



Three held for shooting at man in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Two persons shot at a man in north-east Delhi's Seelampur area. Both sides have criminal record, the police said on Thursday. The accused, along with another man, have been held.

The police said that the incident was reported on Wednesday night. The police control room received a call regarding an incident of firing reported at Seelampur. Shawez and Sahil had fired at one Kallu after which the victim was rushed to a hospital, the police were told.

During investigation, Shawez, Sahil and Aman were apprehended. One countrymade pistol and one semi-automatic pistol have been recovered from their possession, the police said.

During interrogation, it was found that Shawez and Kallu had an old dispute. The police said that Shawez was previously involved in a case of attempt to murder.

Air Quality of Delhi-NCR			
Delhi	182	Gurugram	138
Ghaziabad	242	Faridabad	141
Noida	187	Greater Noida	254
■ Good 0-50	■ Satisfactory 51-100	■ Moderate 101-200	■ Poor 201-300 ■ Very Poor 301-400 ■ Severe 400+ Air Quality Index at 4 p.m. yesterday (Average of past 24 hours)   Source: CPCB

# Man kills children and wife before ending life

Note found; exact reason for incident yet to be ascertained

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

A 31-year-old DTC contractual bus driver allegedly took his life after killing his wife and two children in Naharpur village of Rohini, the police said on Thursday.

The bodies were found in their house, the police said. A note has been recovered from the spot, the police said.

**Joint family**  
The couple and their children lived in a joint family on the second floor of the house while his parents lived on the first floor. His elder brother along with his family lived on the first

Legal action has been initiated and further investigation is in progress

PRANAV TAYAL  
DCP (Rohini)

floor too.

On Thursday morning, the bus driver's father called the police after nobody opened the door despite knocking several times.

The police broke open the door to find all the members dead, a senior officer said. All of them were taken to a nearby hospital where they were declared brought dead, he said.

Legal action was initiat-

ed and further investigation is in progress, said Deputy Commissioner of Police (Rohini) Pranav Tayal.

**Knife recovered**

A kitchen knife used in commission of crime was recovered, the police said, adding bodies were handed over to the family after post-mortem. The police added that they are going through the details mentioned in the note to ascertain the exact reason of the incident.

*Suicide prevention helpline: Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health, 011-4076 9002, Monday-Saturday (10 a.m.-7.30 p.m.)*

# Delhi Model Virtual School will provide education remotely'

It will have regular teaching-learning activities: Sisodia

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Thursday said that the Delhi Model Virtual School, announced recently during the budget, will strive to provide education to students remotely through personalised teaching-learning, effective assessments and use of cutting-edge technology.

**Outlining the scope**

He presided over a meeting to outline the scope of the Delhi Model Virtual School with various departments of the government.

"This school will have regular teaching-learning activities, assessments and all other education-related

The school will operate with the principle of 'anywhere living, any time learning, any time testing'. The virtual school will cater to a wide cross-section of students

MANISH SISODIA  
Deputy Chief Minister

home, sportspersons and artists who need to devote adequate time towards honing their skills, school dropouts and other youth who want to complete their education.

**Discussions**

The government said that various existing models of virtual schools in the U.S. and New Zealand were discussed in the meeting.

The Minister also constituted a six-member committee comprising school principal, teachers, and Information Technology officials to study global best practices in virtual schooling and submit a blueprint for Delhi's virtual school within a week.

Schools to continue with online classes in new session

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government on Thursday said that physical attendance at schools for students of any class in the new academic session is not needed till further orders.

In an order issued by the Directorate of Education (DoE), schools were told that teaching and learning activities may commence from April 1 for students through digital mode for academic session 2021-22.

"It is clarified that students of any class should not be called physically to school for the academic session 2021-22 till further orders. However, teaching-learning activities may be commenced from April 1, 2021 for students through digital modes for the new academic session," the DoE said.

It added that students of Classes IX to XII (session 2020-21) may be called to school only for providing academic guidance and support to them for mid-term exams, pre-board/annual/board examinations, practical exams, project work, internal assessment following the standard operating procedure to ensure protection from COVID-19 and with the consent of the parents.

# Man hires duo to get shot in desperate bid to avoid money owed

He had to return sums taken from people and planned attack on himself to gain sympathy, say police; attackers held

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Two persons were arrested for allegedly firing at their friend in east Delhi's Kalyanpuri. The victim had asked the arrested persons to do it as he did not want to return money he had taken from people on the pretext of providing jobs, the police said on Thursday.

Around 1.20 a.m. on March 17, the police were informed that one Mohammad Abbas, a resident of Kalyanpuri, had sustained a

bullet injury and was admitted in Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital.

**Unknown persons'**

When the police reached, Abbas told them that two unknown persons had fired at him near Shiv Mandir. He also said that one Hasan Mohamad was involved in the incident.

During investigation, it was revealed that Abbas works at Patiala House Court and he had taken ₹6 lakh from one Shah Alam, nephew of Hasan Mohamad, on the pretext of providing government job. He had also taken money from other people.

The police then found a friend of Abbas' - Arshad -

who revealed that a few days ago, Abbas had asked him to shoot him as he wanted to gain sympathy and did not want to return the money, but Arshad refused to do so.

**Hired for ₹50,000**

"Later, on the basis of technical surveillance, Abbas' friend Juber was appre-

hended. He revealed that Abbas had contacted him and told him about his plan. Juber agreed to commit the crime as the victim promised him ₹50,000," Mr. Yadav said.

Juber and Rashid then reached the spot and met the victim where they shot him in the waist and fled to Meerut.

# Fire breaks out at Sabzi Mandi

None injured; short circuit suspected, say fire officials

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

A fire broke out at a shop in Rani Bagh's Sabzi Mandi in north-west Delhi on Thursday, Delhi Fire Service officials said.

No injuries have been reported yet, they said. A call was received around 10.56 a.m. after which nine fire tenders were rushed to the spot, a senior fire official said.

