World Health Organisation (WHO) launched a digital health working group to develop a framework and standards for a smart digital vaccine certificate for yellow fever and Covid-19, paving the way to add other vaccines later. High-profile efforts like these increase the potential that vaccine passports will become a reality, even as important questions remain, including the technology that will be used, the source and verification of data, and definitions of immunity among them. Uncertainties of vaccine passports

There are a number of obstacles standing in the way of wide-scale adoption of vaccine passports. Private and public sector organisations must understand the pitfalls, as well as the promise, so they can plan policies if they become a reality. Key questions

THE NATION www.nationmultimedia.com

that stakeholders, including policymakers, are looking to answer include: Standardisation ~ Who will set the standards? Will there be multiple standards worldwide? How is immunity defined?
Use ~ How will the certificates be used? For travel? Work? Entertainment? Will the uses pass legal scrutiny? Acceptance ~ Who will accept certificates? If there are multiple certificates, will some be accepted more widely than others? Buy-in ~ Will people use the certificates? Will certificates have the support of governments? Equity ~ Can people access and manage their digital information? Will certificates create social stigmas or exacerbate the digital divide? Governance ~ Who will oversee the systems and data? How will privacy be protected? How will forgery be identified and combatted? Usefulness ~ Will certificates go out-of-date if vaccines don't provide long-term immunity? Will certificates need immunity information for multiple strains? Will different groups exhibit different levels of vaccine effectiveness? Verification ~ How will people with immunity be verified? Who will have access to immunisation records? How will that data be confirmed as accurate? Infrastructure ~ Can existing systems handle the data and security needs of digital certificates? Can these systems be integrated and offer interoperability? Unintended consequences ~ Will digital certificates create greater distrust of vaccines? Will it create extra steps for vaccination? Will people be incentivised to get infected to get a certificate? What society needs to achieve wide-scale useFor a digital vaccine passport solution to work, it must achieve wide scale end-user adoption. Given the above challenges, organisations considering using vaccine passports must buy in to governance frameworks that allow for the acquisition, equity, verification and sharing of immunisation data. At a high-level, a digital vaccine passport must enable consent-based Covid-19 vaccination records to be accessed in a secure, verifiable and privacy preserving way.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR editor@thestatesman.com

Virtual meeting on actual wave

SIR, Refer to your report 'Need to take decisive steps to stop Covid second peak'. On Wednesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a virtual meeting with state chief ministers to urgently deal what he called the "emerging second peak" of Covid-19 in the country. He discussed a worrying spike in infections in several states and said that "quick and decisive steps" are needed to combat another pan-Indian outbreak. A few hours later, when the day's new Covid-19 cases were tallied from all states, the total came to 35,836 new infections ~ the highest number of single-day cases in the country in more than 100 days. In India's worst-hit state, Maharashtra, Wednesday's case toll (23,179) was the highest

single-day rise since September 17, 2020 ~ that was a time when the country's first Covid-19 wave was raging at its peak. Like in the first wave, the western state is again the first major hot spot region, and if things don't change soon, it will be the first of many.

Coaxed into a sense of false security due to six months of declining cases, and a high degree of fatigue ~ for both people as well as the governments ~ against the disease, there is an alarming degree of laxity at all levels. Testing numbers have been steadily dropping; the concept of contact-tracing has been reduced to just getting immediate family members of positive cases tested; and mask etiquette, as well as enforcement of social distancing norms, are near non-existent even in metros, leave alone smaller cities or rural areas.

It is now nearly a year since a nationwide lockdown was introduced on March 24, 2020 to fight the disease. Neither the economy nor citizens can cope with such strict measures again. The best way to fight the second wave, apart from strictly instituting Covid-19 management protocols, is to use the one advantage that the country did not have a year ago ~ vaccines. At present, people above the age of 60 or those older than 45 but with certain medical conditions can get doses.

The government must at this stage relax the eligibility criteria. Protecting the ones most vulnerable is crucial, but a large number of infections are still among younger people who are more mobile, and likely to be the ones spreading the virus most. As Covid-19 numbers rise again, PM Modi's warning is apt. The government's policies need to reflect that sense of urgency.

Yours, etc., Khokan Das,
Kolkata.

SECOND SURGE

SIR, It has been observed that the main reason for the alarming increase or surge in the second wave of Coronavirus (Covid-19) cases and the death rates is due to election rallies, cricket matches, reopening of malls, weeding, parties, offices, shops, restaurants, theaters, local trains and irresponsible people not following the guidelines and the norms of the Covid-19 which has taken a dangerous shape and becoming severe in the current situation across the country.

Yours, etc., Bhagwan Thadani,
Mumbai, 23 March.

WATER CRISIS

SIR, Because of less snow and rain this winter, Northern states are likely to face an acute water scarcity this summer. Many water schemes may reach the brink of closure. The states might have to go through the toughest times because of drinking water shortage. It will also affect groundwater as well as other downhill water sources such as springs, wells , bawries, lakes, rivulets, streams and rivers. Demand for water has been growing due to increasing population. Water shortage is also likely to cause crop losses and reduced fodder availablity. Wise use of water is need of the hour to address the water crisis.

Yours, etc., Rohit Kumar Gupta,
Shimla, 23 March.

epaper.thestatesman.com

Quad goes after China

SUNIL SHARAN

Australian prime minister, Scott Morrison, terms the Quad as four great liberal democracies in the Indo-Pacific region. The Quad of course comprises India, the US, Australia and Japan. The first question to be asked is how the US is a democracy in the Indo-Pacific region. The US is a Pacific power and an Atlantic power, but it is certainly not an Indo-Pacific power even though it projects and pretends itself to be one.

The second of course is how liberal a democracy Japan is when it is still a vassal state of the US, with its defence and foreign policies being determined by the Americans.

The Quad is going after China. China now is the number one power in the world. Twenty years of mindless and pitiless war has left America enfeebled. No American now claims victory in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Sure the US is still a military power to be reckoned with, but the world has lost fear of it. Witness Iran.

Iran reportedly has at least fissile material ready in the basement for two bombs. It wants the crippling sanctions that the US has imposed on it to be lifted, so it wants to talk to the US. It will pretend that it doesn't want the bomb. The US will try to suss out Iran's bombs through inspections. But Iran is a much larger country than Iraq, where inspections brought up nothing, and has many nuclear sites, some known and yet others unknown. If Iran has the bomb, it will certainly not give it up. Checkmate the US and its allies - Israel and the Sunni Gulf states.

All the while America has been waging war, China has been busy beefing itself up. It has been building up Africa while importing raw materials from there. Made in America (and Make in India) have not really taken off because the Chinese have become the factory floor of the world. It seems like most anything you find in America now is built in China. China provides over a trillion dollars in loans to America. How can America think of waging war against China, or even trying to contain it?

Morrison's Australia too is stuck with China. His country exports tons of material and other goods like wine to China. His economy too is hopelessly dependent on China. Out of the Quad, the only country that has real historical animosity with China is Japan, but it has to break the shackles of the US if it has to take on China.

What is India doing in the Quad? India is fascinated with anything America does. America wants to create a new enemy in China, so India must follow its example. India has a limited border dispute with China, nothing to fight a large-scale war over. For millennia, India and China have had amicable relations. Fa-Hien and Hsuan-Tsang were Chinese Buddhist monks who visited India about fifteen hundred years ago to gain knowledge of Buddhist scriptures. How can we even think of fighting with the Chinese?

Firstly, the Chinese are in much better shape than us in almost every sphere. India is the world's biggest vaccine maker but it is the Chinese who have captivated the world with their vaccine diplomacy. The dragon sprints while the elephant continues to plod on.

The Quad is irritating China. In case war erupts between India and China, only Japan might join in. The white nations - the US and Australia - will stay away. Why? Because neither of them is in position to take on China. America is too enfeebled to take on the mighty dragon, and Australia is too small. There goes the Quad.

Why is India needling the Chinese by joining the Quad? Since long, India's diplomacy has been to join any and every multilateral forum that will have it. It's part of the G20. It wants to be part of the UN permanent security council as well as the nuclear suppliers group. Sometimes it seems that its foreign policy has just one single-minded objective - to stymie Pakistan over Kashmir.

Note that in 2017 it joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which was founded by China and is heavily dominated by it. So while we have become part of an anti-China grouping like the Quad, we are also members of a pro-Chinese organization like the SCO. What kind of confusing diplomacy is this?

China now is the number one power in the world and India has much to gain by befriending it, and not vexing it. Foxconn, Apple's long-term manufacturer in China, is now building Apple phones in India. Indian industry just doesn't have the nous to rival Foxconn and build Apple phones on its own, so isn't it welcome that Foxconn is moving part of its production to India? Foxconn is going to build the latest iPhone, the iPhone 12, in Tamil Nadu, and is likely to shift 7-10 per cent of its production capacity from China to India.

India can do so much to foster such deals with the Chinese, but that is only when it stops playing a double game with them. There is no harm if India has to play second fiddle to China for the next decade or two. Cooperation with the US for the last three decades has frankly not given us much. Working with China will give us much more. We must not let the US fire its guns against China over our shoulders.

The writer is an expert on energy and contributes regularly to publications in India and overseas.

Pakistan must set its house in order

ABBAS NASIR

The Islamabad Security Dialogue that coincided with US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin's India visit, where he praised New Delhi's growing ties with 'like-minded partners', saw Pakistan's leadership attempting to allay US fears about growing Chinese influence in the region.

Speaking on the second day of the dialogue, army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa talked about CPEC in terms of an opportunity for economic cooperation for the whole region including India and offered an olive branch to Pakistan's eastern neighbour.

Following on from Prime Minister Imran Khan, who spoke a day earlier, he did not mention or decry New Delhi's abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian constitution which accorded special status to Kashmir.

Gen Bajwa said his country was keen to 'bury the past' and move forward. Although Mr Khan and Gen Bajwa did say Kashmir, along with all bilateral issues, needed to be addressed for lasting peace and prosperity in the region, the acrimonious language of recent months was conspicuous by its absence.

It was clear who this message was being pitched at as multilateral economic relations were being mentioned, suggesting fears about Pakistan being tied to China alone were misplaced. The army chief mentioned how his country had seen the need to "set our own house in order" and taken action to contain and eliminate terrorism.

It would be safe to say that the Khan-Bajwa statements did not come out of the blue. Very little is known about it but there has been some backdoor diplomacy, well out of the public eye, that led to the Pakistani and Indian DGMOs discussing and agreeing to a ceasefire along the LoC in Kashmir.

That will contribute to lowering temperatures along the LoC and also bring respite to Kashmiris living in proximity to it, whose lives have been shattered for many months now as mortars and rocket fire were being exchanged frequently, claiming lives, limbs and property.

With the outlines of the Biden administration's foreign policy goals in the region emerging rather clearly now, it is apparent what sort of challenges Pakistan's national security policy authors will face in the coming months and how much elbow room they might have.

For example, look at what wire services reported Pentagon spokesman John Kirby as saying: Austin "commended India's leadership role in the Indo-Pacific and growing engagement with like-minded partners across the region to promote shared goals".

"The two sides reaffirmed their commitment to promote a free and open regional order. Both sides exchanged perspectives on shared challenges confronting the region and committed to further strengthen their broad-ranging and robust defence cooperation," Kirby said.

With the state of Pakistan's economy the way it is as we speak, it won't be too profound to say that elbow room will be exceedingly limited and, unless the economy picks up, the country will lurch from one crisis to another.

The effort, if fruitful, towards some peace in Afghanistan and lessened tension with India may improve the external threat environment for Pakistan but a simultaneous effort to restore a semblance of internal stability to the country is an equal imperative.

For their part, the government and its backers do not seem inclined at this point to want this as their actions and rhetoric in the public domain suggest. For any foreign policy to be effective it will be important that there exists a demonstrable political consensus within the country.

And in the current domestic political climate, a consensus even in key areas seems unlikely unless all the players are prepared to meet the others halfway; not cemented in their positions and bunkered down behind a wall of self-righteousness.

Even as so many see a South Africa-type truth and reconciliation process as a great way to move forward, not one individual in the country expects to see it happen because the kind of heart and moral authority Nelson Mandela enjoyed will be impossible to find here.

In an environment where nobody, yes nobody, is prepared to sacrifice even a modicum of personal/institutional power, despite the Constitution apportioning authority between offices and institutions unambiguously, truth and reconciliation of that sort seems out of the question.

And yet that seems to be the only way forward. Take the example of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif. He was castigated, some would argue deposed and sent to prison eventually, for suggesting the sort of putting 'our house in order' in 2016 that is being mentioned as a success in 2021.

He may want an explanation before endorsing a foreign and national security policy — particularly if such policies warrant international commitments as well — why what was deemed unacceptable five years ago and likened to treason, is now something to celebrate.

Internal cohesion and harmony are essential for the country's economic prosperity and would contribute in no uncertain terms to its national security. The army chief has also linked economic well-being to national security.

The Islamabad Security Dialogue initiated by the National Security Division included government-funded think tanks. The domestic and, more significantly, the international audience may have heard the message as it seemed loud and clear.

In the second phase, hopefully, a more meaningful dialogue can be organised cutting across the political divide for, it is assumed, today's opposition is tomorrow's government. A policy that represents a broader consensus over key areas is well placed to survive the test of time and work.

The US is looking at India to contain the spread of China's influence in the region. Pakistan needs to assess the impact of this 'alliance' on its interests and chart a future course accordingly. Restoration of internal harmony by respecting popular will and the Constitution appear to be sensible starting points.

Dawn/ANN.

