

# The Tribune

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

CHANDIGARH | GURUGRAM | JALANDHAR | BATHINDA | VOL. 141 NO. 78 | 22 PAGES | ₹6.00 | REGD. NO. CHD/0006/2021-2023 ESTABLISHED IN 1881

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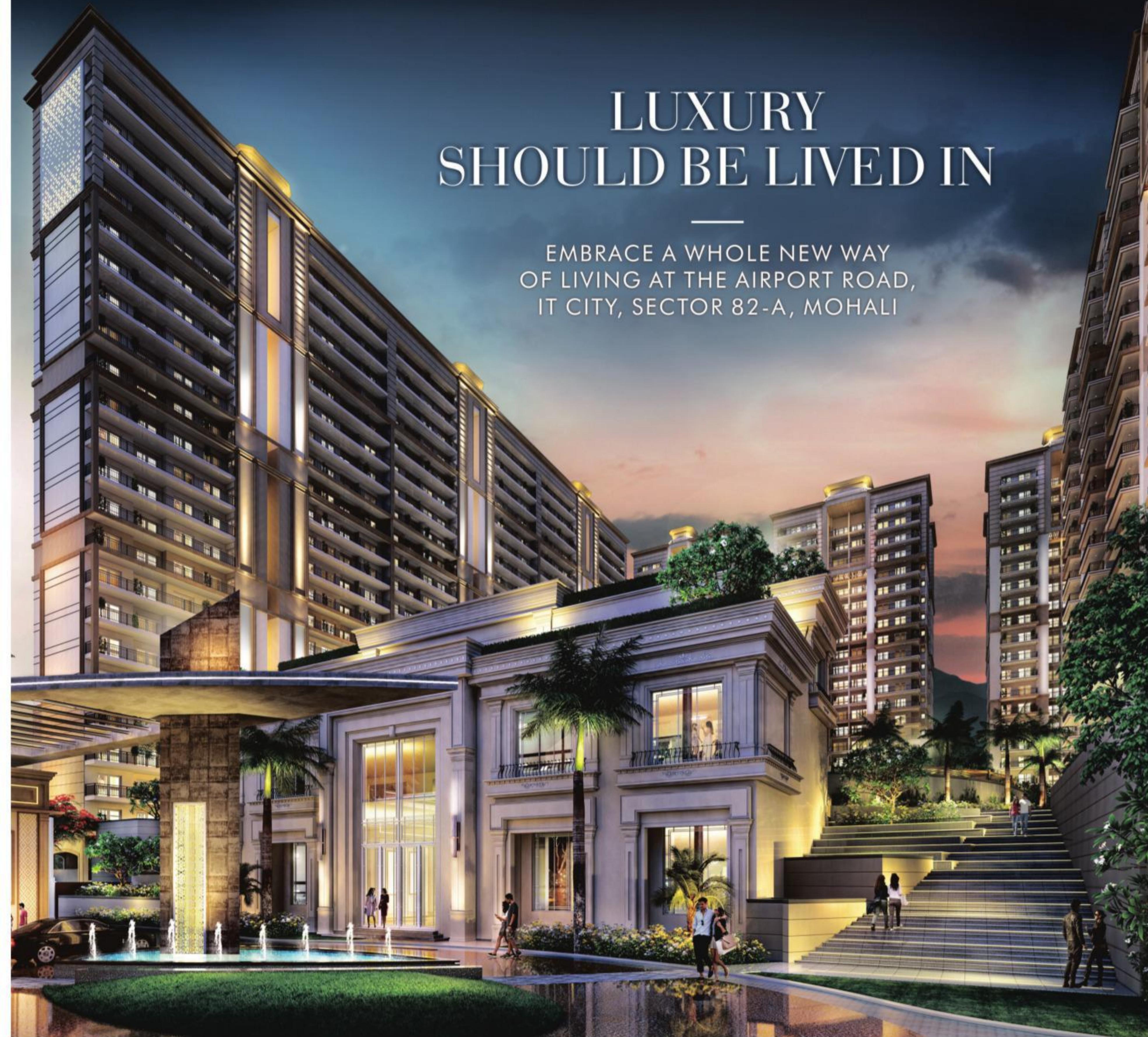
SATURDAY | 20 MARCH 2021