The fire broke out at one of the shops and later spread to around 40 shops. A short circuit is suspected to be the cause of the blaze,



The fire spread to around 40 shops. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

he said.

An officer said that the fire spread to other shops due to the tarpaulin as partition between the shops and

strong winds. The fire was doused around 12.20 p.m., while the cooling process were on for a few hours, he said.

# Sisodia talks collaboration for quality education

Minister holds discussion with DU V-C

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Thursday met Delhi University Vice-Chancellor P.C. Joshi to discuss resolution of pending issues and collaboration for quality education.

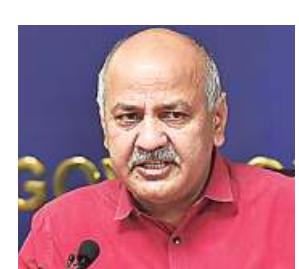
Mr. Sisodia said that the meeting with Mr. Joshi was a fruitful one with discussions on how the Delhi government and DU could collaborate to provide innovative and high-quality higher education to the students of Delhi.

Over the past few months, 12 DU colleges that are fully funded by the Delhi government have raised complaints over delays in the release of grants and appointment of senior administrative officers to the colleges.

Earlier, the varsity had written to the Delhi government seeking a withdrawal of the order, citing that it is "not tenable".

The governing body (GB) of the colleges is the appointing authority of all the non-teaching posts... and accordingly, appointment of non-teaching posts are made by the GB in consonance with the eligibility criteria and mode of recruitment envisaged under the new Recruitment Rules, 2020, notified by the university in this behalf," the letter had read.

Further, in its communication to the government, the varsity had added that issuance of such orders were contrary to the recruitment rules and other university



Meeting with Mr. [P.C.] Joshi was a fruitful one with discussions on how the Delhi government and DU could collaborate to provide innovative and high-quality higher education to the students of Delhi

MANISH SISODIA  
Deputy Chief Minister

Withdrawing transport allowance is mindless'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Responding to a circular issued by the JNU administration on recovery of transport allowance during the COVID-19 lockdown, citing a Ministry of Finance directive, the JNU Teachers' Association on Thursday said that the attempt to recover the allowance was bereft of any logic.

The circular states that transport allowance is not payable during the period to those who have not attended office physically.

"Seeking details of physical attendance in office from March 23 to May 20, 2020, when people were forced to work from home due to the lockdown, appears odd. The fact that the lockdown specifically mandated people to stay at home and not step out unless there were emergencies, seems forgotten," the JNTUA said.

The JNTUA said that for the administration to now gather details of physical attendance of employees a year back seems mindless.

"There are a number of other circulars that have been issued by the Finance Ministry which are of benefit to all employees. However, unlike the circular dealing with recovery of transport allowance, the university administration has not shown the same alacrity in dealing with matters that directly benefit employees," it added.

On the solemn occasion of  
**Good Friday**

Punjab Government  
led by  
Chief Minister  
**Capt. Amarinder Singh**

remembers the holy teachings of  
**LORD JESUS CHRIST**

Let us rededicate ourselves to the noble values  
& cherished ideals propagated  
by Lord Jesus Christ  
for the salvation of mankind

Department of Information & Public Relations, Punjab



**Timings****DELHI**

FRIDAY, APR. 02
RISE 06:10 SET 18:40
RISE 23:58 SET 09:34
SATURDAY, APR. 03
RISE 06:09 SET 18:40
RISE 00:00 SET 10:27
SUNDAY, APR. 04
RISE 06:08 SET 18:41
RISE 01:02 SET 11:25

**Delhi Weather**

max min

Delhi City 34 18

Safdarjung 34 18

Palam 36 17

Delhi Palam Today

35°C Dryness would continue,

Dry moderate gusty winds

would prevail. Sunny warm

day likely.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow

35°C Surface winds speed

would decrease. Light to

moderate surface winds

would continue during the sunny

warm day.

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THE HINDU  
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Lieutenant Governor Anil Baijal on Tuesday chaired a meeting on e-waste management in Delhi in which he emphasised the need of putting in place an effective framework.

The management discussed a regime of incentives and disincentives for ensuring proper disposal of e-waste, effective enforcement of extended producers responsibility, geo-tracking of e-waste and assimilation of traditional waste collectors into formal set up, a statement from L-G office read.

**DPCC fines EDMC ₹40L over fire at Ghazipur site**

'Give report on steps taken within 15 days'

**STAFF REPORTER****NEW DELHI**

The Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) issued a penalty of ₹40 lakh to the East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC) for a recent fire at the Ghazipur landfill, said authorities.

After the fire, Environment Minister Gopal Rai had directed the DPCC to hold an inquiry and the fine was imposed on his directions.

He said they have also asked the EDMC to prepare a detailed report on the steps they are taking. "The EDMC should submit this report within 15 days of getting the notice. The DPCC report also shows that the civic body had no proper ar-

# People over 45 flock to vaccine centres on Day 1 of new round

They welcome government's decision to vaccinate those without co-morbidities

**STAFF REPORTER****NEW DELHI**

Several people, who didn't fulfill the eligibility criteria for vaccinations earlier, reached the inoculation sites on the first day of the drive being extended for those above 45 years.

The recipients welcomed the decision to extend the coverage to a broader category. They said apprehensions regarding the vaccine have gone down as many people have already been inoculated in the past few months.

Vandana Sharma, a 51-year-old housewife, who visited a multispeciality hospital in Kalkaji, said: "I do not have any co-morbidity and hence I was unable to take the vaccine earlier. Even though I am above 50, I missed the criteria because of



People registering for COVID-19 vaccine in the city on Thursday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

this particular issue. I had to wait till it got extended to other categories. In fact, I feel that now it should be extended to other categories as well, including children."

Several of those waiting in line had their family members vaccinated in the earlier phase.