CROSSWORD

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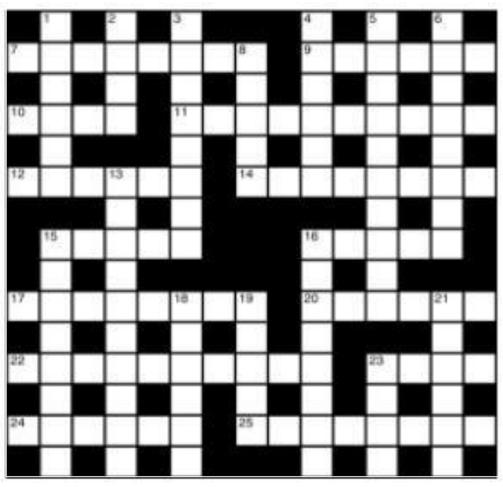

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

ACROSS

7 Baked food made from pasta, mostly, with egg in (8)
9 Fungus damaged a cigar (6)
10 Queen abandoning life's work is a worry (4)
11 One included in stratagem designed to obtain justice (10)
12 Exercise books on cutting good rock (6)
14 Tiny boy with cat fathoms out chronological list (8)
15 Isle of Man, once? (5)
16 A number argue after female receives another stroke on bottom (5)
17 More rioting by American claiming negative response is monumental (8)
20 Like going around with adolescent in woven fabric (6)
22 Change rota for moving item in wardrobe (4,6)
23 Camcorder oddly confiscated in Israeli port (4)
24 Celebrate penning a show (6)
25 It pains me to kick out rector in Hertfordshire town for kissing (8)

DOWN

1 Outspoken Glaswegian unable to fork out for appetiser (6)
2 Child of hairdresser runs away (4)
3 Jumper on male that is extremely short and extremely baggy (8)
4 Where mother does experiments standing upside down in oil (6)
5 One pound off reasonably unsubstantial Christmas decoration (5,5)
6 Separate area popular for receiving international leaders (8)
8 Can Revolutionary Guards start to guard hospital in darkness? (5)
13 Totalitarian leader, Republican, in deep trouble (3,7)
15 Conquers Rome, somehow being more charming (8)
16 Cover rushed on ground (8)
18 Caught in exam with electronic medium providing revelation (6)
19 What is being referred to is uplifting around G-spot (5)
21 Make mistake with small job (6)
23 Burn detached houses (4)

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

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

A "bulletin" issued by the Bengal Agricultural Department gives an interesting "historical note" by Mr. R.S. Finlow, Fibre Expert to the Government of Bengal, on experiments with jute. The results already obtained by scientific research into the possibilities of increasing the yields of jute and paddy, as they were described recently in one of Lord Ronaldshay's speeches, are amongst the most encouraging of the contributions which the Agricultural Department has made to the prosperity of the Province. They might, indeed, be called brilliant. Mr. Finlow's note deals with jute only, and gives details which enable the reader to appreciate the value of the investigations carried on successfully to ascertain the most profitable varieties of the plant. As Mr. Finlow states, the investigation has not terminated with the selection of the variety known as Kakya Bombai, - now cultivated over about 2,00,000 of acres in Bengal, Assam, and Bihar. Each succeeding year has seen the examination of hundreds of small plots sown with the seeds of single plants brought from all parts of the jute-growing tracts. The possibility of improving still further on the results already obtained is thus being tested. All such work, as Mr. Finlow observes, is of a laborious nature, and to produce a new strain of jute, from the beginning to the time when its seed is available in quantity to the cultivator, requires six or seven years.

NEWS ITEMS

ASSISTANT SURGEONS IN BIHAR

In the course of a resolution, the Ministry of local Self-Government announces the new scales of pay for Civil Assistant Surgeons, subject to the limits sanctioned by the Secretary of State. According to the revised scale the starting pay will be Rs 200 with a biennial increase of Rs 25 till the 18th year of service. There will be a grade examination on the 7th and 14th years, and at the latter period the efficiency bar is prescribed. There will be two senior grades to which promotion will be made by selection. The grades will contain 4 posts on Rs 425 and 4 posts on Rs 450. There will be one selection post on Rs 1,000, which will be open to officers of the Indian Medical Department and Civil Assistant Surgeons.

CHARGE OF OBSTRUCTION TO TRAFFIC

At Egmore Police Court today a large number of Mahomedans attended to watch the case in which Mahomed Ibrahim Sahib, mechant, and Abdul Majid Sahib Sharar, were charged with causing obstruction on Pycroft's Road, Triplicane, on the night of March 4. The facts of the case, as alleged by the prosecution, were that the first accused convened a meeting which it was alleged was held on the night of March 4 on Pycroft's Road in spite of the order of the police inspector not to hold it on the road. Several speakers, including the second accused, addressed the meeting, pointing out the alleged injustice done to Mr. Yakub Hasan and the Khilafat by the Government. The Inspector subsequently charged the two accused with obstruction of traffic.

AGRICULTURE IN UNITED PROVINCES

At the meeting of the U.P. Council today Mr. Chintamani moved for a grant of Rs 2,59,060 for agriculture. He said that in response to the public demand, the Government had made various efforts from time to time. At the present moment the question was whether the Department of Agriculture had justified itself and whether in various operations in which it had been engaged it had attained such a measure of success as would justify its maintenance or its further extension. In answer to that question Mr. Chintamani said that it was his conviction that the Department acting in the face of many disadvantages had done a great deal for which it deserved just credit. In conclusion he said that the Government would endeavour to act in consultation with the Department.

DEVELOPMENT OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

Her Excellency Lady Willingdon laid the foundation stone on Monday evening of the Madras Cloth Market. His Excellency Lord Willingdon thanked the president, and the board of directors of the cloth market for the opportunity given to them to show practical interest in the advance of the commercial interests of the city. He understood that the enterprise was purely Swadeshi. With regard to the Swadeshi enterprise, it was a matter for great satisfaction to him to find that more and more in this Presidency. Indian gentlemen of means and influence were realising that the great necessity in the Presidency was the development of commerce and industry. With goodwill, co-operation and determination on all sides His Excellency felt confident all difficulties could be overcome in the near future.

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Finally, sense has prevailed. This is a commercial decision that must be left to banks.

VETERAN BANKER UDAY KOTAK
ON SUPREME COURT'S RULING ON LOAN MORATORIUM

THUMBNAILS

Nissan price hike: Nissan India on Tuesday said it will increase prices of its entire product range from next month in order to offset the impact of rising input costs. The company would hike prices across all available models for Nissan and Datsun, effective from 1 April 2021. "There has been continuous escalation in auto component prices, and we have tried to absorb this escalation over the last few months. We are now constrained to increase our prices across all Nissan and Datsun models, the increase varies from variant to variant," Nissan Motor India MD Rakesh Srivastava said. PTI

FedEx support: FedEx Express on Tuesday said it is helping support more than 400 women-led small businesses across Maharashtra with key resources to restart businesses impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The company, in association with United Way Mumbai, a non-profit organisation, is identifying women who had previously operated a small business and is providing them the resources to help re-establish themselves, said a Press release. SNS

Amazon-Kadam: Kadam, an NGO for creating viable employment opportunities at the village level for the youth and women, which joined Amazon's Karigar programme in 2019 with a team of 220 weavers and started selling on Amazon, saw its business registering three-fold growth, according to a Press release. Prior to joining Amazon, they concentrated solely on B2B markets and their reach was limited which was a major challenge in the way of expanding their business, it said. SNS

Bajaj Allianz plan: In a move to offer a robust retirement plan, Bajaj Allianz has come out with "Bajaj Allianz Life Guaranteed Pension Goal" which stands out for meeting post retirement expenses as it offers guaranteed regular income as long as one is living. This plan locks the annuity amount at the time of buying the policy, and that stays fixed for lifetime, the company said in a statement. SNS

Eden Realty project: Leading real estate developer of eastern India, Eden Realty Group has completed Solaris Bonhooghly project one year before the scheduled deadline set by WBHIRA, said a Press statement issued by the company. After receiving the completion certificate, it has started handing over the flats to its buyers, the statement added. SNS

Oppo record: F19 Pro series, the latest device launched by Oppo, has set a milestone by securing record-setting orders. The device has outsold all its predecessors by achieving more than 70 per cent growth in the first day sale volume as compared to its last year`s version F17 Pro, said a release. SNS

Govt files appeal against Cairn arbitration award

Arbitration tribunal overturned India's demand for ₹10,247 crore in back taxes from Cairn Energy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

India is believed to have challenged in a court in The Hague an arbitration tribunal verdict that overturned its demand for Rs 10,247 crore in back taxes from Cairn Energy Plc ~ the second time in three months that it has refused to accept an international award against retrospective tax.

The appeal was filed on Monday, a source with knowledge of the matter said.

The finance ministry spokesperson did not immediately respond to an e-mail sent for comments.

The appeal against a three-member tribunal at the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague invalidating India's Rs 10,247-crore tax claim on Cairn Energy and ordering the government to return the value of shares it had sold, dividends seized and tax refunds withheld, comes weeks before UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's visit to India. The British Prime Minister is widely expected to broach India honouring international arbitration awards during his 26 April visit, another source said.

In December, the government had challenged in a Singapore court an international arbitration tribunal verdict that overturned its demand for Rs 22,100 crore in back taxes from Vodafone Group Plc.

Since the seat of Vodafone arbitration was Singapore, an appeal was filed in a court in that country. In the case of Cairn, the seat was The Hague and so an appeal has been filed in a court in the Netherlands, the first source said.

The appeal was filed on a day when minister of state for finance Anurag Singh Thakur had told the Lok Sabha in a written reply that "any such decision on filing of appeal or otherwise is taken only after careful consideration of all aspects of the matter."

The tribunal's 582-page detailed verdict that asked India to return $1.2 billion-plus interest and cost to Cairn was registered in the Netherlands on 8 January and New Delhi acknowledged it on 19 January, the source said.

Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had earlier this month indicated the government's intent of appealing against the award on grounds of it questioning the sovereign powers of India to levy taxes.

Her ministry feels taxation is not a subject of bilateral investment treaties, like the UK-India Bilateral Investment Treaty under which Cairn had sought rescinding of the tax demand raised, and so the award should be appealed.

It is of the opinion that Cairn set up a tax abusive structure in 2006 when it reorganised its India business to list the local unit, and did not pay taxes anywhere in the world on the gains that it made in India, they said, adding India had made an unsuccessful case of tax not being part of the treaty before the arbitration panel as well.

However, the arbitration award specifically made it clear the base of the judgment was not a challenge to the 2012 law or India's sovereign right to tax.

"The issue at stake is thus not a matter of domestic tax law, it is rather whether the fiscal measures taken by the state, valid or not under its own tax laws, violate international law," the tribunal had said in a unanimous verdict.

The Hague panel found that a 2012 law passed by the Indian Parliament was a new tax, not a clarification of prior law that could be applied to earlier years.

Cairn has moved courts in nine countries to enforce the award against India. The award has already been recognised by courts in the US, the UK, Netherlands, Canada and France and the same is in the process in Singapore, Japan, the United Arab Emirates and the Cayman Islands.

The registration of the award is the first step towards its enforcement in the event of the government not paying the firm.

ABOUT THE APPEAL

- Since the seat of Cairn arbitration was The Hague so an appeal has been filed in a court in the Netherlands, a source said.
- The appeal was filed on Monday, a source with knowledge of the matter said.
- The finance ministry spokesperson did not immediately respond to an e-mail sent for comments.

Saudi Aramco in talks to buy stake in RIL unit: Morgan Stanley

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Saudi Aramco remains in discussion with Reliance Industries Ltd for a potential deal to buy a 20 per cent stake in its oil-to-chemical (O2C) unit, Morgan Stanley said on Monday citing the Saudi firm's analyst call post announcing 2020 earnings.

Richest Indian Mukesh Ambani had in August 2019 announced talks for the sale of 20 per cent stake in the O2C business, which comprises its twin oil refineries at Jamnagar in Gujarat and petrochemical assets, to the world's largest oil exporter. The deal was to conclude by March 2020 but has been delayed.

"Saudi Aramco's CY20 conference call indicated that it is still in discussion with Reliance to evaluate existing opportunities as potential partners, regarding the non-binding MoU signed with Reliance for its O2C business," Morgan Stanley said in a note.

Besides refineries and petrochemical plants, the O2C business also comprises a 51 per cent stake in the fuel retailing business. It, however, does not include the upstream oil and gas producing assets such as the flagging KG-D6 block in the Bay of Bengal. Reliance had in 2019 put $75 billion as the value of O2C business after signing a non-binding letter of intent with Saudi Aramco.

"Saudi Aramco remains in discussion with Reliance for potential partnership," Morgan Stanley said.

With asset prices, industry outlook, and margins back to August 2019 levels, it saw a revival of the earnings upgrade cycle, led by energy. Multiples should surprise positively too as clarity on new energy investments rises.

"Reliance had recently announced carving out the O2C business as a separate subsidiary to support strategic partnerships and new investors in order to accelerating its new energy and material plans," it said. "We expect the stake sale discussions to pick up pace. We see valuations and asset prices rebounding to levels seen in August 2019 with a much-improved industry outlook," it added.

Telecom sector headed for more consolidation: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 23 MARCH

Providing services like broadband connectivity, cable TV, enterprise solutions, and payment wallets is the need of the hour for telcos, and a second wave of consolidation is upon the industry, a rating agency said today.

India Ratings and Research said the sector, which was battered following the aggressive entry of Reliance Jio, will continue showing signs of recovery amid conducive regulatory environment and maintained a "stable" outlook for the industry in FY22.

The second round of consolidation (Consolidation 2.0) is kicking-in in the industry, which will bring a transformation in the business models of telecom companies, leading to the evolution of incumbents from the providers of traditional voice-only services to complete digital solutions for households, it said.

Along with wireless mobility, telcos will have to provide services such as broadband connectivity, cable TV services (direct-to-home), enterprise solutions, e-payment wallets/platforms, music applications and over-the-top transmission platform.

Such bundling of services along with the traditional wireless mobile services has become the "need of the hour" to ensure customer stickiness and widen the market footprint, the agency said.

It can be noted that the sector was once a very busy field with up to half a dozen operators to choose from. However, in the last five years, operators like Vodafone and Idea went for a merger, some retreated and some were also forced to go into bankruptcy because of the financial difficulties. Among the operators, it said Jio has strong or moderate presence in all the allied services, except enterprise segment where it is non-existent, while Bharti Airtel lacks broadcasting presence and Vodafone Idea does not have a presence in broadcasting, payment wallets and direct to home.

The increasing data usage and rising proportion of higher average revenue per user data customers in the overall subscriber mix indicate that, even without tariff hikes, the sector is structurally moving towards a higher-average revenue per user regime, it said.