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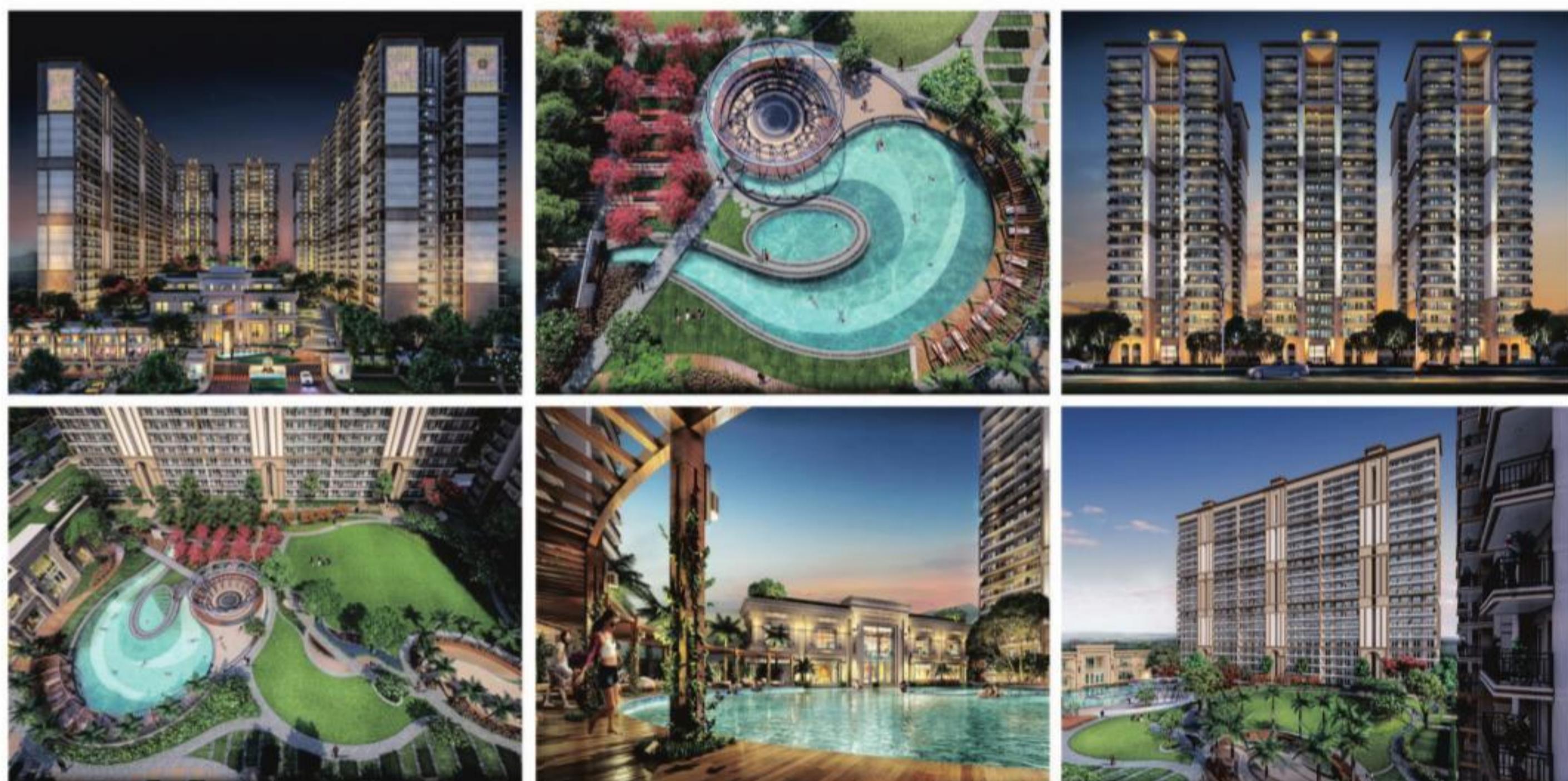
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NO HC RELIEF FOR MEHBOOBA  
IN MONEY LAUNDERING CASE **J&K**

INDIAN ECONOMY LIKELY TO GROW  
AT 12%: MOODY'S **BUSINESS**

NIKHAT STUNS WORLD CHAMPION,  
ENTERS BOXING SEMIS **SPORT**

SATURDAY | 20 MARCH 2021

**Adopt 3-T Mantras to Break the Chain - Together We Fight Corona Strain**

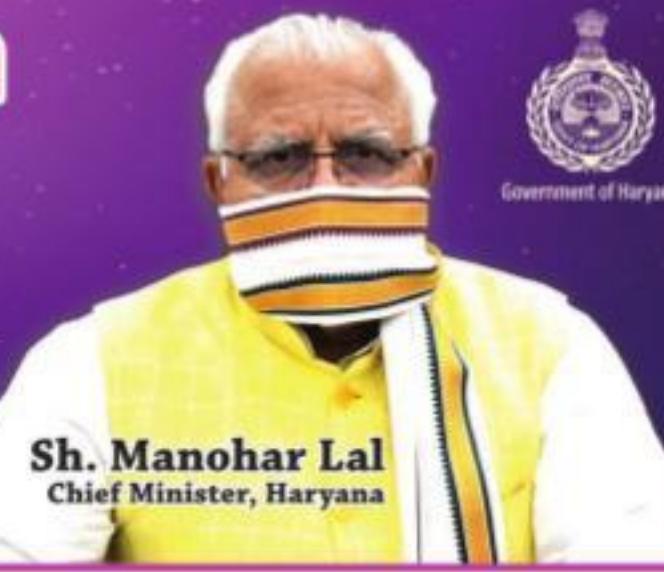
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for not wearing  
mask

Mega  
vaccination on  
every Monday  
and Tuesday



## Punjab shuts schools, colleges

Exams postponed | Mask must, violators to be tested | Curbs on theatres, malls

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 19

Amid a surge in Covid-19 cases in Punjab, CM Capt Amarinder Singh has ordered a slew of restrictions beginning Saturday which include closure of all educational institutions till month-end and curbs on cinema halls and malls. The Punjab School Education Board has postponed Class V and VIII examinations, which were to commence from March 22.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17

### FRESH RESTRICTIONS ON GATHERINGS TILL MARCH 31

- Occupancy in cinema halls capped at 50%, 100 persons in malls
- Not more than 10 visitors be entertained in homes
- Procurement now from April 10  
**FOR 11 WORST-HIT DISTS...**
- Ban on social, political events
- In funerals and weddings, only 20 persons allowed
- Cinemas, restaurants, malls to remain closed on Sundays



### JAB NOT FOR ALL

- It is not scientifically necessary to vaccinate all... Priority groups to be revised SOON. Harsh Vardhan, HEALTH MINISTER
- **40K FRESH CASES**

India reported 39,726 new cases in 24 hours. It was on November 29, 2020, that India last saw 41,810 fresh infections.

**4,11,55,978 DOSES GIVEN**

## CBI raids govt offices at 100 locations across 15 states

NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

The CBI on Friday carried out preventive surprise checks at around 100 locations in over 15 states to identify Union Government offices where corrupt practices could be taking place, officials said.

The operation is going on at the offices of Railways and Income Tax Department among others in UP, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Delhi and other places, they said. The agency has coordinated with vigilance teams. — PTI

## LS nod to Bill allowing pvt sector in mine exploration

NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

The Lok Sabha today cleared a significant Bill to allow private players in mineral exploration. Only 10 per cent of India's geological mining potential is currently explored with corresponding rates for South Africa and Australia (comparable mineral potential as India's) considerably high.