Neeta Hasija, a 55-year-old resident of Govindpuri, said: "While my husband got vaccinated earlier, I had to wait to be eligible as I missed the mark in the previous category. I am happy that it is being slowly extended to all age groups. The response to the vaccine has also been okay so far and hence, I am more confident of taking the jab now."

Many of those turning up at the vaccine centre without prior registration were, however, not permitted to take the vaccine. The extension of the category to be covered under the vaccination drive has also brought relief among many who missed the 60-year age mark, in the previous category.

Champa Roy Barman, 59, said: "I couldn't get vaccinated in the last phase because I missed the age eligibility by just one year. I cannot wait to get vaccinated. It will be a huge relief to get this done, otherwise, there is this constant fear of contracting the virus every time I step out or someone visits."

Champa Roy Barman, 59, said: "I couldn't get vaccinated in the last phase because I missed the age eligibility by just one year. I cannot wait to get vaccinated. It will be a huge relief to get this done, otherwise, there is this constant fear of contracting the virus every time I step out or someone visits."

The government said in 33 private hospitals, beds have been increased by 25% for ICU and 25% for normal ward beds earlier this week due to the increase in cases.

# Explain how contraband reaches prisoners: SC

Give CCTV cover details, Tihar told

**STAFF REPORTER****NEW DELHI**

Due to the upward trend in new COVID-19 cases, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will hold a meeting at 4 p.m. on Friday with Health Minister Satyendar Jain and health department officials.

Owing to the surge in cases, Mr. Kejriwal shall deliberate on preparing an action plan to fight the pandemic, including issues like containment zones, vaccination drive, and maintaining the availability of hospital beds. The departmental officials have also been instructed to prepare and present an action plan to tackle the pandemic," an official statement said.

The order concerns an incident on March 14 when three condemned men were found in an intoxicated condition inside their cells. The officials said the authorities had to use force to bring them to their senses.

However, one of the convicts showed the effects of brutality as he could barely walk. The jail authorities claim there was no CCTV footage of the incident or the medical treatment the men received after they were subdued.

In fact, the Jail Superintendent informed a Bench

led by Justice U.U. Lalit that camera footage is stored only for four days before it is wiped clean. The court responded by ordering Raj Kumar, the Jail Superintendent, to file an affidavit by April "disclosing all the steps undertaken by him in connection with the incident that occurred on March 14".

"The affidavit shall disclose where exactly the CCTV cameras have been installed and whether the control room and the boundary wall of the jail are covered by CCTV cameras or not," the court said in a recent order.

The Bench said the Jail Superintendent should, in the affidavit, also disclose "under what circumstances, materials, such as, tobacco pouches or any other contraband/such things, find their way inside the jail premises..."

# MCG plans pedestrianisation trial again in Sadar Bazar

Shoppers will be allowed to bring only two-wheelers, stretch to eventually become vehicle-free

**ASHOK KUMAR****GURUGRAM**

Encouraged by the visitors' response to the week-long pedestrianisation plan trial for Sadar Bazar here in a bid to decongest the market, the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram has decided to hold another trial for a fortnight from Thursday.

Additional Municipal Commissioner Jaspreet Kaur, also Nodal Officer for the programme, said the response from the visitors was encouraging and therefore, it was decided to hold another trial till April 15.

**Behavioural change**

On the shopkeepers' objection to mark 700-metre-long stretch only for pedestrians, Ms. Kaur said the customers were allowed to ride only two-wheelers on the stretch. "The aim is not to impose



The municipal body will have zero tolerance for encroachment on the stretch, said an official. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the plan on the shopkeepers and the customers, but to bring about a behavioural change. But the relaxation is only for customers. The shopkeepers need to park their vehicles at the designated parking spaces. We eventually plan to make this stretch vehicle-free," said Ms. Kaur. She added that the MCG would have zero tolerance for any encroachment on the stretch.

The shopkeepers had downed the shutters on the first day of the MCG's first phase of trial on March 20. They feared that the customers would be inconvenienced inside the market and that would affect their sales.

space and seven lots were identified with a capacity of 1,500-odd two-wheelers and 200 four-wheelers. She added that the vehicles carrying goods were also allowed to enter the market during specific hours.

Besides the 700-m stretch proposed only for pedestrians, two-wheelers and four-wheelers are allowed in the rest of the market which is spread across 20 hectare.

Sarika Panda Bhatt, founder trustee of Raahgiri Foundation, said that the plan was aimed to decongest Sadar Bazar on the lines of Chandni Chowk and Karol Bagh. She added that the MCG was also open to the idea of allowing a fixed number of e-rickshaws on the stretch. Both, the WRI and Raahgiri Foundation are knowledge partners in the project.

# CM to inaugurate Chandni Chowk redevelopment project on April 17

The completion was delayed by a year due to pandemic

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT****NEW DELHI**

The Delhi government on Thursday said that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will inaugurate the redeveloped main road of Chandni Chowk on April 17 as renovation and beautification works that began in December 2018 have been completed.

**Promote tourism**

The iconic stretch from Red Fort to Fatehpuri Mosque has been made a no-vehicle zone from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. and has been developed to promote tourism in Delhi, the government said.

In a statement, the government said that the area has been renovated to bring back the glory of the historical marketplace, which was in a dilapidated condition, so that people from across



The stretch from Red Fort to Fatehpuri Mosque will be a no-vehicle zone from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. ■ FILE PHOTO: SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

the world could visit.

The government added that during the reconstruction process, the needs of the disabled have also been taken care of and space has been provided for planting small and big plants on both sides of the road so that Chandni Chowk can be

made green. Electric vehicles will also be operated for the convenience of senior citizens.

The project cost the government ₹99 crore and was targeted to be completed by November 2020, but due to the COVID-19 it got delayed by a year.

# 'Submit report on plea over illegal detention'

Preserve footage of post: HC to police

**STAFF REPORTER****NEW DELHI**

The Delhi High Court has ordered the police to preserve the footage of the CCTV cameras installed at a police post here on a plea of a man alleging illegal detention and merciless beating by its officials.