JLR drives in all-electric SUV I-Pace

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Jaguar Land Rover India today launched its fully-electric SUV Jaguar I-PACE in India with a price starting at Rs 1.05 crore (ex-showroom), marking its presence in the country's luxury EV segment.

Bullish on the government support for electric vehicle (EV), the company said setting up of fast charging network could lead to the quick adoption of such pollution-free vehicle across the country.

"In terms of the policy to promote EVs, we feel that the Central government and some state governments are on the right track. Further, areas, where policy push may expedite the adoption of EV's, are setting up of fast-charging network across the country, including in residential societies and buildings, bringing down the initial acquisition cost of EVs," Jaguar Land Rover India president and managing director Rohit Suri said.

He was responding to a query as to what steps can be taken by the government to encourage electric mobility in the country.

Suri noted that the Indian market is warming up to the prospects of electric vehicles.

"Amongst our customers, there is a growing concern around pollution in cities and overall environmental sustainability, which is triggering the demand for EVs. Government policy push is acting as a catalyst to drive this demand even further," he said.

The 21st-century luxury customer is also keen to adopt the latest in technology and EVs are absolutely at the top of the pyramid in this aspect, Suri added.

"In India, we anticipate that the usage will largely be for daily commute within the city and that's how the most definite benefit of electric vehicles will be realised in terms of pollution control within city limits. We expect the Jaguar I-PACE to be used more in this manner and have provided charging solutions for customers to facilitate this," he said.

With I-PACE, the company wants to focus on providing customers with a seamless and worry-free EV ownership experience, he added.

Jaguar I-PACE is powered by a 90 kWh battery that delivers 294 kW power and 696 Nm torque, allowing it to accelerate from 0-100 km/h in just 4.8 seconds.

Suri noted that the I-PACE launch marks the beginning of the company's electrification journey in the country.

"Globally, Jaguar Land Rover had recently announced elaborate plans that would lead us into the world of electric vehicles. Jaguar will be an all-electric luxury brand by 2025 and Land Rover will welcome six pure electric variants in the next 5 years."

Adani Ports to buy controlling stake in Gangavaram Port for ₹3,604 cr

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone today said it will acquire controlling interest in Gangavaram Port Ltd (GPL) from DVS Raju and family for Rs 3,604 crore, taking its stake in GPL to 89.6 per cent.

GPL is located in the northern part of Andhra Pradesh next to Vizag Port.

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ), India's largest private ports and logistics company and the flagship transportation arm of the diversified Adani Group, is acquiring the 58.1 per cent stake held by DVS Raju and family in Gangavaram Port Limited (GPL), the company said in a statement.

The acquisition is valued at Rs 3,604 crore. APSEZ had announced acquisition of Warburg Pincus' 31.5 per cent stake in GPL on 3 March 2021, and together with this acquisition, APSEZ would have 89.6 per cent stake in GPL.

"Ports play a major role in shaping the future. Through APSEZ's 89.6 per cent stake in Gangavaram port, Adani Group will greatly expand its pan-India cargo presence. As India's largest private sector port developer and operator, we will accelerate India's and AP's industrialisation," Adani Group chairman Gautam Adani said in a tweet.

It is the second largest non-major port in Andhra Pradesh with a 64 MT capacity established under concession from Government of Andhra Pradesh (GoAP) that extends till 2059.

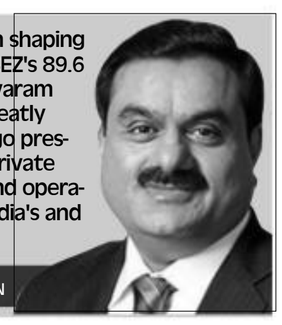
It is an all-weather, deep water, multi-purpose port capable of handling fully laden super cape size vessels of up to 2,00,000 DWT, the statement said.

Currently, GPL operates 9 berths and has free hold land of 1,800 acres. With a master plan capacity for 250 MTPA with 31 berths, GPL has sufficient headroom to support future growth.

GPL handles a diverse mix of dry and bulk commodities, including coal, iron ore, fertiliser, limestone, bauxite, sugar, alumina and steel.

GPL is the gateway port for a hinterland spread over 8 states across eastern, southern and central India, the statement said, adding it will benefit from APSEZ's pan-India footprint.

> Ports play a major role in shaping the future. Through APSEZ's 89.6 per cent stake in Gangavaram port, Adani Group will greatly expand its pan-India cargo presence. As India's largest private sector port developer and operator, we will accelerate India's and AP's industrialisation
>
> **GAUTAM ADANI**
> ADANI GROUP CHAIRMAN



Airtel Africa to sell tower assets for $119 million

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Airtel Africa will sell 1,424 towers in Madagascar and Malawi to Helios Towers for $119 million, Bharti Airtel said in a regulatory filing.

The two companies have also entered into agreement for tower assets in Chad and Gabon, but particulars of the deal were not disclosed.

"Airtel Africa today (on Tuesday) announces the signing of agreements to sell its telecommunications tower companies in Madagascar and Malawi to Helios Towers plc. The group's tower portfolios in these two markets together comprise 1,229 towers which form part of the group's wireless telecommunications infrastructure network," the filing said.

The transaction is expected to close in the last quarter of 2021.

Airtel Africa has also signed a pact with Helios Towers for sale of additional 195 sites across Madagascar and Malawi over the three years.

"In addition, Airtel Africa has entered into exclusive memorandum of understanding agreements for the potential sale of its tower assets in Chad and Gabon to the purchaser (Helios Towers). The proposed transactions are subject to the signing of definitive legal agreements for sale, including customary closing conditions such as required regulatory approvals," the filing said.

The telecom service provider firm has around 1,000 towers in these two countries.

Airtel Africa deal in Chad and Gabon will also incorporate lease arrangements with the Helios Towers and build to suit commitments in Chad and Gabon.

"The proposed transactions are not inter-conditional and are expected to close before the end of our fiscal year 2022," the filing said.

The company will use the proceeds from the transactions and the proposed transactions to reduce Airtel Africa Group's external debt and to invest in network and sales infrastructure in the respective operating countries.

Airtel Africa CEO Raghunath Mandava said: "These transactions will also help to improve the mix of our debt and increase its tenor through long-term leases, which are largely payable in local currency by our operating entities, while reducing foreign currency debt of the group."

Glenmark gets $40 million Covid credit line from IFC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 23 MARCH

International Finance Corporation today said Glenmark Pharmaceuticals has become the first domestic drug maker to get a $40-million (about Rs 290 crore) credit line from its $8-billion fast-track Covid-19 facility.

The loan to Glenmark will help it increase the availability of affordable, quality medicines in the country as well in other countries, including treatment for the pandemic. The World Bank Group lender said the $40-million loan is under its $8-billion fast-track Covid-19 facility and will help the Mumbai-based company boost its generic drug production capacity in general and respiratory drugs in particular.

IFC's partnership with Glenmark began way back in 2016, supporting its expansion and growing its research and development capacities.

"We are proud to partner with Glenmark once again towards an inclusive and resilient recovery," the lender said.

A Glenmark spokesperson said with this credit line they will be able to work with the IFC to help improve access to life-saving drugs as this investment will help them improve the production of quality, and offer low-cost medicines to the needy.

Glenmark produces generic drugs and active pharmaceutical ingredients.

Banking stocks lift equity benchmarks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 23 MARCH

Equity indices regained their footing today, propelled by banking stocks which surged after the Supreme Court declined to extend the loan moratorium period and said complete waiver of interest is not possible.

Reversing last session's losses, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended 280.15 points or 0.56 per cent higher at 50,051.44 points. Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty advanced 78.35 points or 0.53 per cent to close at 14,814.75 points.

UltraTech Cement was the top gainer in the Sensex pack, rising 3.06 per cent, followed by IndusInd Bank, ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, Titan, Axis Bank, SBI and Reliance Industries.

On the other hand, ONGC, PowerGrid, ITC, NTPC, M&M and HDFC were among the laggards, shedding up to 2.28 per cent.

The apex court today refused to interfere with the Centre's and the RBI's decision to not extend the loan moratorium beyond 31 August last year, saying it is a policy decision.

A Bench, headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan, said that the top court cannot do judicial review of the Centre's financial policy decision unless it is malafide and arbitrary.

It also directed that no compound or penal interest be charged during the six-month moratorium period, but added that complete waiver of interest is not possible as it will have huge financial implications.

"Domestic market ended the day on a strong footing supported by a rally in banking stocks amidst weak cues from global markets. Sentiments in the banking stocks were lifted post Supreme Court's order against granting interest waiver and extension of moratorium period, while its decision to not charge compound interest added a minor concern in the banking space. In the global space, European markets pulled back as rising Covid infections reflected lockdown worries," said Vinod Nair, head of research at Geojit Financial Services.

Sector-wise, BSE bankex, industrials, energy, realty, and power indices rose up to 1.51 per cent, while metal, FMCG, oil and gas and telecom indices closed with losses.

Broader BSE mid-cap and small-cap indices climbed as much as 0.95 per cent.

Global equities were on the back foot as investors awaited Congressional testimony by US Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell and treasury secretary Janet Yellen.

Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Seoul ended on a negative note. Stock exchanges in Europe were also trading with losses in mid-session deals.

Meanwhile, the global oil benchmark Brent crude was trading 3.53 per cent lower at $62.34 per barrel.

The rupee gave up all its intra-day gains to settle 6 paise lower at 72.43 against the US dollar, in line with weakness in other peers against the American currency.

Foreign institutional investors were net sellers in the capital market on Monday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 786.98 crore, as per exchange data.

SENSEX JUMPS 280 PTS

- Stock exchange benchmarks regained their footing on Tuesday, propelled by banking stocks which surged after the Supreme Court declined to extend the loan moratorium period and said complete waiver of interest is not possible.
- Reversing last session's losses, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended 280.15 points or 0.56 per cent higher at 50,051.44 points.
- Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty advanced 78.35 points or 0.53 per cent to close at 14,814.75 points.

epaper.thestatesman.com

Reports indicate that atrocities have been committed in Tigray region. War is a nasty thing.

PRIME MINISTER OF ETHIOPIA ABIY AHMED
ACKNOWLEDGING POSSIBLE WAR CRIMES IN TIGRAY IN AN ADDRESS BEFORE LAWMAKERS

China, North Korea reaffirm alliance

In January, Kim vowed to further expand the North's nuclear programme

ASSOCIATED PRESS
SEOUL, 23 MARCH

The leaders of China and North Korea are reaffirming their traditional alliance following contentious talks between top diplomats from Washington and Beijing and diplomatic isolation and economic problems in the North that have left it ever-more dependent on the Chinese.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency said Tuesday leader Kim Jong Un called for stronger unity and cooperation with China in the face of challenges posed by hostile forces while exchanging messages with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

According to KCNA and China's Xinhua news agency, Xi in his own message to Kim described bilateral relations as a valuable asset to both countries and vowed to make unspecified contributions to the peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

KCNA said Xi also expressed a commitment to provide the peoples of the two countries with better life. Some analysts saw this as an indication that China would soon provide North Korea with badly needed food, fertilizer and other aid that had been significantly reduced amid the pandemic border closures.

Xinhua said the leaders' messages were exchanged during a meeting between Chinese senior diplomat Song Tao and North Korean Ambassador to China Ri Ryong Nam during a meeting in Beijing on Monday.

The exchange between the leaders came as the Biden administration steps up diplomatic efforts to strengthen cooperation with Asian allies South Korea and Japan to deal with the North Korean nuclear threat and China's growing regional influence.

Top US and Chinese officials traded sharp and unusually public barbs in Alaska last week in their first face-to-face meetings since President Joe Biden took office, where Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Washington is united with its allies in pushing back against Chinese authoritarianism.

The contentious talks in Anchorage came after Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin traveled to Japan and South Korea for talks that mainly focused on North Korea and China.

During his visit to Seoul, Blinken sternly criticized North Korea's nuclear ambitions and human rights record and pressed China to use its tremendous influence to convince the North to denuclearize.

Junta justifies crackdown, accuses Suu Kyi of graft

ASSOCIATED PRESS
YANGON, 23 MARCH

Myanmar's military junta on Tuesday took the offensive to justify last month's coup and subsequent actions against those opposed to it, even as street demonstrations continued against the takeover.

At a news conference in the capital Naypyitaw, the military presented a video of a former political colleague of ousted national leader Aung San Suu Kyi claiming he had handed over large amounts of cash and gold to her personally, in what the military has characterized as corruption. Such allegations were previously denied by her lawyer.

Many of the protests Tuesday were staged in a way that avoided confrontations with authorities, who have not hesitated to use lethal force to break up demonstrations. Some marches were held before dawn in Yangon, the country's biggest city, and elsewhere and went unmolested. Other protests adopted the tactic of having signboards or other inanimate objects lined up in the street to serve as proxies for human demonstrators.

The independent Assistance Association for Political Prisoners has verified 261 protesters' deaths nationwide but says the actual total, including cases where verification has been difficult, is probably much higher.

In its news conference, the military presented displays of seized homemade weapons and videos of street battles to argue that the demonstrators are violent and that its efforts to stop them are justified. However, in the weeks since the Feb. 1 coup, protesters only began using organized violence after more than 100 demonstrators had been shot dead by police and soldiers.

The allegations against Suu Kyi made by former Yangon Chief Minister Phyo Min Thein were first mentioned by the military several weeks ago. Last week the military-controlled Myawaddy TV station aired a similar video with a construction magnate who also claimed to have made large payoffs to Suu Kyi. That video was replayed at Tuesday's news conference.

No supporting evidence for the allegations has been offered, and they are generally dismissed as an effort by the military to frame Suu Kyi so she can be discredited and tried on a serious criminal charge. She is already being held on several more minor charges.

A report of Myanmar newspaper said the junta has expressed fresh concern about civil servants, teachers and medical workers joining the Civil Disobedience Movement that is the vanguard group opposing last month's military takeover.

Militants given death sentence for trying to kill Bangladesh PM

DHAKA, 23 MARCH

Fourteen Islamist militants were on Tuesday given death sentence by a Bangladeshi court here for attempting to kill Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 2000.