"Today is a remarkable day for mining. The government is unshackling the mineral potential of India to make it

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17

## US Defence Secy meets PM; visit to focus on Indo-Pacific stability

AJAY BANERJEE

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

US Defence Secretary General Lloyd Austin arrived here on Friday for discussions to address the "most pressing" challenges facing the Indo-Pacific region. General Austin, here as part of his first three-nation tour as Defence Secretary, later



Austin, Rajnath  
to meet today

called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

India and the US will have separate strategic and military demands for each other when he meets Defence Minister Rajnath Singh along with their delegations tomorrow. It could very well set the tone for cooperation and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17

The breadth of cooperation reflects the significance of our major defence partnership. Llyod J Austin, US SECY OF DEFENCE

## Now, Pak for EAMs' meet

NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

Qureshi on the sidelines of the 'Heart of Asia' conference in Dushanbe on March 30.

Both are expected to attend the meet, part of a regional initiative on Afghanistan. —TNS

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*Chief Minister, Punjab*

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OBCs fixed at Rs.8 Lakh







# Curbs likely on social, religious gatherings

TREBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**SHIMLA, MARCH 19**  
The state government is likely to impose curbs on social, cultural and political functions including fairs in view of rise in Covid cases across the state.

The decision was taken by the Cabinet at its meeting held here today under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur. However, the exact details of the curbs will be known tomorrow after the CM will hold a meeting with DCs and SPs and the final order will be issued.

There is a possibility of 50 per cent of the total capacity occupancy restriction in social, religious and political events in view of rise in Covid cases and related deaths. There could also be a hike in penalty on people found not wearing masks, as many people can still be seen without masks. The Cabinet was of the view that hostels and educational institutions must be closed but the final decision will be taken tomorrow after the DC, SP meeting tomorrow.

## Three deaths, 182 new cases

**SHIMLA, MARCH 19**  
With 182 new Covid cases today, the total positive cases reached 60,389. Besides, three deaths were reported in the last 24 hours.

The surge in positive cases and fatalities continued to be reported.

With a total of three deaths, two in Shimla and



one in Sirmour, the total fatality figure in the state touched 1,003.

The highest number of 65 cases was reported in Una, 52 in Kangra, 24 in Solan, 10 in Shimla, nine in Bilaspur, eight in Mandi, five each in Hamirpur and Kullu and four in Sirmour. — TNS



PRATIBHA CHAUHAN

TREBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**SHIMLA, MARCH 19**  
With 19 per cent reduction in glaciers and rise of 1.6 degree Celsius in temperatures over the last five years, Himachal could be ravaged by Uttarakhand like catastrophe in the coming years.

This apprehension was expressed by none other than by Irrigation and Public Health (IPH) Minister Mahender Singh in the Vidhan Sabha today. The issue was raised by BJP legislator Ramesh Dhawala as Private Member resolution in the Assembly.

"I admit that there has been too much tinkering with nature which could spell doom for us. In case the melting of glaciers continues at the same pace, the day is not far when we too could face disasters like Uttarakhand," he said. While the tempera-



BEAS, SUTLEJ 'REDUCED TO NULLAHS'

- While the temperatures at the national level had risen by 0.86°C, in Himachal there had been a rise of 1.6°C in last 5 yrs
- The IPH Minister said when Beas and Sutlej rivers had been reduced to nullahs in the month of March, one can imagine how grave the situation will be in May-June
- He said scanty rain during the monsoons and less snowfall in winters had resulted in a situation which was alarming

tures at the national level had risen by 0.86 deg Celsius, in Himachal there had been a rise of 1.6 degrees Celsius in the last five years, which was a cause of major concern.

With the threat of a major water scarcity in the coming days looming large, a multi-pronged strategy, including

boring tube wells and hand pumps, will be adopted. "I am of the firm opinion that we will have to take steps to recharge ground water and undertake snow harvesting as only these timely interventions can help address the problem of water scarcity," he opined.

"A meeting of IPH officials

from all over the state has been convened on March 23 to assess the situation and look for solutions so that a master plan can be prepared to tackle water scarcity threat," the minister stated. He said the schemes would be inter-linked so that water can be supplied from a surplus scheme to another by laying pipes, which can be porous to use even later.

"Seeing the various water sources and nullahs already drying up, we apprehend that the water shortage will not just affect drinking water schemes but also irrigation," he stated. He added that permission will be given this year to bore tube wells and hand pumps, though a ban had been imposed in view of the falling ground water level.

The minister said directions had been issued to complete 300-400 small drinking water schemes on priority to meet the scarcity. He announced that 155 rainwater harvesting structures would be made to tackle the drought like situation that is being apprehended.

# Probe into MP's death if family wants: CM

TREBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**SHIMLA, MARCH 19**

Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur today said an inquiry into the death of Mandi MP Ram Swaroop would be ordered only if his family wishes so and requested everyone to not show haste and wait for the investigation by Delhi police to get over.

Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader Mukesh Agnihotri today raised the demand for a CBI inquiry into the death of the MP in the Vidhan Sabha.

"The state and its people have a right to know how such a respected and mature leader can commit suicide. It is only an inquiry which can reveal the real cause of the death," he demanded.

The entire party is in a state of shock and the family is still trying to come to terms with the unfortunate incident where such a respected and dedicated leader died," said Thakur.

"The Mandi MP was a very respected and loved leader and the manner in which he has died is very unfortunate. We too are very saddened by his demise so there is no question of playing politics," said Agnihotri. He, however, added that being a representative of 17.50 lakh people, his death has left many unanswered questions, which need to be probed.

Delhi police complete its investigation and in case the family desires, the government is open to ordering an inquiry into his death", he added.

The Chief Minister said the family had revealed that Ram Swaroop was battling health issues like a prostate growth for which he was planning treatment. "In the recent past he had lost a lot of weight and had also stayed at Kayakalp Naturopathy Centre in Palampur so it would be wrong to make assumptions," he said.

"The entire party is in a state of shock and the family is still trying to come to terms with the unfortunate incident where such a respected and dedicated leader died," said Thakur.

"The Mandi MP was a very respected and loved leader and the manner in which he has died is very unfortunate. We too are very saddened by his demise so there is no question of playing politics," said Agnihotri. He, however, added that being a representative of 17.50 lakh people, his death has left many unanswered questions, which need to be probed.