Justice Anu Malhotra also directed the police to submit a status report on the case by next date of hearing on April 8.

The court's order came on a plea by one Umair Siddiqui alleging that there has been a flagrant violation of Article 21 of the

# AAP criticises BJP for 'ruining' city parks, latter cites NGT orders

Lack of irrigation is turning them into dry lands: Bharadwaj

**STAFF REPORTER****NEW DELHI**

The Aam Aadmi Party on Thursday attacked the BJP over the "bad" condition of parks in the city, and alleged that they are drying up despite Delhi government's offer to provide water.

AAP chief spokesperson Saurabh Bharadwaj said that under 14 years of BJP rule, the corporations have ruined the Capital's parks.

The lack of irrigation is turning these parks into dry lands. This step is also distancing the people of Delhi from their 18,000 public parks," the AAP leader said.

In response, Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said that Mr.

"They want this increase in pollution to be attributed to the Kejriwal government. The Delhi Jal Board [DJB] had also prepared a proposal of ₹850 crore for laying down a pipeline from the STPs to the parks as a permanent solution for the civic bodies. The DJB even split the cost of the project among various agencies. The civic body refused not only to pay but also to comment on the proposal when it was sent by the DJB to it for review," he said.

In response, Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said that Mr.

Bharadwaj has again played dirty politics on the parks borewell issue being removed on NGT's guidelines.

He has tried to portray as if the civic bodies are liable to make alternate arrangements for watering of parks while the truth is that as per the orders of NGT, including the latest order on March 26, the DJB is bound to provide free water for parks to civic bodies.

He said that it is said that Mr. Bharadwaj has chosen to misread an order of a constitutional body and we will bring this to the notice of NGT Chairperson.

# CM to meet officials over rising cases

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Due to the upward trend in new COVID-19 cases, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will hold a meeting at 4 p.m. on Friday with Health Minister Satyendar Jain and health department officials.

The order concerns an incident on March 14 when three condemned men were found in an intoxicated condition inside their cells.

The officials said the authorities had to use force to bring them to their senses.

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The order concerns an incident on March 14 when three condemned men were found

**GOVERNMENT OF NCT OF DELHI  
DEPARTMENT FOR WELFARE OF SC/ST/OBC  
B-BLOCK, 2ND FLOOR, VIKAS BHAWAN, NEW DELHI-110002**

**Extended Last date for submission of application  
upto: 30/04/2021**

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

**APPLICATIONS ARE INVITED FOR SCHOLARSHIP SCHEMES FROM THE STUDENTS BELONGING TO SC/ST/OBC CATEGORY OF DELHI FOR THE YEAR 2020-21**

Online applications are invited through e-district portal of Government of NCT of Delhi i.e., [www.edistrict.delhigovt.nic.in](http://www.edistrict.delhigovt.nic.in) for the following scholarship schemes from the students belonging to SC/ST/OBC category of Delhi :

- 1) Reimbursement of tuition fees to the SC/ST/OBC students for class I to XII, studying in recognized public/private schools of Delhi.
- 2) Merit scholarship for students belonging to SC/ST/OBC category studying in Professional/technical Colleges/Institutes/ Universities.
- 3) Dr. B.R. Ambedkar State Award for Toppers amongst SC/ST/ OBC Category Students.
- 4) Financial assistance to SC students for pursuing higher studies aboard. (offline)
- 5) Pre-Matric Scholarship for SC Students
- 6) Post-Matric Scholarship for SC Students
- 7) Pre-Matric Scholarship for OBC Students
- 8) Post-Matric Scholarship for OBC Students

Details of these scholarship schemes, including instructions for applying online by students and verification of applications by educational institutes etc., are available on the official website of the department [www.scstwelfare.delhigovt.nic.in](http://www.scstwelfare.delhigovt.nic.in)

**Appeal: All educational institutes are requested to take all possible measures for students' awareness and assist them in applying for the schemes.**

DIP/Shabdharth/0003/21-22

**PRESS NOTICE ON SHORT TERM BASIS TO BE ISSUED FOR PUBLICATION IN NEWSPAPERS FOR TENDERING**

The Executive Engineer , Jal Shakti Division No.II Kullu at Bhunter invites offline tenders on short time basis on behalf of Government or Himachal Pradesh from approved eligible contractors for the following works:-

S. No.	Name of Work:	Estimated Cost	EMD Cost of Tender	Time of completion of form	Cost of form
01	Providing LWSS to PC Habitation Chanoun in tehsil Banjar District Kullu H.P.(SH)- Installation of and erection of pumping machinery)	211600	4232	One	250

Last date sale of tender forms:- 06-04-2021 upto 5:00 PM and opened on 07-04-2021 up to 12:30 PM. The tender forms/NIT and other detailed conditions can be downloaded from the website [www.hpphp.org](http://www.hpphp.org) from office of the Executive Engineer upto date specified above.  
(Er. Ravinder Kumar Sharma)  
Executive Engineer  
Jal Shakti Division No.II, Kullu at Bhunter

**E-TENDER NOTICE TO BE PUBLISHED IN NEWS PAPERS**

On line e-tender on lump sum/items rate basis are invited by the Executive Engineer, Jal Shakti Division Palampur on behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh in electronic tendering system in two covers for the under mentioned work from the Contractor/Firm of appropriate class.