Judge Abu Zafar Md Kamruzzaman of Dhaka's Speedy Trial tribunal-1 pronounced the verdict as nine of them were brought to the court from jail to face the trial in person.

The rest five convicts are on the run. They were tried in absentia and defended by state-appointed lawyers.

"The verdict will be executed by a firing squad to set an example, unless the law barred it," the judge said.

Otherwise, the convicts could be hanged in line with the prevailing practice, following mandatory review of the death sentences by the High Court Division of the Supreme Court under the Bangladesh law, the judge said.

Under the Bangladesh law, the death sentences would require to be endorsed by the High Court following an automatic death reference hearing. The convicts are allowed to file an appeal as well.

For the five convicts who are at large, the judge ordered the verdict to be executed after their arrest or surrender.

All the convicts are operatives of outlawed Harkatul Jihad Bangladesh.

HuJI-B's chief Mufti Abdul Hannan, who was found to be the mastermind of the plot, too was indicted in the case but his name was dropped from the trial as he was executed in 2017 in another case involving attempted assassination of the then Bangladeshi-origin British High Commissioner. PTI

Israelis return to polling station

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
JERUSALEM, 23 MARCH

Israelis returned to polling stations on Tuesday for an unprecedented fourth time in two years in what is being largely seen as a referendum on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's continuance at the helm of affairs amid his ongoing trial on corruption charges as well as his handling of the pandemic.

The elections were called barely seven months after the last government was formed after the Likud and Blue and White party failed to agree on a budget by a 23 December deadline. The two parties had fought each other bitterly in the three ultimately inconclusive elections throughout 2019 and 2020 but agreed in May 2020 to form a power-sharing government with a rotating premiership between Prime Minister Netanyahu and Blue and White leader Benny Gantz.

The unity government collapsed in December. As per the election commission, 6,578,084 Israelis are eligible to vote for any of the 38 parties running in the elections in 13,685 polling stations across the country, including 750 special polling stations for the sick and quarantined due to Covid-19.

Exit polls will be broadcast by the leading channels Tuesday night but the final results will be out only on 31 March after the votes from special polling stations, of soldiers, emissaries and prisoners are also properly tallied by Thursday or Friday.

Netanyahu, 71, and his wife Sara cast their votes in Katamon, Jerusalem. He called on citizens to go out and vote. Yair Lapid, Yesh Atid head, said that his party has the "chance to restore sanity to Israel" and create "a government that will fight corruption and reject religious coercion." President Reuven Rivlin cast his last vote as president at the polling booth close to his residence in Jerusalem and called on all Israeli citizens to go out and vote.

"I beg of you go out and vote! I'm voting for the last time as president, but above all as a worried citizen a very worried citizen," he said. Voter turnout was recorded at 14.8 per cent at 10:00 am, according to the Central Elections Committee.

Buoyed by a successful vaccination drive, one of the fastest in the world per capita, Netanyahu has put it at the forefront of his campaign claiming that under his leadership Israel has become the first country in the world to beat the Covid -19 pandemic. He yet again faces a tough challenge of putting together a coalition post-elections.

Tensions mount between Afghan govt & warlord

KABUL, 23 MARCH

Tensions are mounting between Afghanistan's government and a powerful local warlord, with deadly clashes erupting in a rural province between his fighters and government troops.

The fear is that the violence could be a harbinger of more chaos as US troops head toward the exits.

The government has launched an assault in central Maidan Wardak province, vowing to punish the warlord, Abdul Ghani Alipoor, after the defense minister accused his fighters of shooting down a military helicopter last week, killing nine personnel.

It's the latest in a long history of frictions with Alipoor that are increasingly turning bloody. In January, security forces killed at least 11 civilians when they opened fire on protesters, including many Alipoor supporters, in the province's Behsud district.

Alipoor holds widespread loyalty among ethnic Hazaras, a mainly Shiite community who are a minority in Afghanistan but make up most of the population in Maidan Wardak.

Alipoor is one of the many warlords backed by heavily armed militias who hold local power across Afghanistan. AP

MORNING WALK

People walk across the medieval Charles Bridge as the sun rises in Prague, on Tuesday. AP

UN says 15 dead, 400 missing in fire at Rohingya camp in Bangladesh

AGENCIES/PTI
DHAKA, 23 MARCH

At least 15 people have been killed in a massive fire that ripped through a Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh, while at least 400 remain missing, the U.N. refugee agency said on Tuesday. "It is massive, it is devastating," said UNHCR's Johannes Van der Klaauw, who joined a Geneva briefing virtually from Dhaka, Bangladesh. "We still have 400 people unaccounted for, maybe somewhere in the rubble," he said.

He said the UNHCR had reports of more than 550 people injured and about 45,000 displaced. Bangladeshi officials are investigating the cause of the blaze even as officials, aid workers and families sift through the debris looking for further victims. The fire ripped through the Balukhali camp near the southeastern town of Cox's Bazar late on Monday, burning through thousands of shanties as people scrambled to save their meagre possessions.

Rohingya refugees look at the remains of Monday's fire at the Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh. AP

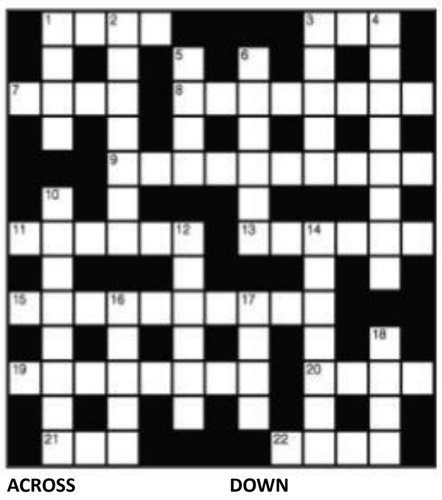
"Everything has gone. Thousands are without homes," Aman Ullah, a Rohingya refugee from the Balukhali camp, said. "The fire was brought under control after six hours but some parts of the camp could be seen smoking all night long." Police have so far confirmed seven deaths.

"The cause of the fire is still unknown" and authorities were investigating the matter, Zakir Hossain Khan, a senior police official said by telephone from the camps. Sanjeev Kafley, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies's delegation head in Bangladesh, said more than 17,000 shelters had been destroyed and tens of thousands of people displaced.

More than a thousand Red Cross staff and volunteers worked with fire services to extinguish the blaze, spread over four sections of the camp containing roughly 124,000 people, he said. That represents around one-tenth of an estimated 1 million Rohingya refugees in the area, Kafley said. Some witnesses said that barbed wire fencing around the camp trapped many people, hurting some and leading international humanitarian agencies to call for its removal.

LEISURE

10 MINUTE CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1 Lend (4)
3 Meadow (Poetic) (3)
7 Young deer (4)
8 Scold severely (8)
9 Darling (10)
11 Abscond (6)
13 Condiment (6)
15 Harshly critical (10)
19 Heaven (8)
20 Greasy (4)
21 Attempt (3)
22 Daze (4)

DOWN
1 Heavy metal (4)
2 Loss of memory (7)
3 Milky coffee (5)
4 Various (8)
5 Give pain (4)
6 Portable computer (6)
10 Pertinent (8)
12 Allow (6)
14 Lose consciousness (4,3)
16 Of dubious honesty (Informal) (5)
17 Comply with (4)
18 Open pie (4)

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1 Cease, 4 Bray (Sea spray), 7 Quit, 8 Prepared, 9 Hair of the dog, 11 Sphere, 13 Airing, 15 At arm's length, 18 Town hall, 20 Limb, 21 Kept, 22 Darts.

DOWN
1 Crush, 2 Astride, 3 Employees, 4 Bye, 5 Aware, 6 Bemoan, 10 Travelled, 12 Python, 14 Regular, 16 Rinse, 17 Humus, 19 Act.

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

BEETLE BAILEY/Mort Walker

RED EYE/Bill Yates & Mel Casson

DADDY DAZE/John Kovaleski

NEED TO KNOW

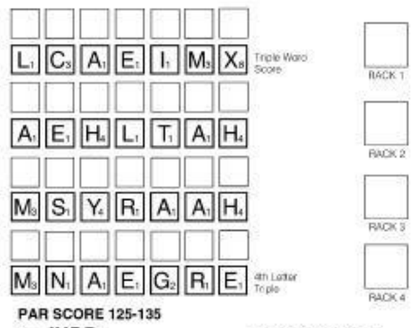
HOSPITALS
- AIIMS 26588500, 26588900
- Moolchand Medcity (formerly Hospital) 42000000 & 24-hour Chemist Shop 42000447
- Vidyasagar Institute for Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences 26924300, 26924304
- Batra Hospital & Medical Research Centre 29051280, 29958747
- Deen Dayal Upadhyay 25496320, 25494403
- Guru Tegh Bahadur 22586262, 22585007

RAILWAY INQUIRY
General Inquiry 139
- Toll Free Nos. 1800112511
- SMS Inquiry Nos. 57886, 54959, 5676747

ROADWAYS INQUIRY
- ISBT (General Inquiry): 23868836, 23865181
- Haryana Roadways 23861262
- Himachal Roadways 23717473, 23325320
- Punjab Roadways 23867842, 23860626
- Rajasthan Roadways 23864470
- U.P. Roadways 23868709

FLIGHT INQUIRY
- AIR INDIA Flight Inquiry and Reservation 18001801407
- INDIGO AIRLINES New Delhi City Office 43513185, Call Centre 09910383838, 18001803838, Reservation 43513186; Indigo Airlines Airport 011-25671580; Terminal I-B 25671576, Palam Road 25671579, 18001803838
- JET AIRWAYS Flight Inquiry and Reservation 39841111
- EMIRATES Flight Inquiry and Reservation 33773377
- Air Canada Flight Inquiry 25656421/25656431 Reservation 41528181
- Air France Flight Inquiry and Reservation 23466262 (City) 25652294 (Airport)
- Kuwait Airways Flight Inquiry and Reservation 23354373

SCRABBLE® BRAND GRAMS



PAR SCORE 125-135
by JUDD
FOUR RACK TOTAL
TIME LIMIT: 20 MIN

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION BY JUDD

N U C L E U S	RACK 1 = 65
I M P A N E L	RACK 2 = 72
A N E M I A	RACK 3 = 8
C U B I C A L	RACK 4 = 63
PAR SCORE 135-145	JUDD'S TOTAL 208

rabble and Scrabble Tiles are registered trademarks. All rights in the game are owned in the U.S.A by Hasbro Inc., in Canada by Hasbro Canada Inc., and elsewhere by J.W. Spear & Sons Limited, a subsidiary of Mattel, Inc.

irections Make a 2 to 7 letter word from the letters in each row. Add points of each word, using scoring directions at right, 7-letter words get 50-point bonus. "Blanks" used as any letter have no point value. All Judd's words are in The Official Scrabble Players Dictionary(Merriam-Webster) and OSW Official Scrabble Words(Chambers). Judd's solution tomorrow.
10-25-12

SUDOKU

Conceptis SudoKu By Dave Green

	7	5	3	9		2		
2							4	
8					4	3		5
3			8		9	6		
1				4				7
		8	2		7			9
5		4	1					2
	8							4
		2		6	5	8	7	

Difficulty Level ★ 11/26

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answer to previous puzzle

Answer to previous puzzle

5	1	4	7	8	2	9	3	6
8	2	3	5	9	6	4	7	1
6	9	7	4	3	1	8	5	2
3	6	1	2	5	8	7	9	4
2	4	5	6	7	9	3	1	8
7	8	9	3	1	4	6	2	5
1	7	6	8	2	3	5	4	9
9	5	8	1	4	7	2	6	3
4	3	2	9	6	5	1	8	7

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that no row, no column and no 3x3 box contains the same number. The difficulty level increases through the week.

epaper.thestatesman.com

We should remember the great spirit shown by our nation . We have all played our part, whether it's working on the front line , working on vaccine, home schooling ....to prevent the spread of the virus

BRITISH PRIME MINISTER BORIS JOHNSON
MARKING THE ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE UK'S STAY-AT-HOME LOCKDOWN

WEATHER

CITY	MAX	MIN	
SINGAPORE	26°C	21°C	R
HONG KONG	17°C	15°C	H
TOKYO	11°C	09°C	CL
LONDON	12°C	09°C	H
DUBAI	23°C	19°C	H
SAN FRANCISCO	13° C	04° C	H
NEW YORK	09° C	07° C	S
MOSCOW	01° C	-09°C	H

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

THUMBNAILS

A man is silhouetted while viewing a preview of the Imagine Van Gogh immersive exhibition in Vancouver on Thursday. ■ AP

Australia flood: Heavy rainfall was forecast to ease across Australia's east coast but floodwaters will linger for days across New South Wales state where 15,000 people were nervously waiting for potential orders to evacuate. Some 18,000 residents of Australia's most populous state have fled their homes since last week, with warnings the cleanup could stretch into April. AP

Oz political scandal : Australia's prime minister said he was shocked and disgusted by the latest sex scandal to rock his government and vowed to do more to attract women into politics.PM Scott Morrison said a lawmaker's staff member at the center of the latest allegations of sexual misconduct had been terminated over disgusting behaviour. AP

Iran mishap :A road accident in southeastern Iran on Tuesday killed at least 14 people, including eight children, an Iranian semi-official news agency reported. There were no details as to what caused the accident. The crash involved three cars, the report said, and also left 11 people injured. AP

Russia military pilots dead: Three members of a Russian warplane crew died on Tuesday when their ejection seats accidentally activated during preflight checks, the military said. The Russian Defense Ministry said that the incident happened on Tuesday at a military airbase in the Kaluga region, about 145 km southwest of Moscow. AP

Colorado shooting leaves 10 dead in latest mass tragedy

Police officer among victims; one suspect in custody, say Boulder police

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BOULDER (COLORADO), 23 MARCH

A shooting at a crowded Colorado supermarket that killed 10 people, including the first police officer to arrive, sent terrorized shoppers and workers scrambling for safety and stunned a state that has grieved several mass killings. A lone suspect was in custody, authorities said.

Hundreds of police officers from throughout the Denver metropolitan area responded to the Monday afternoon attack, converging on a King Soopers supermarket in a busy shopping plaza in southern Boulder.