# FIR against firm for ₹555-cr fraud

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 19**  
The CBI today said it had registered a case against Himachal Pradesh-based Indian Technometal Company Ltd and its directors for an alleged fraud of Rs 555.65 crore towards a consortium of banks led by the erstwhile Corporation Bank.

Following the registration of the case, CBI spokesperson RC Joshi said the agency sleuths conducted searches on the premises of the accused and the firm at Kan-

gra (Himachal Pradesh), which led to the recovery of incriminating documents.

The two directors of Indian Technometal Company Limited named in the CBI FIR are Rakesh Kumar Sharma and Vinay Kumar Sharma.

Joshi said the action followed a complaint from the Union Bank of India (erstwhile Corporation Bank) alleging that the private company, through its directors in conspiracy with others, had defrauded the con-

soritum by misrepresentations, concealment of facts and submission of false documents and information to avail credit facilities.

"The default on payments caused a loss to the tune of Rs 555.65 crore to the consortium which also included the State Bank of Hyderabad (now SBI), Punjab National Bank, Punjab & Sindh Bank, UCO Bank, Syndicate Bank, Central Bank of India, Karur Vysya Bank and JM Financial ARC," Joshi said. — TNS

# Canal breach in Punjab poses threat in Kangra

RAJIV MAHajan

**NURPUR, MARCH 19**

The water being released by the Shahnehar barrage authorities at Talwara in Punjab for the past two days without intimation to the Himachal Pradesh administration has posed a threat to the safety of residents and their livestock in mand areas of Fatehpur and Indora subdivisions in Kangra district.

As per information, the Shahnehar canal breached



A waterlogged field in the mand area of Fatehpur.

at certain points from the barrage (52 gate) to the Mukerian hydel power proj-

ect and the Punjab IPH Department, which controls this canal, released water

into the Beas river. The repair work will likely be completed by April-end.

The Beas river water flooded mand areas where fields with standing wheat crop were submerged. As many as 10 houses of Gujjars at Bahadpur are under threat. Their paths and approach roads were submerged yesterday. A bridge on the mand-Bahadpur link road also got partially damaged. Fatehpur SDM Balwan Chand, who rushed to

the spot last evening, told The Tribune that the traffic movement on the bridge had been stopped.

He said after taking the issue of flood menace in the mand area, the Shahnehar barrage authorities had reduced canal water discharge to 6,000 cusecs last evening. He said in the past too, the authorities had released canal water without any intimation in October last year and January this year.

# Cooperatives on march in Punjab

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- State of Art Gur/Jaggery Manufacturing Project is being set up at Budhewal Coop. Sugar Mill.
- Indian Oil Retail Outlets are being set up in all the Cooperative Sugar Mills with all the investments to be made by the IOC.
- 300 ton per day Bio-CNG project from Paddy Straw (Prali) is being setup at closed Sugar Cooperative Sugar Mill at Rakhra (Patiala) in collaboration with Indian Oil Corporation Limited.

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# Pakistan's changing idea of national security



**TARA KARTHA**  
FORMER DIRECTOR, NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL SECRETARIAT

**T**Hese are stirring times in Islamabad, where the rich and the powerful gathered for the first-ever Islamabad Security Dialogue (ISD) on March 17-18. In Pakistan, the rich and the powerful are either politicians, businessmen or those in khaki, or even all three. And since it is they who run the country, what they say usually matters. The Dialogue was inaugurated by Prime Minister Imran Khan, while the keynote address was delivered by army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa. Of the two, it's obvious who one would listen to. And it was quite something.

The ISD was organised by the National Security Division, a body originally set up under Nawaz Sharif to serve as the secretariat of the Cabinet Committee on National Security which replaced the Defence Committee of the Cabinet. Later called the National Security Committee, it was notified as the 'principal decision-making body on national security' in a move quite unlike the advisory role such bodies have in most countries. That it included the service chiefs hardly needs to be said.

At present, the division is headed by a secretary-level officer. An added post in national security bureaucracy is in the form of a special adviser to the PM,

Moeed Yusuf, an academic from the US, who has been in the news for possible backchannel talks with India.

It is this division which seems to have initiated the ISD, together with five leading think-tanks of the country, the Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies, Islamabad Policy Research Institute, Institute of Strategic Studies, Institute of Regional Studies and National Defence University's Institute of Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis.

The idea is aimed at bringing think-tanks and policy-makers together, in a praiseworthy effort to benefit both. Bureaucracies the world over are not very different from each other, particularly in South Asia, where there is usually a solid brick wall between the two. The first move to break that wall is the first ever advisory portal, an integrated platform to exchange ideas with universities, think-tanks and the bureaucracies. The second was obviously to get the army chief to lay down the proposals.

For decades, Pakistan's idea of national security was simply India, and anything at all to do with what Delhi did anywhere. This permeated from top to bottom in the bureaucracy, leading to a somewhat lazy and hazy thinking about what Pakistan's actual security constituted, even while outside experts pointed to a seriously water-stressed country, disease, lack of access to health, apart from the obviously unstable politics of extremism and intolerance.

This now seems to be changing, just a little. It started at the beginning of this year. In February, there was talk of Pakistan prioritising geo-economics over other issues. That was echoed by Foreign Minister Qureshi soon after



General Bajwa says national security is not the preserve of armed forces alone. If that is not astonishing enough, there is the offer of regional connectivity. That's not just about CPEC. In simple words, he is offering up Pakistan as a node for regional connectivity. This means Pakistan is ready for roads, railways & shipping to cross its territory into the rest of the world, including India. That's turning South Asian politics on its head.

**NEW PUSH:** Pakistan PM Imran Khan and army chief General Bajwa appear to be keen on a strategic rethink. REUTERS

Khan's visit to Colombo where he rather surprisingly talked about Sri Lanka being part of CPEC. Now at the ISD, PM Khan is talking of comprehensive security astonishingly, saying that security is not just about defence. Unsurprisingly, he praised China's model, as he does at every forum available. Equally unsurprisingly, Kashmir and self-determination went together, which doesn't say very much of his understanding of his country's national security priorities.