Name of Work	Estimated cost	EMD	Cost of tender
Work no 1:- Improvement of distribution system of adjoining villages of Bindhi Nallah and various sources of drinking water supply schemes of Palampur area in Tehsil Palampur Distt. Kangra (HP) (SH : C/O water treatment plant 2.13 MLD, .38 MLD, 2Nos. Intake chamber, Underground Storage Tank 78000 litre, 409000 litre, 470000 litre capacity, 143000 litre, 44000 litre, 133000 litre, 52000 litre, 265000 litre, 170000 litre , Over head storage tank 97000 litre, 47000 litre , Gravity main , Providing , and Laying G.M.S Pipe 80 mm dia 2911 Rmt , 100 mm dia = 18879 Rmt , 125 mm dia =728 Rmt , 150 mm dia = 22528 Rmt , Laying & Jointing of GMS Pipe 80 mm dia 7224 Rmt , 100 mm dia 10186 Rmt , 125 mm dia 1772 Rmt , 150 mm dia 372 Rmt and Distribution system Providing and Laying , Jointing 20 to 65 mm dia =33385 , Laying and Jointing GMS Pipe 20 to 65 mm dia 11656 Rmt )	Rs. 13,44,23,332/-	Rs. 13,76,740/-	Rs. 2500/-

Last date of filing/uploading the tender through e-tendering 31/01/2021 upto 11:00 AM and the same will be opened on 16/04/2021 at 11:30 AM. The tender forms and other detailed conditions can be obtained from the website [WWW.hpphp.org](http://WWW.hpphp.org) and [WWW.hptenders.gov.in](http://WWW.hptenders.gov.in).

HIM SUCHNA AVAM JAN SAMPARK

HP /0009/21-22

**GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL CAPITAL TERRITORY OF DELHI  
(DEPARTMENT OF LAW, JUSTICE & LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS)**

8TH LEVEL, C-WING, DELHI SECRETARIAT, NEW DELHI

No. F.5(560)/Lit/LJ/LA/20/3444 Dated 01/04/2021

**NOTICE**

**Sub: Advertisement for the post of Consultant (Insurance) on contractual basis in the Law, Justice & Legislative Affairs Department, Govt. of NCT of Delhi, New Delhi.**

Department of Law, Justice and Legislative Affairs, Government of NCT of Delhi requires the services of Senior Officer of Government Insurance Company retired from the post of Branch Manager or equivalent post having sufficient experience of handling the Group Insurance Schemes. The engagement will be on purely contractual basis with a consolidated remuneration of Rs. 50,000/- (Rupees Fifty Thousand per month only). The engagement is initially for a period of 06 (Six) months which may be extended further as per the requirement. Application format and terms and conditions of engagement can be downloaded from the website of this department [www.law.delhigovt.nic.in](http://www.law.delhigovt.nic.in). Applications complete in all respects alongwith copies of supporting documents should reach this office within 30 days of publication of this notice. Application received after last date or incomplete or without supporting documents will be summarily rejected.

DIP/Shabdharth/0001/21-22

DEPUTY SECRETARY(LAW)

## Farmers to lay siege to Parliament: BKU

'After snatching our farming, the government is planning to target the dairy sector'

**ANUJ KUMAR**

GHAZIABAD  
The Bharatiya Kisan Union has said that farmers would protest Parliament in the next session. Dharmendra Malik, media in-charge, BKU, said following the Samyukt Kisan Morcha's decision, the BKU, which is leading the protest against the contentious farm laws, has decided to take the protest peacefully to Parliament in the next session.

"BJP spokespersons are repeatedly saying that there is nothing black in the farm laws. We challenge them to come on a public platform and we will explain to them what is wrong with the laws," Mr. Malik said.

He took on the govern-



Farmers protesting against the Centre's agriculture laws at the Ghaziabad border in U.P. ■ FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

ment for being eager to sign the Free Trade Agreement with the European Union on dairy industry. "After snatching our farming, the government is planning to wean us of our dairy farming. Along

pose the FTA on dairy industry as well. It will help import dairy products from big players like Denmark and will affect local farmers," he said.

Addressing, the labourers, salaried class and Army men, Mr. Malik said after farmers,

the government would target other groups for its vested interest.

Rajveer Singh, vice-president of the State unit of BKU, said farmers hadn't lost hope. "The government is trying to tire us out. We are responding accordingly. As farmers are busy with wheat and sugar-cane crops till the end of April, we call farmers of one village to carry out the protest for a day. Ghaziabad alone has more than 160 villages," he said.

Criticising the Parliamentary panel, comprising Opposition MPs, for supporting one of the three farm laws, Mr. Singh said it was clear that farmers were providing the real opposition.

## 4 booked after video of assault in U.P. goes viral

**OMAR RASHID**

LUCKNOW

The police in Uttar Pradesh's Bareilly district initiated a probe on Thursday after a man and a woman were dragged out of a shop, assaulted and manhandled by locals in broad daylight. The act was filmed by those present on the spot.

The video of the incident, in which the woman was humiliated by local men, was widely shared on social media.

SP Rural Bareilly Raj Kumar said a case had been registered under Sections 323

(voluntarily causing hurt) and 504 of the IPC at the Hafizganj police station. Four persons were named in the FIR lodged on the complaint of the woman's brother, said the officer.

In the video, a group of unidentified local men can be seen manhandling the two and pushing them around. The man's shirt is torn while the group is seen pulling at the woman's hair and not allowing her to cover her face with a 'dupatta'.

One person was arrested, said SSP Bareilly Rohit Singh Sajwan.

## '18.5 mn trees felled for roads'

**STAFF REPORTER**

A whopping 18.5 million trees have been felled for widening of roads whereas the loss has been compensated by plantation of only 2.9 million trees in Odisha during the past one decade.

The numbers came to light when Forest Minister Bikram Keshari Arukha furnished a reply to a query in the State Assembly earlier this week.