SWAT officers carrying ballistic shields slowly approached the store as others quickly escorted frightened people away from the building, some of its windows shattered. Customers and employees fled through a back loading dock to safety. Others took refuge in nearby shops.

One suspect was in custody, a tearful Boulder Police Chief Maris Herold said late Monday. Authorities didn't identify the suspect, though Boulder County District Attorney Michael Dougherty said the suspect was the only person injured and was receiving medical care.

Officers had escorted a shirtless man in handcuffs, blood running down his leg, from the store during the siege.

Authorities would not say if he was the suspect. Foothills Hospital in Boulder was treating one person from the shooting scene but refused further comment, said Rich Sheehan, spokesman for Boulder Community Health, which operates the hospital.

Police stand outside a King Soopers grocery store where a shooting took place on Monday in Boulder, Colo. ■ AP

This is a tragedy and a nightmare for Boulder County, Dougherty said. These were people going about their day, doing their shopping. I promise the victims and the people of the state of Colorado that we will secure justice.

Herold identified the slain officer as Eric Talley, 51, who had been with Boulder police since 2010. He was the first to arrive after responding to a call about shots fired and someone carrying a rifle, she said.

He was by all accounts one of the outstanding officers of the Boulder Police Department, and his life was cut too short, Dougherty said.

Dozens of police and emergency vehicles, their lights flashing, escorted an ambulance carrying the officer from the shooting scene after nightfall. Some residents stood along the route, their arms raised in salute.

Identities of the other nine victims were not disclosed as police were still notifying their family members.

Dougherty said it was too early to speculate on a motive and that the investigation involving local, state and federal agencies would take days.

The attack in Boulder, about 25 miles (40 kilometers) northwest of Denver and home to the University of Colorado, stunned a state that has seen several mass shootings, including the 1999 Columbine High School massacre and the 2012 Aurora movie theater shooting.

Monday's midafternoon attack was the seventh mass killing this year in the U.S., following the March 16 shooting that left eight people dead at three Atlanta-area massage businesses, according to a database compiled by The Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University.

It follows a lull in mass killings during the pandemic in 2020, which had the smallest number of such attacks in more than a decade, according to the database, which tracks mass killings defined as four or more dead, not including the shooter.

Dean Schiller said he had just left the supermarket when he heard gunshots. He saw three people lying face down - one in a doorway and two in the parking lot.

Schiller said he couldn't tell if they were breathing.

Sarah Moonshadow and her son, Nicolas Edwards, had just bought strawberries when they heard gunfire. Moonshadow told The Denver Post they ducked and just ran. Outside, Edwards said, arriving police pulled up next to a body in the parking lot.

I knew we couldn't do anything for the guy, he said. We had to go.

Video posted on YouTube showed one person on the floor inside the store and two more outside on the ground. What sounds like two gunshots are heard at the beginning of the video.

Investigators had just started sorting through the crime scene and conducting witness interviews, Dougherty said. Matthew Kirsch, the acting U.S. attorney for Colorado, pledged that the full weight of federal law enforcement will support the investigation.

Slain officer, father of 7, sought new life away from front line dangers

BOULDER, 23 MARCH

A U.S. police officer killed in a mass shooting at a Colorado supermarket on Monday had seven children and had been looking for a new job in order to protect his family, his father said.

The shooting in Boulder, Colorado, left nine other people dead while a suspect injured in the violence was arrested, authorities told a news conference late on Monday. Officer Eric Talley was the first on the scene, Boulder Police Chief Maris Herold said, lauding his intervention as "heroic."

Talley, 51, had joined the police just over a decade ago and had been looking to eventually find a new line of work, his father Homer said in a statement issued to local media."He was looking for a job to keep himself off of the front lines and was learning to be a drone operator. He didn't want to put his family through something like this," Homer Talley said.

"He had seven children. The youngest is seven-years-old. He loved his kids and his family more than anything." A woman named Kirstin said on Twitter that Eric Talley was her older brother."My heart is broken. I cannot explain how beautiful he was and what a devastating loss this is to so many. Fly high my sweet brother," she wrote in a post that included a photo of them as young children. AGENCIES

Biden eyes $ 3 trillion package for infra, schools, families

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, 23 MARCH

Fresh off passage of the Covid relief bill, President Joe Biden is assembling the next big White House priority, a sweeping $ 3 trillion package of investments on infrastructure and domestic needs.

Biden huddled privately late Monday with Senate Democrats as Congress has already begun laying the groundwork with legislation for developing roads, hospitals and green energy systems as part of Biden's "Build Back Better" campaign promise. Much like the USD 1.9 trillion virus rescue plan signed into law earlier this month, the new package would also include family-friendly policies, this time focusing on education and paid family leave.

The White House plans are still preliminary, with a combined$ 3 trillion in spending proposed to boost the economy and improve the quality of life, according to a person familiar with the options who insisted on anonymity to discuss private conversations. While the goal is a bipartisan package, Democrats in Congress have signalled a willingness to go it alone if they are blocked by Republicans.

"Biden's outreach to Senate Democrats comes as the White House is under fire for its handling of the US-Mexico border.The focus on infrastructure shifts attention back toward priorities that are potentially more popular with Americans and potentially bipartisan.An infrastructure package would include roughly $ 1 trillion for roads, bridges, rail lines, electrical vehicle charging stations and the cellular network, among other items. The goal would be to facilitate the shift to cleaner energy while improving economic competitiveness. A second component would include investments in workers with free community college, universal pre-kindergarten and paid family leave. No part of the proposal has been finalised and the eventual details of any spending could change.

The overall price tag first reported on Monday by *The New York Times* has been circulating on Capitol Hill for weeks, since the start of the Biden presidency. With the House and Senate under Democratic control, the proposals are expected to draw support from all corners of Congress.

Admin proposes 18-month delay in calculating prevailing wages of H-1B and other visas: The Biden Administration has proposed an 18-month delay in the effective date of a final rule on calculating the prevailing wages of certain immigrants and non-immigrant workers, including those on the popular H-1B visas. The proposed delay will provide the Department of Labour with sufficient time to consider the rule's legal and policy issues thoroughly and issue an upcoming Request for Information and gather public comments on the sources and methods for determining prevailing wage levels, an official release said following the announcement on Monday. This proposed rule follows an initial 60-day delay announced earlier this month. PTI

ROYAL TOUCH

Britain's Prince William and Kate, Duchess of Cambridge, visit the vaccination centre at Westminster Abbey, London on Tuesday to pay tribute to the efforts of those involved in the Covid-19 vaccine rollout. ■ AP

Rivals seeking to gain as Biden mulls approach to Syrian war

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, 23 MARCH

The Biden administration is mulling over America's role in Syria's ongoing conflict as the US tries to break away from Middle East wars, but Vladimir Putin's top diplomat already has been busy on the ground, trying to win support for a Syria approach that could establish Russia as a broker of security and power in the region.

The new US administration has yet to say how it plans to handle Syria, which is now fragmented among a half-dozen militaries including US troops owing to a war that has killed and has displaced millions.

The conflict includes al-Qaida affiliates, Islamic State forces and other jihadist groups eager to use Syria as a base. Russia and Iran have intervened to prevent the collapse of Syrian President Bashar Assad, who has wielded chemical attacks, barrel bombs and starvation to crush what had started out as a peaceful uprising. The conflict just entered its 11th year.

Dealing with Syria's war will test the Biden administration's determination to focus on Asia and not the Middle East. If the US diminishes its presence, Russia and other hostile US rivals are poised to step in and boost their regional stature and resources.

Dealing with Syria's war will test the Biden administration's determination to focus on Asia and not the Middle East.

Hence Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Middle East tour this month.

Lavrov stood by as the foreign minister of a Gulf state generally friendly to Washington, the United Arab Emirates, delivered a message in line with Moscow's position: US sanctions on Syria's Russia-supported regime were blocking international efforts to rebuild Syria.

Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan said it is time to welcome Syria back into the fold of Arab nations. In other words, Russia's message is the Syria war is over, Assad has won, Assad will be in power as long as he is breathing oxygen," said Frederic Hof, who served as a US Syria adviser and envoy in the Obama administration.

Hof said there was an unstated part of the message: Russia plans to be on hand as Syria is built from the ashes, benefiting from any international reconstruction resources coming in, and positioning itself as the broker to manage the security threats that Syria poses to the region.

Hof and James F. Jeffrey, argue for the United States to remain a significant presence in the country, citing Russia's ambitions.The Biden administration is reviewing whether it should consider Syria as one of America's most important national security problems.

It's shown no sign yet of doing so. Notably, where Biden has spelled out some other Middle East problems as priorities including Yemen's war and Iran's nuclear program, for which Biden appointed envoys he and his officials have said and done little publicly on Syria.

Navalny's allies call for major rally across Russia

MOSCOW, 23 MARCH

Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny's allies on Tuesday called for a new massive protest across the country to demand his release from prison.

In a statement posted on Navalny's website, they urged Russians to sign up for a protest on an interactive map and said they will set a date for it when the number of people willing to take part reaches at least 500,000 nationwide. The organisers promised in a statement that the rally would the biggest that Russia has seen.

Navalny, was arrested on 17 January upon his return from Germany.

Last month, Navalny was sentenced to 2 1/2 years in prison for violating the terms of his probation while convalescing in Germany. The sentence stems from a 2014 embezzlement conviction that Navalny has rejected as fabricated and which the European court of Human Rights has ruled to be unlawful.

Authorities have detained about 11,000 people, many of whom were fined or given jail terms ranging from seven to 15 days. AP

US: AstraZeneca may have used outdated info in trial

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, 23 MARCH

Results from a U.S. trial of AstraZeneca's vaccine may have included outdated information and that could mean the company provided an incomplete view of efficacy data, American federal health officials said on Tuesday.

AstraZeneca said in a statement that the data it released Monday included cases up to 17 February, as the study rules specified, and that it was continuing to analyse cases that have occurred since then.

The company said that a preliminary analysis of data that has continued to roll in was consistent with what it had already reported. It promised an update within 48 hours.

AstraZeneca reported Monday that its COVID-19 vaccine provided strong protection among adults of all ages in a long-anticipated U.S. study, a finding that some experts hoped would help rebuild public confidence in the shot around the world and move it a step closer to clearance in the U.S. In the study of more than 30,000 people, the company reported that the vaccine was found to be 79 per cent effective at preventing symptomatic cases of Covid-19 including in older adults.

There were no severe illnesses or hospitalizations among vaccinated volunteers, compared with five such cases in participants who received dummy shots a small number, but consistent with findings from Britain and other countries that the vaccine protects against the worst of the disease.

AstraZeneca also said the study's independent safety monitors found no serious side effects, including no increased risk of rare blood clots like those identified in Europe, a scare that led numerous countries to briefly suspend vaccinations last week.But just hours after those encouraging results were reported, the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases issued an unusual statement.

The agency said the Data and Safety Monitoring Board expressed concern that AstraZeneca may have included outdated information from that trial, which may have provided an incomplete view of the efficacy data.

We urge the company to work with the DSMB to review the efficacy data and ensure the most accurate, up-to-date efficacy data be made public as quickly as possible, the statement added.

In previous vaccine trials, as is the situation here, cases have continued to accrue, even as companies began to release their data. But the AstraZeneca circumstance is unusual in drawing the concern of the data monitoring board. The company has said it aims to file an application with the Food and Drug Administration in the coming weeks, and the government's outside advisers will then publicly debate the evidence.

EU slams AstraZeneca for production shortfalls: A leading EU official has lashed out at the AstraZeneca vaccine company for its massive shortfall in producing doses for the 27-nation bloc, and threatened that any shots produced by them in the EU could be forced to stay there. Sandra Galina, the chief of the European Commission's health division, told legislators on Tuesday that while vaccine producers like Pfizer and Moderna have largely met their commitments the problem has been AstraZeneca. So it's one contract which we have a serious problem.

Dr. Fauci warns of possible virus surge

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, 23 MARCH

Dr. Anthony Fauci is warning that a surge of coronavirus cases in Europe could foreshadow a similar surge in the US. Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease doctor, is urging Americans to remain cautious while the nation races to vaccinate its citizens.

In an interview on ABC's Good Morning America, Faucis says he is optimistic of the vaccines' effectiveness and expressed hope that AstraZeneca's vaccine could join the arsenal of inoculations. He deemed it an unforced error that the company may have used outdated data in a clinical trial, perhaps casting doubt on its effectiveness. But he says Americans should take comfort knowing the FDA would conduct an independent review before it was approved for use in the United States.

In split vote, Scottish leader misled lawmakers, probe says

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LONDON,23 MARCH

A Scottish parliamentary investigation concluded in a split decision Tuesday that First Minister Nicola Sturgeon misled lawmakers about sexual harassment allegations against her predecessor.

The finding came a day after a separate inquiry, by a senior lawyer, cleared Sturgeon of wrongdoing in the scandal that is roiling Scottish politics weeks before a crucial election.

A committee of lawmakers has been investigating the Scottish government's handling of sexual harassment allegations against Alex Salmond, who served as Scotland's first minister before Sturgeon took office in 2014.

Its report said Sturgeon had given an inaccurate account" of what happened at a key meeting with Salmond in 2018, and she has misled the committee on this matter. It also said Sturgeon's claim about when she first learned of allegations of inappropriate behaviour by Salmond toward women long rumored in political circles was hard to believe.The committee split along party lines, with four lawmakers from Sturgeon's governing Scottish National Party dissenting from those conclusions, and five opposition members backing them.Sturgeon has alleged that the criticism of her is politically motivated.

On Monday, James Hamilton, a former chief prosecutor in Ireland, concluded that Sturgeon didn't mislead parliament or breach the code of conduct for government ministers.Sturgeon would have faced intense pressure to resign if she was found to have broken the ministerial code.

Twitter CEO sells NFT of first tweet for $2.9 mn

SAN FRANCISCO, 23 MARCH

Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey has sold a digital version of his first tweet for more than $ 2.9 million more than two weeks after he announced a digital auction for the post.

The tweet from March 2006, which says "just setting up my twttr," was bought by Bridge Oracle CEO Sina Estavi, according to Valuables by Cent, the digital platform where the digital auction for the tweet was held.