But the speech that has been uploaded in full is that of the army chief. And General Bajwa has much to say. First, he says national security is not the preserve of the armed forces alone. Then he places national security within 'South Asia', as the least integrated of regions. Someone in the

audience could ask, whose fault that is, and the chief would have been hard put to answer. On Kashmir, he simply says, "It is time to bury the past and move forward. But for the resumption of the peace process or meaningful dialogue, our neighbour will have to create a conducive environment, particularly in Indian Occupied Kashmir." Nothing on UN resolutions, self-determination or the standard phrases!

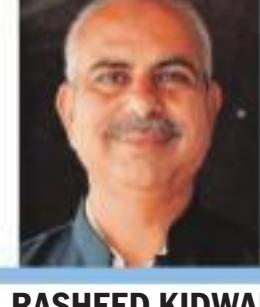
If that's not astonishing enough, there is the offer of regional connectivity. That's not just about China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), though that is offered up as an 'inclusive, transparent' project for global and regional participation, particularly Afghanistan. What follows is best quoted in full. The General says, "Let me also emphasise that while CPEC

remains central to our vision, only seeing Pakistan through the CPEC prism is also misleading. Our immensely vital geostrategic location and a transformed vision make us a country of immense and diverse potential which can very positively contribute to regional development and prosperity."

In simple words, he's offering up Pakistan as a node for regional connectivity. That's something for a country that has stonewalled the SAARC regional connectivity proposals for years, refusing even the Motor Vehicles Pact that would have allowed passenger and cargo movement across the region. This means that Pakistan is ready for roads, railways and shipping to cross its territory into the rest of the world, including India. That's turning South Asian politics on its head.

New Delhi's hardened security experts will pooh-pooh a proposal from an army chief who is on extension, and will probably retire finally in November 2023, three years after he actually ended his tenure. Others will say with more truth that Pakistan is in a jam, given its crumbling economy, CPEC delays and a political milieu that is challenging to say the least. But the army chief is still the 'go-to' person for all foreign officials, distinguished or otherwise. What he says matters since he sits on top of the political food chain. It is as simple as that. Delhi had better consider this connectivity push and its pros and cons rather than dither about Bajwa's hostile antecedents. Here is an opportunity. Take it up. It might mean money, and a lot of it.

# Lack of hands-on approach hurting Congress



**RASHEED KIDWAI**  
SENIOR JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR

A group of Congress dissenters, known as G-23, is waiting for a poll debacle. Sharad Pawar has already started floating the trial balloon of a 'third front'. Pawar's NCP is a part of the ruling alliance in Maharashtra with the Shiv Sena and the Congress, but the NCP is backing the Left in Kerala and Mamata Banerjee's TMC in West Bengal. Pawar claims to be in talks with regional parties over the formation of a 'third front' whose objective is to isolate the Congress and take on the NDA.

**T**HE Congress is contesting the Assembly polls in four states and a UT with a 'piecemeal' and ad hoc survival strategy, taking the grand old party from one crisis to the next.

On May 2, 2021, if the Congress fails to dislodge Sarbananda Sonowal in Assam or Pinarayi Vijayan in Kerala, Rahul Gandhi's prospects of leading a united Congress or returning as the 87th president of the AICC will take a nosedive.

A group of Congress dissenters, known as G-23, is waiting for a poll debacle. Veteran Sharad Pawar has already started floating the trial balloon of a 'third front'. Pawar's NCP is a part of the ruling alliance in Maharashtra with the Shiv Sena and the Congress, but the NCP is backing the Left in Kerala and Mamata Banerjee's TMC in West Bengal. Pawar claims to be in talks with regional parties over the formation of a 'third front' whose objective is to isolate the Congress and take on the NDA.

Rahul Gandhi has spent far too many hours in Kerala, where most opinion poll surveys have given the ruling LDF an edge over the Congress-led UDF.

A worried party leadership is now



**GRIM PROSPECTS:** The Congress' ad hoc survival strategy is taking the grand old party from one crisis to the next. PTI

eyeing Assam as a 'face-saver'. The Congress is relying heavily on perfume baron Badruddin Ajmal's All-India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), which has a considerable influence on the Bengali-speaking Muslims of Assam.

However, the Congress' campaign in Assam is suffering as it does not have a chief ministerial candidate. In fact, in all poll-bound states, the Congress is going without a 'chehra' (face), though in Kerala, it is widely assumed that in the event of an electoral success, Oommen Chandy would return as the chief minister. However, K Muraleedharan's nomi-

nation from the prestigious Nemom Assembly seat has generated a lot of interest. Muraleedharan is the son of former Congress Chief Minister Kannoth Karunakaran and the sitting MP from Vadakara.

The Congress' Puducherry story is bizarre. Puducherry may be a tiny UT of 30 Assembly seats, but it was considered 'safe' until a month ago when Chief Minister V Narayanasamy lost majority on the floor of the House. As if the February 22 setback was not enough, the Congress denied the former chief minister a ticket to contest the Assembly polls. In fact, the seat went to ally DMK's quota.

Sitting 2,370 km away, the political developments in Puducherry have caused huge resentment at New Delhi's 24, Akbar Road, the AICC headquarters. Leaders, who do not wish to be named, wonder why Narayanasamy was allowed to continue in office if he was not going to be fielded or lead the party from the front.

Narayanasamy's in-house bete noire A Namassivayam had left the Congress in February, setting in motion a spate of resignations that led to the fall of the Narayanasamy government in Puducherry.

Apparently, Puducherry had not been a priority for the Gandhis — Rahul and Sonia — who, until November 2020, had relied heavily on Ahmed Patel to look into the political management of UTs like Puducherry. In Patel's death, Narayanasamy lost his mentor and influential contact in the party's Delhi durbar.