**WESTERN RAILWAY**

**Various Construction Works**

Divisional Railway Manager (WA), Western Railway, 6th floor, Engg. Deptt., Mumbai Central, Mumbai-400 008 invites E-tender as per details given as follows : **Executive :** Sr. DEN (Co) BCT, **Tender Notice No. & Date :** BCT/20-21/398 dttd. 30-03-2021, **Work and location :** Mumbai Central (CFO Yard)-Replacement of existing old Sick Line Building and extension of sick line shed. **Approx Cost of work :** Rs. 20,66,45,02,616.00, **EMD :** NIL. **Date & Time of submission :** On 04.05.2021 till 15.00 hrs., **Date & Time of opening :** On 04.05.2021 at 15.30 hrs. Regarding detailed nature of work, containing cost of tender document, EMD, eligibility criteria, similar nature of work, detailed tender conditions, please visit [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in). Manual offers will not be considered. 0770 Like us on : [facebook.com/WesternRly](https://facebook.com/WesternRly)

**SEARCH FOR MISSING**



General Public is hereby informed that a boy namely **Chand Mohd, S/o Deep Mohd, R/o H.No. 742, Gali No. 05, E-Block, Shri Ram Colony, Khajuri Khas, Delhi, Age: 25 years, Height: 5'8", Built: Medium, Complexion: Fair, Face: Round, Wearing: White Colour Shirt, Blue Colour Pant & Black Colour Shoes** in his feet has been missing from his home since 03.03.2021. In this regard a vide **DD No. 03A dated 06.03.2021** has been lodged at P.S. Khajuri Khas, Delhi.

Any person having any information or clue about the above deceased may kindly inform to the undersigned on the following address or telephone nos.

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**PUBLIC NOTICE**

That my client, Prem Kumar and Jyoti both R/o 6202, C-637, Vasant Kunj, N.Delhi-110070, have disowned and disinherited their son namely Nitish & his Wife Neetu from their all movable & immovable properties on 25th March 2021. Their son and his wife are Beyond their control and supervision.

Date : 31/03/2021  
Manjeet Singh Bal (Advocate) E.NO. D/509/1995

This is for the information of general public that my client Smt.Jagbir Kaur W/o S. Gurvinder Singh Sethi R/o J-1/28,Ground Floor,Rajouri Garden,New Delhi-110027 have severed all her relations and connections with her elder brother S.Inderjeet Singh S/o Late S. Darshan Singh and his wife Smt.Amarveer Kaur because of their insulting behaviour and rude attitude towards my clients. Anybody dealing with them shall do so at his own risk & responsibility.. Advocate Rajan Mahajan

This is for the information of general public that my client Smt.Jagbir Kaur W/o S. Gurvinder Singh Sethi R/o J-1/28,Ground Floor,Rajouri Garden,New Delhi-110027 have severed all her relations and connections with her elder brother S.Inderjeet Singh S/o Late S. Darshan Singh and his wife Smt.Amarveer Kaur because of their insulting behaviour and rude attitude towards my client. Anybody dealing with them shall do so at his own risk & responsibility.. Advocate Rajan Mahajan

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**PERSONAL**  
CHANGE OF NAME

I. No. 4355281 Y Rank Ex-Hav Name Thonglaming or (Unit) The Assam Regiment,R/o Hebron Veng New Lamka,P.O. New Lamka,P.S. & Dist-Churachandpur,Manipur affirm that in my service records my son's name and DOB has been written as Mr Paupazuman 04.05.1999 but actual name and DOB is N.Pauzaman 04.05.2000 for all future purposes.

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### April 2021 Batches

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**WEATHER WATCH**

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)

**Forecast for Friday:** Thunderstorm with lightning/gusty winds likely at isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Sikkim, Odisha, Kerala and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Heat wave conditions likely in isolated pockets over Gujarat, Telangana, Rayalseema, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry

**CITY** **RAIN** **MAX** **MIN** **CITY** **RAIN** **MAX** **MIN**

Agartala..... 24.3... 36.6... 19.1 Kozhikode..... 1.5... 34.0... 27.8

Ahmedabad..... 40.2... 23.3 Kurnool..... 41.5... 25.1

Aizawl..... 14.2... 27.7... 14.5 Lucknow..... 36.1... 16.2

Allahabad..... 39.7... 21.3 Madurai..... 41.2... 26.2

Bengaluru..... 36.7... 23.1 Mangalore..... 35.4... 25.4

Bhopal..... 37.1... 21.8 Mumbai..... 32.7... 25.6

Bhubaneswar..... 39.8... 25.5 Mysuru..... 38.0... 20.0

Chandigarh..... 32.8... 15.0 New Delhi..... 34.0... 18.4

Chennai..... 39.7... 27.1 Patna..... 37.0... 16.8

Coimbatore..... 37.9... 25.7 Port Blair..... 31.2... 25.2

Dehradun..... 31.4... 12.0 Puducherry..... 37.7... 25.4

Gangtok..... 17.4... 11.4 Pune..... 38.2... 19.2

Goa..... 34.5... 23.6 Raipur..... 40.8... 21.8

Guwahati..... 3.8... 29.8... 19.5 Ranchi..... 37.0... 20.0

Hubballi..... 37.0... 19.0 Shillong..... 24.3... 14.6

Hyderabad..... 39.1... 22.2 Shimla..... 23.5... 11.5

Imphal..... 11.9... 29.6... 15.8 Sinagar..... 19.7... 4.5

Jaipur..... 36.2... 20.4 Thiruvananthapuram..... 34.4... 26.9

Kochi..... 12... 32.6... 25.6 Tiruchi..... 41.9... 26.8

Kohima..... 34.2... 22.0... 11.8 Vijayawada..... 42.8... 25.8

Kolkata..... 38.8... 26.2 Visakhapatnam..... 32.0... 27.6

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

**Pollutants in the air you are breathing**

**CITIES** **SO<sub>2</sub>** **NO<sub>x</sub>** **CO** **PM<sub>2.5</sub>** **PM<sub>10</sub>** **CODE**

Ahmedabad..... 58... 64... 26... 132... 143... 100

Bengaluru..... 5... 112... 40... 90... 115... 100

Chennai..... 7... 23... 50... 42... 49... 100

Delhi..... 18... 30... 55... 287... 239... 100

Hyderabad..... 61... 64... 9... 128... 148... 100

Kolkata..... 20... 37... 19... 139... 123... 100

Lucknow..... 5... 21... 52... 143... 157... 100

Mumbai..... 12... 28... 8... 220... 110... 100

Pune..... 33... 31... 116... 106... 100... 100

Visakhapatnam..... 62... 46... 169... 134... 100... 100

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)  
SO<sub>2</sub>: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO<sub>x</sub>: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM<sub>2.5</sub> & PM<sub>10</sub>: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease.