The 15-year-old post was sold as a non-fungible token, or NFT a digital certificate of authenticity that confirms an item is real and one of a kind by recording the details on a blockchain digital ledger.

Dorsey tweeted earlier this month that the proceeds would be converted to Bitcoin, and given to non-profit Give Directly's Africa Response. AP

epaper.thestatesman.com

Greek wonder springs to life

Researchers have unravelled the marvels of a desktop cosmos from ancient times

S ANANTHANARAYANAN

A Roman shipwreck off the coast of Lebanon, discovered in 1901, yielded a treasure of unparalleled ingenuity, dated to the second century BCE.

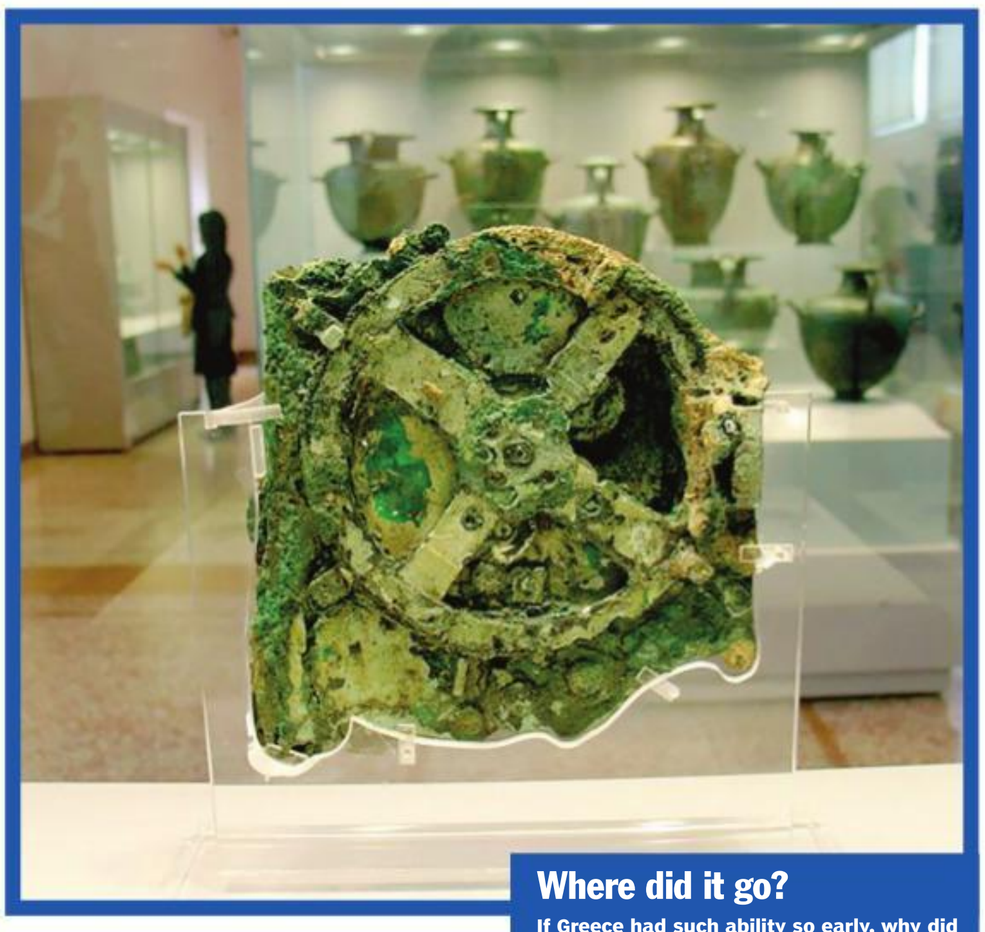
It was the Antikythera Mechanism, an artifact found 42 metres off the Greek island of Antikythera along with others. The German philologist Albert Rehm identified the corroded object as an astronomical calculation machine, but nothing more could be made out. Till, between the 1950s and 1970, science historian Derek de Solla Price used gamma ray radiography to identify the article as a complex, gear driven, astronomical calendar!

The modest, "dictionary size" object contains 30 different gears wheels, in bronze, and a mechanism that interconnects them, to display the positions of the Sun and Moon, following the then known cycle -- the Metonic cycle, a pattern of phases of the Moon, which repeats after nearly 19 years. And then the Callippic cycle, which is four Metonic cycles, less a day, to keep the Moon phases in step with the apparent movement of the Sun. With an input of past or future dates, turning a crank could calculate the positions of the Sun, Moon and the five planets then known, at different times. Even lunar and solar eclipses could be predicted, and that was using the Saros cycle, which describes the recurrence of eclipses, over a period of 6,585.3 days.

What lay behind the mechanism, however, remained unclear. Till, in 2006, microfocus X Ray tomography – building a 3-D image of the object with the help of "slice by slice" X-Ray scans, partly revealed the structure of the corroded and rust-covered mechanism. It also uncovered inscriptions, thousands of characters of text, that pointed to the motions of the Sun, Moon and planets, and how they were displayed by the mechanism. The detailing of the things the device could do provoked ideas about how it may work. But the internals or working of the device could not be meaningfully picturised.

Tony Freeth, David Higgon, Aris Dacanalis, Lindsay MacDonald, Myrto Georgakopoulou and Adam Wojcik, from University College London at London and Doha, and the Cyprus Institute at Nicosia, describe in the journal, *Scientific Reports*, how they grappled with all the data, at the level of astronomy understood in ancient Babylon and available to the Greeks, to finally work out how the ingenious contraption could display the movements of all five planets. "Our challenge was to create a new model to match all the surviving evidence. Features on the Main Drive Wheel indicate that it calculated planetary motions with a complex epicyclic system (gears mounted on other gears), but its design remained a mystery," the paper says.

How they went about it is no less than mathematical detective work, to fill in details of a complex, but unknown scheme of clockwork, based on bits and pieces of information. A useful lead, the paper says, came from the inscriptions in the "back front covers" of the device. The back cover described the front face as a system of rings representing the Sun and the planets, while the front cover listed out the rhythmic patterns of the movements of the planets (and the moon) and the Sun, and the periodic cycles the planets followed.



The paper considers that relative periods could be expressed by pairs of gears, which had numbers of teeth in the correct ratio. It surveys the theories and conjectures of the time to explain how planets moved, sometimes forward, sometimes backwards, as seen from Earth. As the Greeks believed the Earth to be the centre of the system, the movements were complex, described in terms of epicycles, or turning circles that moved around a larger circle. What the system of gears could model such motion? Finally, a step was taken forward, the paper says, when "surprisingly complex periods for the planets Venus and Saturn" were observed in the X-Ray imaging. If how those were worked out could be understood, could the team do the same for the other planets?

Where did it go?

If Greece had such ability so early, why did the industrial revolution have to wait so long? It seems that the device found in 1901 was not the only one of its kind. Cicero has spoken of a similar device built by Archimedes in the third century BCE and another one by Posidonius (second and first century BCE).

The technology appears to have been communicated via the Arab world, as suggested by a device dated in the sixth century, and Islamic calendar computers of the 13th century. Much of modern technology has its roots in the mechanical toys of the 18th century and the earlier tradition of clock working. And clock working too, like many things of our world, has Greek origins!

A known feature in the case of Venus was that the planet went through five cycles of movement every eight solar years. While this could be readily represented as a gear ratio, the ratio itself was approximate. The Babylonians had worked out a better ratio, at 720 cycles in 1,151 years, but this ratio was not practical, as 1,151 teeth were too many for a gear to have. "Then came a notable discovery in 2016," the paper says, of the numbers, 462 and 442, in respect of Venus and Saturn. In place of 720/1,151, the number 462 yields a ratio, 289/462, which is very nearly the same as 720/1,151. And there is a similar ratio, 427/442, for Saturn. And, significantly, those numbers, unlike 1,151, which is a prime, have whole number factors. The number 289 is nothing but 17x17, while 462 is 2x3x7x11. And in the case of Saturn, 427 = 7x61 and 442 = 2x13x17.

As for how the numbers, 462 and 442 had been arrived at, the paper finds that it was by a method called the Parmenedes Proposition. It is a mathematical device to improve an approximate ratio. To find the ratio – 22/7, for the value of pi, for instance, we could start from the knowledge that the ratio is more than 20/7 but is less than 23/6. Then, we add the numerators and denominators like this, (20+23)/ (7+6) which is 43/13, or 3.3. As we know that this is still too high, we can repeat the process, as (2x20+43)/2x7+13), which is 83/27, or 3.07, which is closer to 22/7.

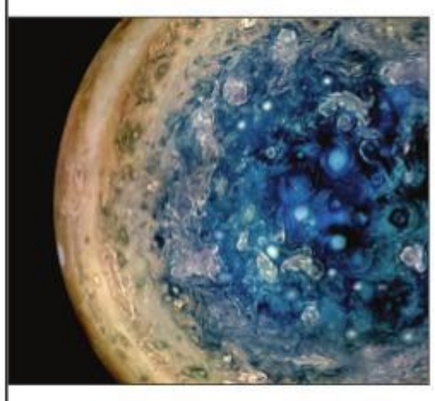
The paper shows how this method could yield the numbers for Venus and Saturn, and an adaptation to provide possible ratios for the remaining planets. While the ratios are accurate and practical, they are chosen to have a feature of economy – ratios for Mercury, Mars and Jupiter are seen to include factors, like 7 and 17– allowing a 51-tooth gear to work for both Venus and Mercury, and a 56-tooth gear for the remaining planets and the Sun.

The line of thinking shows the way to an optimum gear design, which corresponds to the holes and posts, for spindles or gears, and what could be a reconstruction of the ancient marvel! The complexity suggests that Greek technology was far more advanced than previously thought. The precision has been compared to that of 18th century watchmakers. The design is astonishing. No other civilisation is known to have created anything as complicated for another thousand years.

The writer can be contacted at response@simplescience.in

PLUS POINTS

Aurora storms



Scientists have been able to analyse the origins of Jupiter's incredible aurora dawn storms for the first time.

Originally discovered in 1994, the beautiful blue ring above the gas giant's north and south poles are formed on the nightside of the planet. As it rotates, and dawn breaks on the planet, the auroral features become more luminous.

It is estimated that between hundreds and thousands of gigawatts of ultraviolet light are beamed into space from the planet, 10 times greater than that of a typical aurora.

Despite the huge amounts of energy that were given out, the aurora has been hidden from scientists' view. This is because, prior to Nasa's Juno mission that was launched in 2016, the view had only been visible from the dayside – hiding everything that happened on the nightside of the planet.

"Observing Jupiter's aurora from Earth does not allow you to see beyond the limb, into the nightside of Jupiter's poles. Explorations by other spacecraft -- Voyager, Galileo, Cassini – happened from relatively large distances and did not fly over the poles, so they could not see the complete picture," Bertrand Bonfond, a researcher from the University of Liège in Belgium, explained.

"That's why the Juno data is a real game changer, allowing us a better understanding of what is happening on the nightside, where the dawn storms are born."

The storms on Jupiter are very similar to a kind of aurora found on Earth, known as substorms. These are caused by short disturbances in the Earth's magnetosphere, which is controlled by our planet's magnetic field, where energy is released high into the planet's ionosphere.

Yet this similarity is peculiar, because the magnetospheres of Jupiter and Earth contrast vastly. On Earth, the magnetosphere is subject to the whims of the solar winds – charged particles that bombard the Earth from the Sun; on Jupiter, by contrast, it is particles from its volcanic moon Io that get ionised and trapped around the gas giant via magnetism that make up its magnetosphere.

–THE INDEPENDENT

Life & lightning

Lightning strikes may have supplied primordial Earth with enough phosphorus to support the emergence of life, according to new research published last week that offered an alternative explanation as to how living organisms were born.

Phosphorus is a vital building block of life as we know it, forming basic cell structures and the double helix shape of DNA and RNA. Billions of years ago on early Earth, most of the available phosphorus was locked away in insoluble minerals. However, one mineral, schreibersite, is highly reactive and produces phosphorus capable of forming organic molecules. Since most schreibersite on Earth comes from meteorites, the emergence of life here has long been thought to be tied to the arrival of extra-terrestrial rocks. But schreibersite is also contained within the glass-like rock formed by lightning strikes in some types of clay-rich soils.

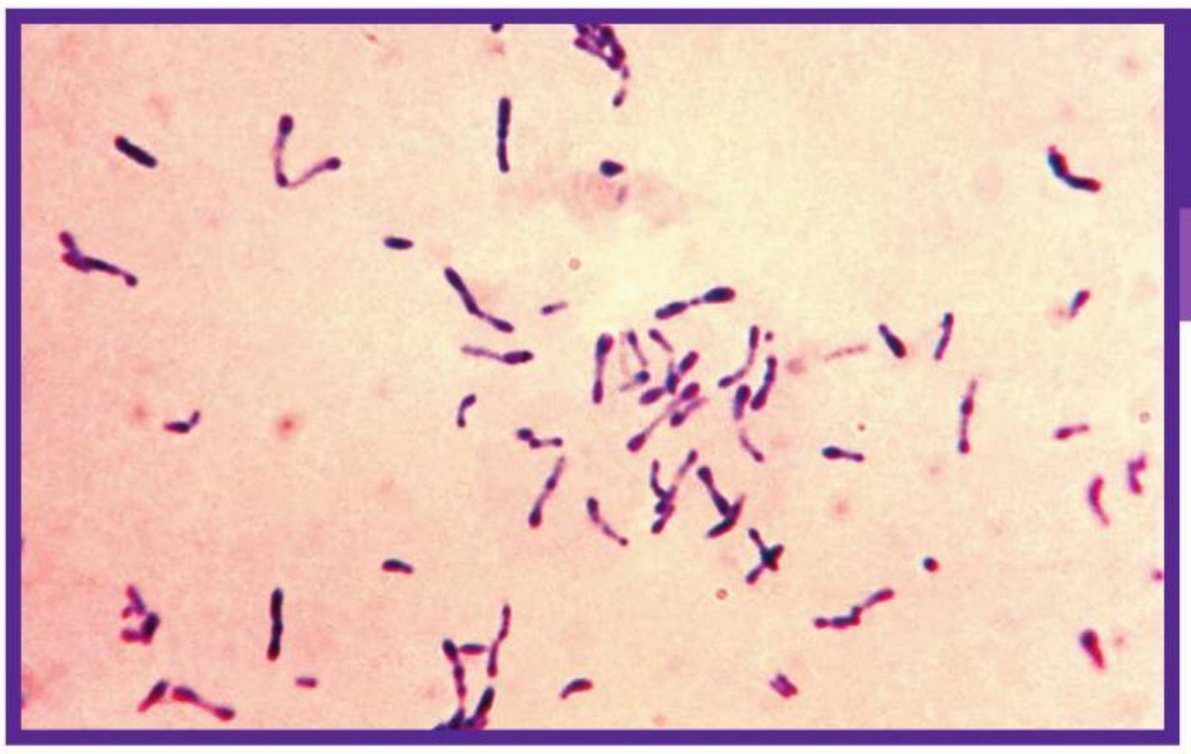
Researchers in the US and UK used state of the art image techniques to analyse the amount of the phosphorus-giving mineral formed in each lightning strike. Writing in the journal *Nature Communications*, lead study author Benjamin Hess from Yale's department of earth and planetary sciences and his colleagues estimated that lightning strikes could have produced between 110 and 11,000 kilogrammes of phosphorus a year. Using simulations of the climate on early Earth, they said that while meteor strikes began to decline after the Moon was formed 4.5 billion years ago, lightning strikes surpassed space rocks for phosphorus production around 3.5 billion years ago. That timing coincides with the origin of life.