There are reports that Rahul Gandhi not only got deeply upset with Narayanasamy's inability to keep his flock together but also his failure to translate a fisherman's complaint accurately. When Rahul was interacting with the fishermen's community at Nelliellope, a woman reportedly had complained to Rahul how the Chief Minister had not come to them during the cyclone. When Rahul turned to the chief minister to know what the middle-aged woman had spoken in Tamil, Narayanasamy is said to have played with words to absolve himself of any laxity, turning

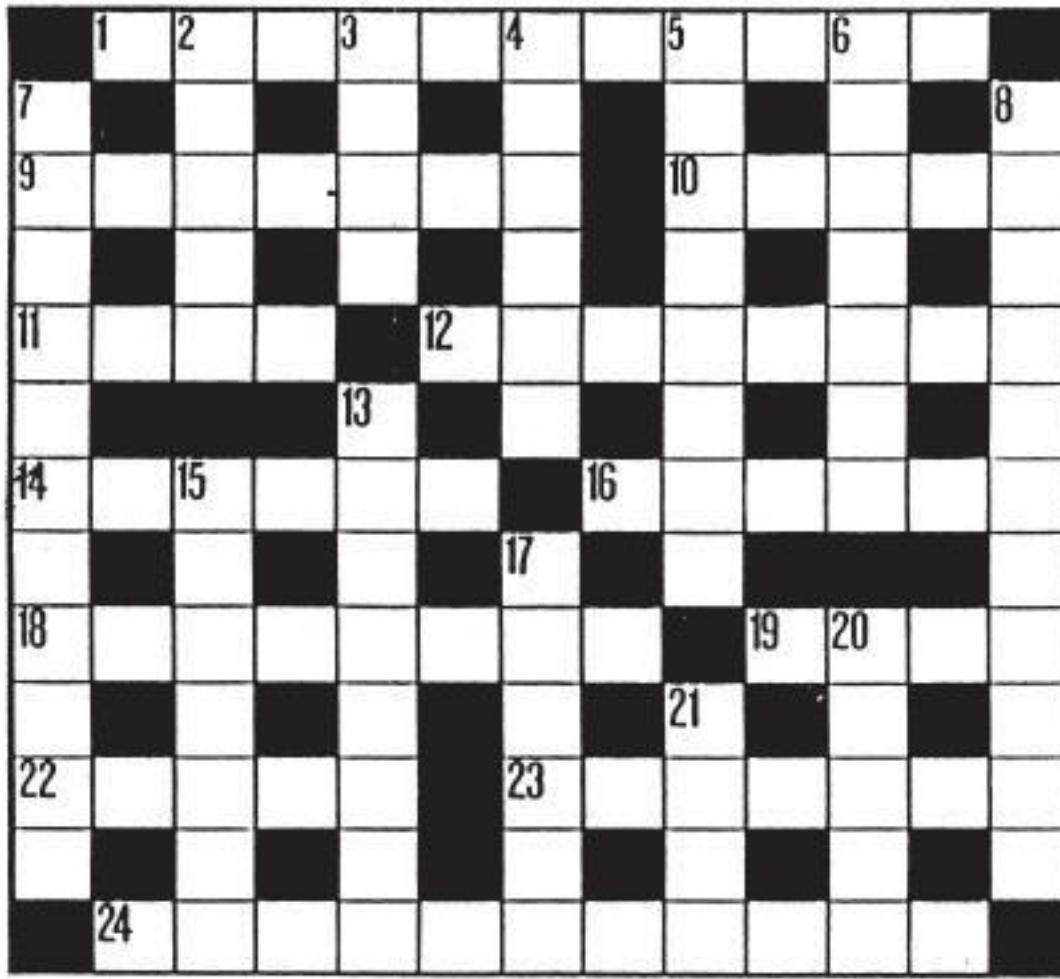
the complaint into praise. The Gandhis' lack of a hands-on approach is hurting the Congress. Party leaders point out that Capt Amarinder Singh, Bhupesh Baghel and Ashok Gehlot seem to be doing a good job in the party-ruled states (Punjab, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, respectively), where they have been projected as credible regional satraps.

After the current round of Assembly polls, the Congress will face elections in six more states: Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat. Except for Punjab, the party lacks a face or a cogent political strategy in these states.

Eyebrows have also been raised over Rahul's penchant to shoot long video interviews with academics which bring little or nothing for the poll campaign. Congress leaders say Rahul's election campaign period should have been carefully utilised in the form of interviews with popular TV news channels and leading newspapers of the eastern and southern states. The complaint against Rahul's philosophical vagaries is that he has not been making significant political points which can provide a last-minute fillip to the Congress' prospects in Kerala, Assam and Puducherry.

On May 2, the alliance's potential success in Tamil Nadu would not suffice as it would be more of a DMK victory than that of the Congress. Ditto in West Bengal, unless a surprise — a hung House — makes the Congress-Left alliance relevant.

## QUICK CROSSWORD



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

Across: 1 Settle, 4 Acid test, 9 Mock-up, 10 Comedown, 12 Balm, 13 Unity, 14 Fine, 17 Dispirited, 20 Lay it on thick, 23 Moot, 24 Gawk, 25 Till, 28 Ecstatic, 29 Rising, 30 Exponent, 31 Invert.

Down: 1 Somebody, 2 Ticklish, 3 Loud, 5 Cook the books, 6 Deep, 7 Exotic, 8 Tunnel, 11 In mitigation, 15 Jihad, 16 Sloth, 18 Divisive, 19 Skylight, 21 Impede, 22 Toss-up, 26 Lawn, 27 Sign.