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Singrauli, Madhya Pradesh recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 309 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Rupnagar, Punjab recorded a healthy AQI score of 47

# Pune Mayor rules out lockdown for now

Focus on enhanced sample testing and medical infrastructure, increased vaccination, says Murlidhar Mohol

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE  
PUNE

Stating that there was no need for a lockdown in Pune at the moment, Pune Mayor and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Murlidhar Mohol on Thursday said that the city's medical infrastructure was well-primed to cope with the increasing case surge.

He said that the administration had aimed to inoculate a record one lakh people across the district on Thursday and that the focus was on further enhancing medical facilities and sample testing capacities.

The city has been recording staggering spikes of more than 4,000 cases a day for the last fortnight, while Pune district (which includes Pimpri-Chinchwad and Pune rural besides Pune city) has been witnessing an average 7,500 cases a day.

**Worst-affected district**  
The district, which is the worst-hit in India, has now reported over 65,000 cases and nearly 10,000 deaths.

"We do not need a lock-



**At ease:** People sitting in a waiting area after receiving the COVID-19 jab at the BKC vaccination centre in Mumbai on Thursday. ■ EMMANUEL YOGINI

down. I think the city's medical facilities have the wherewithal to cope with the dramatic case surges. The focus should be on enhanced sample testing, increased vaccination, and continuously improving and streamlining the medical infrastruc-

ture," Mr. Mohol said.

He said that currently Pune city witnessed a robust sample testing of 16,000 a day, while the capacity of the re-opened jumbo COVID-19 facilities had been ramped up from 400 to 500 beds.

"Additionally, we are plan-

ning to add 5,000 more beds across all COVID-19 care centres. About 20-25% of these beds would be converted into oxygen beds to tackle critically ill patients," Mr. Mohol said.

Earlier, Baramati MP Su-

priya Sule had tweeted that

the Pune administration had opened 174 vaccination centres to achieve its ambitious target of one lakh vaccinations and that the inoculation drive was progressing apace and in a satisfactory manner.

## Opposition to lockdown

Meanwhile, Mr. Mohol's fellow party member Pravin Darekar, the BJP's Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Council, reiterated his party's stance of fierce opposition against the ruling Uddhav Thackeray-led Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government were a lockdown to be imposed over Maharashtra.

"It appears that there is no coordination whatsoever between the three parties [Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress] over the decision to enforce a lockdown. The Chief Minister ought to have acted earlier to check the renewed surge in cases...the BJP will vehemently oppose any decision that affects ordinary citizens," Mr. Darekar said.

The BJP is seeking to ex-

ploit the alleged 'differences' between the tripartite MVA as the spectre of an imminent lockdown looms large amid alarming case and fatality spikes across Maharashtra.

Senior Congressmen like Prithviraj Chavan and Balasaheb Thorat, too, have expressed their disapproval over another lockdown while stressing that it must be carefully calibrated, and that relief must be provided to daily-wage earners in form of direct cash transfers.

In a riposte to Mr. Darekar, Sena MP and spokesman Sanjay Raut said that nobody ought to 'politicise' the lockdown issue at the moment.

"I do not think that the decision to implement a lockdown or not ought to be a political hot potato. Even Prime Minister Narendra Modi was compelled to impose a countrywide lockdown last year. There are times when governments do not have a choice but to take stern measures to preserve human life. So, I do not think this is a matter for playing politics over," Mr. Raut said.

## Activists hail SC stay on cutting mangroves for Mumbai bridge

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI

Bridges can be constructed without destroying mangroves, environment activists have said while hailing the Supreme Court's decision to stay cutting of mangroves for

a bridge in Andheri.

The activists are hopeful that the BMC will redesign the project. The BMC had planned to construct a bridge connecting Yari Road junction and Lokhandwala backroad in Versova.

## Congress to take stock of political situation

Charges against Home Department, alleged Pawar-Shah meeting to be discussed

STAFF REPORTER  
MUMBAI

We are an ally in this government.  
An allegation against any department defames the government

CONGRESS MINISTER

Congress Committee officer-bearer attached to the party's State unit.

Rising COVID-19 cases in Maharashtra have forced the State Congress to minimise the number of office-bearers called for the review meetings to be conducted over the

next two days. Only Congress ministers have been called on Friday for a meeting to be chaired by the party's State unit in-charge, H.K. Patil. On Saturday, a meeting of the Mumbai Congress will be held. "Earlier, office-bearers from all districts would be invited along with ministers to review the party and government performance. However, the increasing COVID-19 cases have compelled us to reduce the number of participants," the leader said.

The meetings hold importance in the backdrop of the State Home Department fac-

ing allegations of misconduct and the alleged meeting between Mr. Pawar and Mr. Shah. "We are an ally in this government. An allegation against any department defames the government. We will be discussing the situation and our observations will be sent to the Central leadership," a minister who did not wish to be named said.

When asked why the Congress had no reaction to the meeting between the two leaders, the minister said, "None of the leaders are from our party. Why should we be concerned about this?"