Hess said that the research didn't entirely discount meteorites as another source of life-giving phosphorus.

–THE STRAITS TIMES/ANN

LOWDOWN ON DIPHTHERIA

Here's how the extremely infectious disease spreads



TAPAN KUMAR MAITRA

Extensive clinical, pathoanatomical, epidemiological and experimental investigations preceded the discovery of the agent responsible for diphtheria. They paved the way for the discovery of the organism (Edwin Klebs, 1883), its isolation in pure culture (Friedrich Loeffler, 1884), separation of the toxin (Émile Roux and Alexandre Yersin, 1888), antitoxin (Emil von Behring and Shibasaburo Kitasato, 1890) and diphtheria toxoid (Gaston Ramon, 1923).

Corynebacterium diphtheriae is a straight or slightly curved rod, one to eight mcm in length and 0.3-0.8 mcm in breadth. The organism is pleomorphous and stains more intensely at its ends, which contain volutin granules. *C. diphtheriae* frequently display terminal clubshaped swellings. Branched forms as well as short, almost coccal, forms sometimes occur. In smears the organisms are arranged at an angle and resemble spreadout lingers.

The causative agent of diphtheria is an aerobe or a facultative aerobe. The optimal temperature for growth is 37 °C and the organism does not grow at temperatures below 15 and above 40 °C. The pH of medium is 7.2-7.6. The organism grows readily on media which contain protein (coagulated serum, blood agar, and serum agar) and on sugar broth. On Roux's (coagulated horse serum) and Loeffler's (three parts of ox serum and one part of sugar broth) media the organisms produced growth in 16-18 hours. The growth resembles shagreen leather, and the colonies do not merge together.

In broth cultures *C. diphtheriae* produce potent exotoxins (histotoxin, dermonecrotoxin and haemolysin). The toxigenicity of the organisms is linked with lysogeny (the presence of moderate phages-prophages in the toxigenic strains). The classical international standard strain, Park-Williams eight exotoxin-producing strain, is also lysogenic and has retained the property of toxin production for over 85 years. The genetic determinants of toxigenicity are in the genome of the prophage, which is integrated with the *C. diphtheriae* nucleoid. The diphtheria exotoxin is a complex of more than 20 antigens. It has been obtained in a crystalline form.

The toxigenic strains of *C. diphtheriae* are characterised by marked dehydrogenase activity, while the non-toxigenic strains do not possess such activity. The diphtheria toxin is unstable, and is destroyed easily by exposure to heat, light and oxygen of the air, but is relatively resistant to supersonic vibrations. The toxin is transformed into the toxoid by mixture with 0.3-0.4 per cent formalin and maintenance at 38-40 °C for a period of three or four weeks. The toxoid is more resistant to physical and chemical factors than the toxin.

The genus Corynebacterium comprises a species pathogenic for human beings and several species, which are non-pathogenic for man and conditionally designated as diphtheroids. The majority of diphtheroids occurs in the external environment (water, soil and air) while some are present as commensals in the human body.

C. diphtheriae are relatively resistant to harmful environmental factor. They survive for one year on coagulated serum, for two months at room temperature, and for several days on children's toys. Corynebacteria remain viable in the membranes of diphtheria patients for long periods, particularly when the membranes are not exposed to light. The organisms are killed by a temperature of 60 °C and by a one per cent phenol solution in 10 minutes.

Animals do not naturally acquire diphtheria. Although virulent diphtheria organisms were found to be present in horses, cows and dogs, the epidemiological significance of animals in diphtheria is negligible.

Patients suffering from the disease and carriers are the sources of infection in diphtheria. The disease is transmitted by an airdroplet route, and sometimes with dust particles. Transmission by various objects (toys, dishes, books, towels, handker-chiefs, etc) and foodstuffs (milk, cold dishes, etc) contaminated with *C. diphtheriae* are also possible. It is most prevalent in autumn. That is because children crowd more in the autumn months and body resistance is reduced by a drop in temperature.

C. diphtheriae penetrates into the blood and tissues of sick humans and infected animals. The diffusion factor due to which these organisms are capable of invasion is formed of a complex of K-antigen and lipids of the wall of bacterial cells. Clinical studies and experiments on animals have provided evidence of the influence of pathogenic staphylococci and streptococci on the development of diphtheria, the infection becoming more severe in the presence of the organisms. Hypersensitivity to *C. diphtheriae* and to the products of their metabolism is of definite significance in the pathogenesis of diphtheria.

In humans, membranes containing a large number of *C. diphtheriae* and other bacteria are formed at the site of entry of the causative agent (pharynx, nose, trachea, eye conjunctiva, skin, vulva, vagina and wounds). The toxin produces diphtherial inflammation and necrosis in the mucous membranes or skin. On being absorbed, the toxin affects the nerve cells, cardiac muscle, and parenchymatous organs and causes severe toxaemia. Deep changes take place in the cardiac muscle, vessels, adrenals, and in the central and peripheral nervous systems.

According to the site of the lesion, faucial diphtheria and diphtheritic croup occur most frequently, and nasal diphtheria somewhat less frequently. The incidence of diphtheria of the eyes, ears, genital organs, and skin is relatively rare. Facial diphtheria constitutes more than 90 per cent of all the diphtherial cases, and nasal diphtheria takes the second place.

Immunity following diphtheria depends mainly on the antitoxin content in the blood. However, a definite role of the antibacterial component, associated with phagocytosis and the presence of opsonins, agglutinins, precipitins, and complement-fixing substances cannot be ruled out. Therefore, immunity produced by diphtheria is anti-infectious (anti-toxic and antibacterial) in character.

According to the physician's prescriptions, patients are given antitoxin in doses ranging from 5,000 to 15,000 units in mildly severe cases, and from 30,000 to 50,000 units in severe cases of the disease. Penicillin, streptomycin, tetracycline, erythromycin, sulphonamides and cardiac drugs are also employed. Diphtheria toxoid is recommended in definite doses for improving the immunobiological state of the body, or for stimulating antitoxin production. Carriers are treated with antibiotics. Tetracycline, erythromycin, and oxytetracycline in combination with vitamin C are very effective.

The writer is associate professor and head, department of botany, Ananda Mohan College, Kolkata

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REVVING UP

Mick Schumacher *(in photo, left)* makes his Formula One debut this weekend in Bahrain as a rookie without an equal in history. As the son of Michael Schumacher, who until recently was the most successful Grand Prix driver of all time, his path to the top of the sport has long seemed pre-destined.

THUMBNAILS

Kohli's stance: Skipper Virat Kohli has demanded removal of a rule relevant to an umpire's call in leg-before decisions where the on-field supervisor's not-out decision stands even if the ball is shown clipping the stumps. Kohli criticised claiming a catch even after a drop.

Azam case: Lahore High Court has suspended the order of a sessions court directing the Federal Investigation Agency to register a case against Pakistan captain Babar Azam and others in a harassment case. It issued notices to the FIA and Hamiza Mukhtar.

Job retained: Juventus have said the club have no intention of allowing Cristiano Ronaldo to leave them. Speculation continues over the Portuguese star's future, with concern about the value for money he brings to the team given his reported j55 million-a-year pay.

African Cup: Arsenal's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Thomas Partey will both miss one game of their respective Africa Cup of Nations qualifying campaigns due to Covid-19 restrictions. Club football is on a two-week hiatus as players join their national teams.

Pepe out: Portugal defender Pepe will miss their opening 2022 World Cup qualifiers after picking up an injury playing for his club Porto, the country's football association - FPF - has said. "The FPF has deemed Pepe unfit to play three matches," it was said.

World Cup: Germany will seek redemption for November's humiliating thrashing against Spain as Joachim Loew's squad look to get the fans back behind them by winning their first three World Cup qualifiers, against Iceland, Romania and North Macedonia.

Tokyo Olympics: Foreign volunteers will not be allowed to serve in the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympic Games this summer, a countermeasure against Covid-19. Those with "special skills" might retain their positions and enter Japan under special entry rules.

Series win: Skipper Tom Latham led from the front with an unbeaten century as New Zealand beat Bangladesh by five wickets in the second one-dayer today to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

Narwal shoots second gold: Promising Manish Narwal shattered the world record en route clinching the gold in the P4 mixed 50m pistol SH1 event on the penultimate day of the 2021 Para Shooting World Cup in (UAE) on Tuesday.

AIBA secretary general: The International Boxing Association (AIBA) has appointed two-time world champion and Olympic gold-winning former boxer Istvan Kovacs as its Secretary General. The decision was taken by the AIBA Board of Directors on Monday during a meeting via video conference.

Dream debuts: Krishna, Krunal shine to give India 1-0 lead

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PUNE, 23 MARCH

Debutants Krunal Pandya and Prasidh Krishna made the big stage their own to give an all-round India a convincing 66-run victory over world champions England in the first ODI of the three-match series here on Tuesday.

After under-fire opener Shikhar Dhawan delivered with a solid 98, Krunal (58 not out off 31) smashed the fastest fifty by a debutant to fire India to 317 for five following England's decision to field.

At 135 for no loss in the 15th over, with Jason Roy (46 off 35) and Jonny Bairstow (94 off 55) going strong, England seemed to be running away with the chase before Krishna (4/54) and Shardul Thakur (3/37) shared seven wickets between them to script a winning comeback.

The 25-year-old Krishna's figures were the best by an Indian debutant as England's innings ended at 251 in 42.1 overs. Considering the nature of the surface, it was a commendable effort from the Indian bowlers, who carried on from the T20 series to defend gettable targets with remarkable ease. Krishna, who leaked 37 runs in his first three overs, came back strongly and troubled the batsmen with his ability to generate extra bounce. Thakur once again provided the breakthroughs when the team needed and senior pro Bhuvneshwar Kumar too chipped in with a couple of wickets towards the end. England had the game in the bag but were guilty of throwing it away, failing to build on the flier of a start given Bairstow and Roy.

Earlier, Dhawan and Virat Kohli (56 off 60) shared 105 runs for the second wicket before Krunal (58 not out off 31) and KL Rahul (62 not out off 43) sent England on a leather hunt with their unbeaten 112-run stand off 57 balls to take the team past 300. Dhawan hammered 11 fours and two sixes in his 106-ball knock while Krunal plundered seven fours and two maximums in his entertaining innings. Rahul also got welcome runs after a lean run in the T20 series.

Put into bat here, Rohit Sharma (28 off 42) and Dhawan shared 64 runs for the opening wicket. Dhawan hammered two successive fours, a square-cut and drive, in the seventh over, while Rohit struck two successive boundaries in the ninth over. Dhawan, who lost his place in the playing eleven for T20s after a wretched run of form, got a 'life' when he hooked over fine-leg to get his fourth boundary. India were placed at 64/0 after 15 overs. However, Rohit soon perished, getting an outside edge to wicket-keeper Jos Buttler off Stokes.

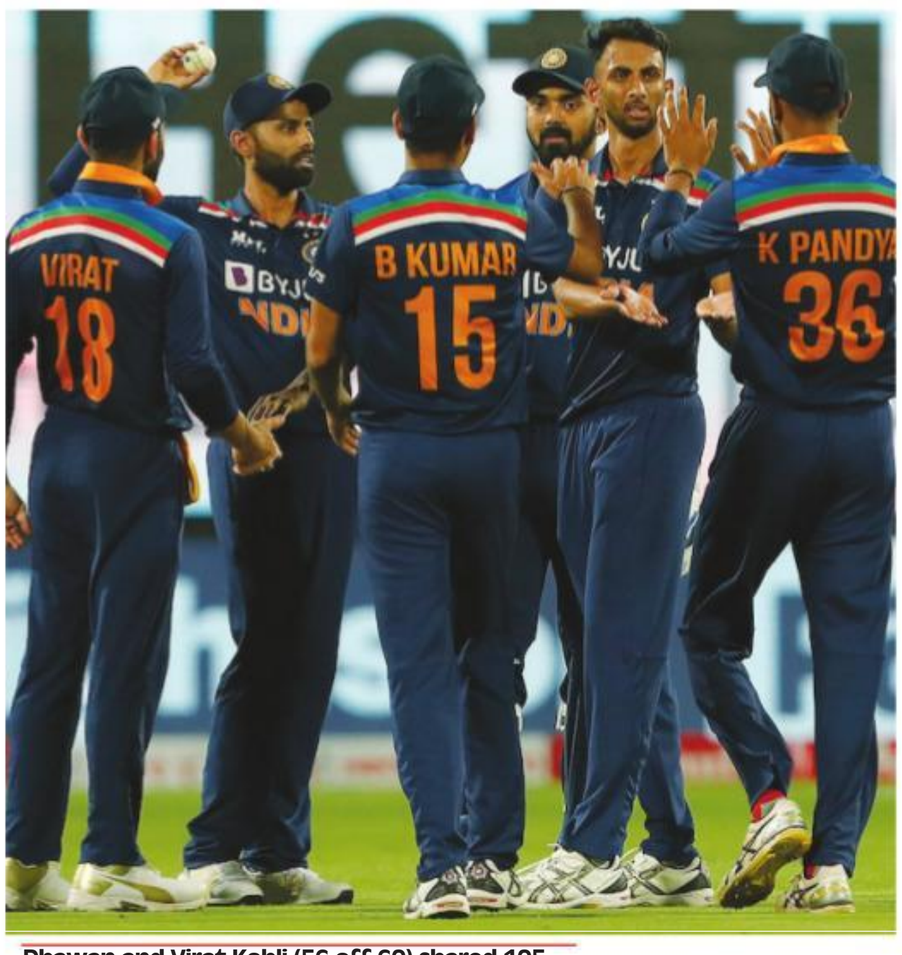
Skipper Kohli joined Dhawan and the two rallied the innings.