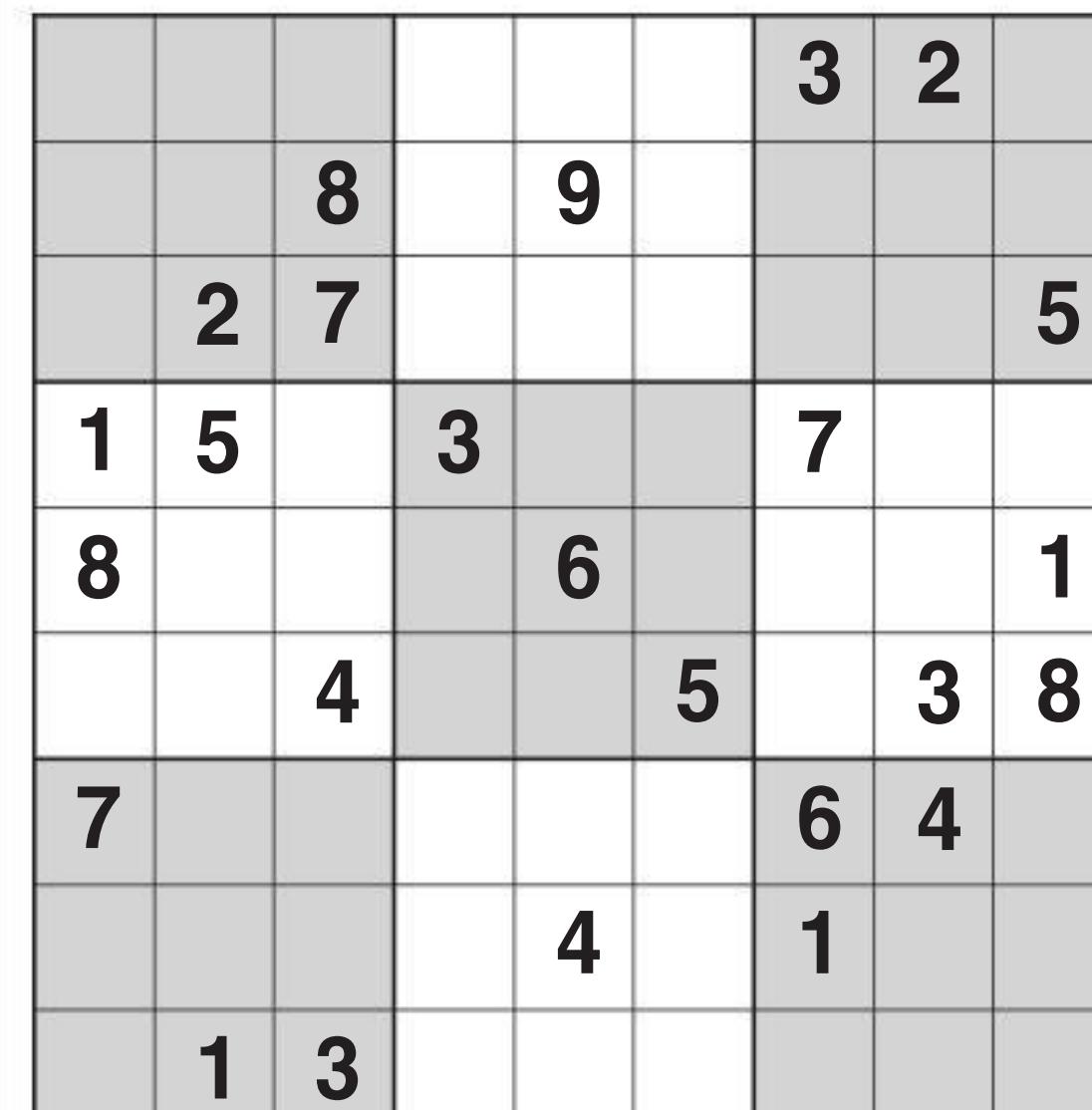
## ACROSS

- 1 Made simpler and more efficient (11)
- 9 Bad feeling (3,4)
- 10 Goodbye (5)
- 11 Careful attention (4)
- 12 False belief (8)
- 14 Serving temporarily (6)
- 16 Back part of gun barrel (6)
- 18 Plastered with first coat (8)
- 19 Detect (4)
- 22 Sugar coating (5)
- 23 Embarrassed (7)
- 24 Experiencing difficulties (2,4,5)

## DOWN

- 2 Fine silk net (5)
- 3 Title of Muslim ruler (4)
- 4 A disease on plants (6)
- 5 Rushing (2,1,5)
- 6 Large imposing building (7)
- 7 Perfectly sound (5,2,4)
- 8 Reverse the trend of events (4,3,4)
- 13 Entice (8)
- 15 Strained relations (7)
- 17 Depart suddenly (6)
- 20 Carpentry tool (5)
- 21 Predatory seabird (4)

## SU DO KU

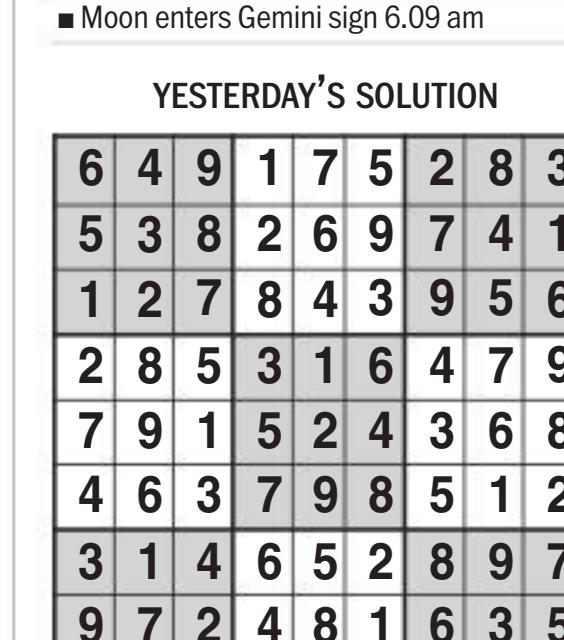


## CALENDAR

MARCH 20, 2021, SATURDAY

- |                                   |      |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| ■ Vikrami Samvat                  | 2077 |
| ■ Shaka Samvat                    | 1942 |
| ■ Phalgun Shaka                   | 29   |
| ■ Chaitra Parvishtha              | 7    |
| ■ Hijri                           | 1442 |
| ■ Shukla Paksha Tithi             | 7,   |
| ■ Priti Yoga up to 11.57 am       |      |
| ■ Rohini Nakshatra up to 4.46 pm  |      |
| ■ Moon enters Gemini sign 6.09 am |      |

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



## FORECAST

SUNSET: SATURDAY 18:34 HRS  
SUNRISE: SUNDAY 06:25 HRS

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	33	16
New Delhi	34	17
Amritsar	30	14
Bathinda	31	14
Jalandhar	30	14
Ludhiana	33	16
Bhiwani	34	15
Hisar	34	16
Sirsia	32	16
Dharamsala	22	10
Manali	19	06
Shimla	21	11
Srinagar	19	05
Jammu	30	16
Kargil	04	-02
Leh	03	-06
Dehradun	32	16
Mussoorie	22	11

TEMPERATURE IN °C





















## 50-year-old abortion law amended to aid sexual assault victims



IN PARLIAMENT

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 19**  
The Parliament on Friday approved a Bill that eases abortion rules for victims of rape, incest and for mothers bearing abnormal foetuses. The Lok Sabha cleared amendments passed by the Rajya Sabha on March 16, paving the way for President Ram Nath Kovind to grant assent to the Bill.