Kohli got his first boundary, a cover drive, on the 17th ball and was in his elements as he relied on drives and pulls.

Dhawan brought up his fifty with a maximum, a slog-sweep, off 68 balls, in the 24th over, and then changed gears.

He got another life after Moeen Ali dropped a sitter at deep-mid-wicket off Adil Rashid.

Kohli and Dhawan took on Ali, and the 29th over fetched India 15 runs. Kohli, who raced to his 61st ODI fifty in 50 balls, was dismissed, after he was caught in the deep off pacer Mark Wood (2/75). India lost their way in the middle overs before Krunal and Rahul went on the offensive. Dhawan pulled one straight to Eoin Morgan at mid-wicket to miss out on a hundred.



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Shreyas Iyer doubtful for IPL

India batsman Shreyas Iyer dislocated his left shoulder while fielding in the first ODI against England here on Tuesday, raising serious doubts over his participation in the IPL beginning April 9.

The incident happened in the eighth over of the England innings when Shreyas dived on a drive hit by Jonny Bairstow off pacer Shardul Thakur. The 26-year-old is unlikely to take part in the remaining two ODIs.

"Shreyas Iyer subluxated (partially dislocated) his left shoulder in the 8th over while fielding. He has been taken for further scans and won't take any further part in the game," said the BCCI in a medical update. "Rohit Sharma was hit on the right elbow while batting and felt some pain later. He won't take the field," it added. Shreyas looked in pain and walked off the field while holding his shoulder, raising concerns over his fitness ahead of the IPL in which he captains Delhi Capitals.

SCOREBOARD

India Innings:
Rohit Sharma c Jos Buttler b Stokes 28
Shikhar Dhawan c Morgan b Stokes 98
Virat Kohli c Moeen b Mark Wood 56
S Iyerc (sub) Livingstone b Mark Wood 6
KL Rahul not out 62
Hardik Pandya c Bairstow b Stokes 1
Krunal Pandya not out 58
Extras: (LB-3, W-5) 8
Total: (5 wkts, 50 Overs) 317
Fall of Wickets: 64-1, 169-2, 187-3, 197-4, 205-5
Bowling: Mark Wood 10-1-75-2, Sam Curran 10-1-48-0, Tom Curran 10-0-63-0, Ben Stokes 8-1-34-3, Adil Rashid 9-0-66-0, Moeen Ali 3-0-28-0.

England Innings:
J Royc (sub) S Yadav b Prasidh 46
J Bairstow c Kuldeep Yadav b Thakur 94
B Stokes c (sub) S Gill b Prasidh 1
Eoin Morgan c Rahul b Thakur 22
Jos Buttler (wk) lbw b Thakur 2
Sam Billings c Kohli b Prasidh 18
Moeen Ali c Rahul b Bhuvneshwar 30
Moeen Alic Rahul b Bhuvneshwar 30
Tom Curran c Bhuvneshwar b Prasidh 11
Adil Rashid c Rahul b Bhuvneshwar 0
Mark Woodnot out 2
Extras: 13 (b 0, lb 3, w 10, nb 0, p 0)
Total: 251 (10 wkts, 42.1 Ov)
Fall of Wickets: 135-1, 137-2, 169-3, 175-4, 176-5, 217-6, 237-7, 239-8, 241-9, 251-10
Bowling: Bhuvneshwar Kumar 9-0-30-2, Prasidh Krishna 8.1-1-54-4, Shardul Thakur 6-0-37-3, Krunal Pandya10-0-59-1, Kuldeep Yadav 9-0-68-0

Hassan is rubbed up the wrong way by Al Hasan

THE DAILY STAR/ANN
DHAKA, 23 MARCH

Bangladesh Cricket Board president Nazmul Hassan yesterday said he had yet to see a controversial interview on a portal that had had Shakib Al Hasan saying he skipped the Tests against Sri Lanka to play for Kolkata Knight Riders and be ready for the Twenty20 World Cup India would host later this year. Al Hasan also criticised some people associated with Bangladesh cricket. "He is the team's best player. Now, as a national player who has also been the team's captain, he cannot say anything against the team. According to the rules, he cannot do that.

He has signed an agreement with us and it clearly mentions he cannot say anything against the board or any board member. Even if you forget about the rules, as a person, one should have some minimum respect for his seniors. Why would I, being a national player, say anything against players like Akram (Khan) or Naimur Rahman? Just because you are a good player, do you have the authority to say anything against them? If he had anything to say, he could have said it in person to them," added Hassan.

The BCB president also wondered why Al Hasan's participation in the forthcoming IPL thereby skipping the Sri Lanka Tests - had suddenly resurfaced as a debating topic even after he was given his no-objection certificate. "I don't know why he said all these things all of a sudden. According to me, there is no basis for these things to come to the fore now. Many supported this and many did not (Al Hasan skipping the Sri Lanka Tests for the IPL) but all those discussions had long stopped. I don't find any logic behind bringing this topic back up and blaming board directors by name. What has happened suddenly is that he had to say things by naming Akram or Rahman, besides questioning Durjoy's role in developing the high-performance squad? I don't understand the timing of it. It came up just after Bangladesh had lost to New Zealand (in the first One-Day International). I actually can't believe it," Hassan said.

Cornwall fashions Caribbeans' lead

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SSEVICE
ANTIGUA, 23 MARCH

Rahkeem Cornwall made his highest Test score, sharing a record partnership with Joshua da Silva, as the West Indies secured a vital 99-run lead at the end of the second day of the first Test. The imposing all-rounder closed on 60 not out to push the West Indies to 268/8 off 101 overs, in reply to Sri Lanka's 169, made on the first day.

Cornwall has so far hit two sixes -- both from savage pulls into the western side of the ground, as well as nine fours. He is the first Antiguan to score a half-century at this venue and also has the highest score by a No 9 batsman at the ground. Cornwall has also reached the the highest score by a West Indies No 9 against Sri Lanka in Tests. He featured in a vital eighth-wicket stand with da Silva, who made 46 in his first knock on home soil.

It changed the course of the match as it hauled the West Indies around from relative trouble at 171-7 to 261-8 and a healthy lead. Da Silva fell just before the close, caught behind as he tried to ramp a ball from Dushmantha Chameera down to third man. "I told myself I had to do the job for the team. I was always confident. I knew I was hitting the ball very well coming into the match so I just had to settle in and support Josh at the other end," Cornwall said after the day's play.

"I know I have good bating skills. Tomorrow the first hour will be crucial. They will come back fresh and will look to knock us over, so we have to be mindful of that and look to play well and gather as many runs as we can," he further said.

Earlier, a 56-run second-wicket partnership between John Campbell (42) and Nkrumah Bonner (31) was the best effort by the West Indies top order. However, Sri Lanka paceman Suranga Lakmal made inroads with figures of 5/45, his fourth five-wicket haul in Tests. Lakmal dismissed captain Kraigg Brathwaite (3), then removed Kyle Mayers for an attacking 45 off 70 balls in an hour and a half. The left-hander played some brilliant shots, including a hook over the mid-wicket fence as he struck six fours and two sixes. Lakmal returned to bowl Jermaine Blackwood (2) and Jason Holder (19), leaving the West Indies at 169-6.

Alzarri Joseph was his fifth wicket, caught at point as he flashed a firm drive at an outswinger, before Cornwall and Da Silva came together in the final session.

Spinner Gayakwad restricts SA to 112/7

LUCKNOW, 23 MARCH

Left-arm spinner Rajeshwari Gayakwad picked up three wickets for just nine runs to help India Women restrict South Africa Women to 112 for 7 in the third and final T20 International here on Tuesday. Gayakwad (3/9) was the star performer as she bowled with great control and guile to flummox the South African batters while fellow slow bowlers Radha Yadav (1/24) and Deepti Sharma (1/22) chipped in with impressive displays.

Skipper Sune Luus was the top-scorer for South Africa with 28 while Lara Goodall finished with 25 not out from 17 balls after they were asked to bat. Sinalo Jafta (16) and Goodall took 16 runs in the 17th over bowled by medium-pacer Simran Bahadur. PTI

Kohli says players should be consulted on cricket schedule

AGENCIES
PUNE, 23 MARCH

India skipper Virat Kohli yesterday said players should be consulted on the cricket calendar as the extended bubble life during the coronavirus pandemic had strengthened burnout fears.

With India going into three One-day Internationals against England after winning a gruelling Test series 3-1 and a Twenty20 International series 3-2, Kohli said more attention must be paid to cricketers' mental health. "The players need to be spoken to and consulted," said Kohli.

"Otherwise it's going to be a case of whoever can last through difficult times like this plays, if not then move away and someone else replaces that player." He added: "I don't think that's healthy for a cricket system and

cricket culture moving forward which we definitely want to make stronger and stronger." Responding to suggestions that the 50-over games were out of place in a year dominated by the World Test Championship final and the T20 World Cup, Kohli said:

"Tournament scheduling is something that is not in our control. I think it's very important to consider how much cricket you are playing. It's not just the physical side of thing but the mental side of things as well.

Scheduling and workloads are things that everyone will have to be very aware of," he added. "Especially today where you just don't know where restrictions might come in."

Most players have been in secure bubbles, with only small breaks since last August. From September until January, India's players went through the Indian Premier League and a tour of Australia. Kohli though stayed away from the debate of England's rest-and-rotate policy in the pandemic, saying it was their "internal" matter. England are the reigning 50-over champions and Morgan said they must prove their worth on the hard, dusty wickets. "The challenge for us is always trying to explore and push the limits as much as we can given the conditions," said Morgan.

Shooting WC: Ganemat-Angad pair continues India's dominance with mixed skeet gold

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

The gold rush continued for Indian shooters at the ISSF World Cup on Tuesday as Ganemat Sekhon and Angad Vir Singh Bajwa claimed the skeet mixed team top honours here.

The 20-year-old Ganemat and 25-year-old Angad, who had topped the qualification with a score of 141, produced another good show to beat the Kazakh pair of Olga Panarina and Alexandr Yechshenko 33-29 in the gold medal showdown. It was the only final lined up for the day.

With this, table-topper India's gold haul at the ongoing event went up to seven. The hosts have also won four silvers and as many bronze medals for a total of 15 medals so far in the tournament.

Another Indian pair of Parinaaz Dhaliwal and Mairaj Ahmad Khan, however, missed the bronze medal by a whisker at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range on Tuesday.

Qatar's Reem A Sharshani and Rashid Hamad claimed the bronze medal with a score of 32 against the Indian team's 31. The duo had produced a perfect score in the final four shots even as 19-year-old Dhaliwal crumbled under pressure and missed a shot to miss out on a third place finish.

In the gold medal match, the 25-year-old Angad, world no.62, looked in fine form as he produced a near-perfect show, missing just one out of his 20 shots even as Ganemat stumbled six times.

It was a nail-biting showdown as India and Kazakhstan were level at 16-16 after the first set of 20 targets.

Ganemat got her act together in the second half, producing perfect next four shots and even though Angad missed one, Olga and Alexander both missed two each to give India a 23-20 lead.

In the final four shots, Angad once again produced a confident performance and even though Ganemat missed her last shot, it didn't matter as the Kazakhs were guilty of missing three.

It was the Ganemat's third medal in the ongoing tournament, having claimed a silver along with Parinaaz Dhaliwal, Karttiki Singh Shaktawat in the women's skeet final on Monday.

The 20-year-old had won the country's first-ever ISSF World Cup medal in the women's skeet event when she bagged a bronze on the third competition day.

For Angad, it was his second gold after having claimed the yellow metal along with Gurjoat Khangura and Mairaj Ahmad Khan in the men's skeet final on Monday.

India's youngsters have also been in stupendous form in the tournament and won the mixed team gold medals in both the 10m air pistol and 10m air rifle events on Monday.

While Saurabh Chaudhary and Manu Bhaker netted the 10m air pistol mixed team gold, Divyansh Singh Panwar and Elavenil Valarivan claimed the top finish in the 10m mixed air rifle event.

Indian men won the skeet team event, while the women settled for silver.

Ganemat started shooting on the insistence of her father Amrinder Singh Sekhon in 2015 and soon completed a hat-trick of silver medals in the senior National Shooting Championship in 2018 at Jaipur.

In the selection trials held at KSSR in January, Sekhon had topped qualifying with a score of 120, which was a huge six points ahead of the second place. Ganemat also competed in the 2018 Asian Games in Indonesia, where she finished 10th.

In the other events of the day, Sanjeev Rajput qualified for the finals of the men's 50m Rifle 3 Positions event with a score of 1172, to top the charts. In-fact all three Indians made it to the final scheduled for Wednesday morning.

Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar shot 1165 to finish fifth while Niraj Kumar bagged the eighth and final qualifying spot.

In the Women's 25m Pistol where the first precision round was held, all three Indians were on top of the leaderboard.

Indian number one Rahi Sarnobat was perched at the summit with a score of 291, while Chinky Yadav was lying second with 289.

Manu Bhaker was third with a score of 288. Wednesday has the Rapid Fire round scheduled, before the top eight make it to the final, which is also scheduled on the same day.

Besides the men's 50m Rifle 3 Positions and the women's 25m Pistol, the Women's 50m Rifle 3 Positions final is also slated for the day.

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