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Amendment Bill, 2020, eases abortion conditions for a range of women survivors of assault. Under the 1971 law, surgical abortion of foetuses beyond 20 weeks was illegal. The amended Bill allows vic-

tims of rape and incest; minors and differently abled to abort foetuses with upper gestation age limit of 24 weeks instead of 20 weeks and scraps the upper gestation age limit for abortion in cases of abnormal foetuses that are incompatible with life and pose a risk to the mother.

The Bill follows several court petitions seeking permission to abort pregnancies at a gestational age beyond the permissible limit on grounds of foetal abnormalities or sexual violence.

The amended Bill says, "The upper gestation limit will not apply in cases of substantial foetal abnormalities diagnosed by a medical board. Also the name and other particulars of a woman whose pregnancy has been terminated shall not be revealed except to a person authorised in any law for the time being in force." — TNS

## Okay to deny reproductive tech to live-in, same-sex couples: Panel

**ADITI TANDON**  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 19**

In a move with far-reaching ramifications for gender justice and LGBTQ rights, the parliamentary committee on health on Friday said it was correct on the part of the government to exclude live-in and same-sex couples from availing the benefits of assisted reproductive technologies to have children in the event of infertility.

In its report to Parliament on the Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Bill, 2020, today, the committee said, "Given the Indian family structure and social milieu and norms, it will not be very easy to accept a child whose parents are together, but not legally married. We feel that keeping the best interest of that child born through ART services and other parentage issues in case of

### BILL TO MODIFY LIST OF SCs IN TN PASSED

The Lok Sabha on Friday passed the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2021, which seeks to modify the list of Scheduled Castes in Tamil Nadu by grouping seven castes that currently exist as separate castes under one nomenclature of "Devendrakula Vellalars". Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment Thawar Chand Gehlot called the change in nomenclature a long-pending demand of the community. TNS

their separation, it would not be appropriate to allow live-in couples and same-sex couples to avail the facility of ART."

In saying so, the panel endorsed the government's definition of a couple commissioning ART service as "infertile married couple". Earlier, the government had similarly excluded live-in and same-sex couples from the ambit of the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2019.

The ART Bill, 2020, makes no groundbreaking distinction even though the parlia-

mentary panel says it took into account the SC order decriminalising same-sex relationships. Endorsing the Bill, the parliamentary panel, however, differed with the government, which has excluded people with genetic disorders from the ambit of ART Bill.

"Consider incorporating the provision of ART services to individuals with any medical condition, including genetic disorders," the panel says, while leaving out same-sex and live-in couples noting, "Though the SC decrim-

inalised same-sex relations, it did not introduce any special provisions or grant any additional rights to same-sex couples. The same applies for people who are in live-in relationships."

The ART Bill seeks to regulate all forms of assisted reproductive technologies, barring surrogacy, which has been covered by a separate law.

It will create a National Advisory Board and state-level boards apart from a national registry for accreditation, and supervision of all ART clinics that offer services like gamete donation, intrauterine insemination (IUI), in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), intracytoplasmic sperm injection and pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD). The sector has been operating in a regulatory vacuum leading to unethical practices.

Will hike wages of tea workers: Rahul



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has lunch with a tea garden worker in Dibrugarh district of Assam on Friday. PTI

## In TN, Haasan promises income for homemakers

### ASSEMBLY POLLS 2021



3,000 "value rights assistance" to them in its poll manifesto, but maintained it was not a sole. It also promised a monthly aid of Rs 5,000 to select group of people, including those aged 75.

Haasan said through skill development, women could earn as much as Rs 10,000 per month and "that is what we call payment to housewives". — PTI

## RSS denies marking houses of Ram Temple fund donors

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 19**  
The RSS today dismissed allegations that the sangh volunteers "marked houses" while carrying out the nationwide fundraising exercise for Ram Temple, the Ram Mandir Nidhi Samarpan Abhiyan.

Addressing mediapersons at the two-day Akhil Bharatiya

Pratinidhi Sabha meeting in Bengaluru, RSS Sahasrkaryavah Manmohan Vaidya said, "The sangh believes that those who contributed funds are its own and so are those who did not."

"The sangh does not believe in differentiating on any basis," he said. — TNS

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## Fair elections becoming distant reality: TMC MPs

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 19**  
The ECI's reported decision to not allow state police personnel in a radius of 100 m on any polling booth in West Bengal has drawn flak from the state's ruling TMC.

Citing media reports regarding the decision, the TMC on Friday accused the Election Commission of "bias" and said holding elections in West Bengal in a free, fair and transparent manner was "becoming a distant reality". In a memorandum presented to the EC by a TMC delegation, the TMC said the decision amounted to casting aspersions on the reputation of the police administration in the state. — TNS

### BUTTERSCOTCH



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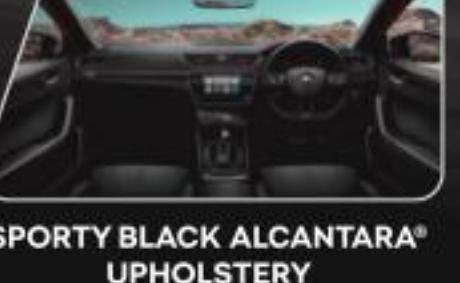
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