## WESTERN RAILWAY NOTIFICATION

Engagement of Medical Practitioners and paramedical staff on Contract Basis in Jagjivan Ram Western Railway Hospital, Mumbai Central, In view of COVID-19 Pandemic, Jagjivan Ram Hospital, Mumbai Central, Western Railway will be conducting Telephonic/WhatsApp interview for filling up the posts of Contract Medical Practitioners (GDMO/Specialist) and Paramedical staff on full-time contract basis up to 30.09.2021 to work in COVID Isolation wards of Jagjivan Ram Railway Hospital. The candidate may apply only ONLINE on our official website : <http://203.153.40.19/bct> (ekarmik) and as well as on ekarmik bct downloadable application available in Google Play store. The date of submission of online application is from 03.04.2021 to 06.04.2021. Applications sent by post will not be accepted. Interviews will be held from 08.04.2021 onwards. The detail of the posts, age limits, Remuneration for which application are invited are as follows:

Sr. No.	Designation	Total Required	Age limit	Remuneration
1.	CMP-GDMO	14	53 yrs	Rs. 75,000/-
2.	Nursing Supdt	59	20-40 yrs	Rs. 44,900/- + admissible Allowance
3.	Radiographer	02	19-33 yrs	Rs. 29,200/- + admissible Allowance
4.	Renal Replacement/Hemodialysis Technician	01	20-33 yrs	Rs. 35,400/- + admissible Allowance
5.	Clinical Psychologist	02	18-33 yrs	Rs. 35,400/- + admissible Allowance
6.	Hospital Attendant	60	18-33 yrs	Rs. 18,000/- + admissible Allowance

Candidates should have requisite academic qualification on the date of Interview. Those who are appearing at and/or awaiting results of final examination are not eligible. Academic and Technical Qualification must be from a recognized Institution/Board, otherwise candidature will be rejected. Candidates having higher qualification may also apply & indicate the details.

Age relaxation of 5 years is applicable to SC/ST & 3 years to OBC categories against SC/ST & OBC vacany respectively. The vacancies indicated may vary, depending on fresh sanctions received, resignations being given by existing candidates, etc. Post indicated herein may be kept unfilled at the discretion of administration. The candidates should bring all original documents along with a set of self attested photocopy of the same.

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## Registration of Forest Contractors

For the Forestry works in Faridabad Forest Division Application FORM are to be submitted by the eligible candidate. Application FORM will be available from Faridabad Forest Division or can be downloaded from website [www.haryanaforest.gov.in](http://www.haryanaforest.gov.in). This registration will valid till 31.03.2022.

All terms and condition will be available on above website. Application FORM with supporting documents should be submitted to our Division physically or on our mail [dfofb2@gmail.com](mailto:dfofb2@gmail.com) till 10.00 am of 12.04.2021

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## Overseeing oversights

U-turn on the drastic cut in small savings rates deferred the impact, but revealed the intent

**I**ndia's small savings instruments witnessed unprecedented overnight volatility in rates this week. On Wednesday evening, the Budget division in the Department of Economic Affairs revised downwards the interest rates payable on small savings instruments for the April-June 2021 quarter, by 40 basis points (0.4%) to 110 basis points (1.1%). The return on the most popular PPF scheme was pegged at 6.4%, the lowest level in 46 years. The government had refrained from tweaking these rates for the last three quarters after effecting a similarly sharp cut in Q1 of 2020-21, when the PPF interest was pruned from 7.9% to 7.1%. However, by early Thursday, the rate cuts had disappeared and the *status quo* reinstated, following a tweet by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The only explanation: 'Orders issued by oversight shall be withdrawn.' It is not clear whose 'oversight' led to the rates being cut. In the process, the intent has been revealed even if the impact is deferred. Surely, Wednesday's order, approved by the competent authority, was not based on random numbers keyed in and notified inadvertently amidst a flurry of last-minute economy-related government notifications on the last day of the financial year.

It is difficult to believe that the oversight is on the bureaucracy's part, for it simply executed the stated policy decision to link small savings rates to the interest paid on government securities of a comparable tenure every quarter. So one must deduce the oversight is on the political executive's part on the timing and implications of executing the required decision as per the extant policy. The clinching factor – the five Assembly polls. The government, that has brazened it out on Opposition jibes about rising unemployment, high inflation along with soaring fuel prices, could ill afford to yield a fresh talking point – the squeezing of the middle class and senior citizens, even as they brace up for the fresh tax on provident fund incomes. This rollback is not the first instance of post-haste policy ad hocism, but it may make the government's ₹12.05-lakh crore borrowing plan for the year harder as the central bank has been complaining of high small savings rates as a deterrent to lower interest rates. Another instance is the mysterious practice of oil companies freezing pump prices during electoral campaigns, even though oil prices are deregulated. The PM, as part of his 'One Nation, One Election' pitch, has often said that the virtually perennial poll season hits development. On the same note, if governments need permission to announce initiatives while the model code of conduct is in force, any deviation or reversal from routine administrative decisions should also attract the Election Commission's scrutiny.

## Special no longer

China is keener on tightening its grip on Hong Kong than on widening democratic space

**H**ong Kong, China's Special Administrative Region (SAR), has served as the mainland's most important gateway to the world for the past 24 years. Since its handover from British rule in 1997, the SAR has defied expectations that it would lose its unique identity. Unlike the mainland, the unique "one country, two systems" model guaranteed a high degree of autonomy and freedoms, including a free press, the right to protest, and a rambunctious political scene with a noisy pro-democracy opposition. Perhaps, most importantly, for the hundreds of multinationals, it also enjoyed an independent judiciary, a stark contrast from the Communist Party-controlled courts across the border. This week, Beijing dealt a blow to many of those unique freedoms. On March 30, the Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress (NPC), approved sweeping changes to Hong Kong's electoral system that will reduce significantly the share of directly elected representatives in the SAR's Legislative Council (LegCo). President Xi Jinping signed orders to promulgate amended annexes to Hong Kong's Basic Law, the constitution that has governed the SAR and ensured its autonomy, marking the biggest change since 1997.

While previously 35 of LegCo's 70 members were directly elected, that number has now been reduced to 20, even as the size of the legislature has been expanded to 90. The remaining 70 will be nominated from broadly pro-establishment groups, thereby ensuring a majority for the pro-Beijing camp in perpetuity. The most controversial change is the establishment of a Candidate Eligibility Review Committee to decide the eligibility of candidates and deem whether they are "patriotic" enough. Its verdicts cannot be challenged in the courts, the only standing independent institution. Beijing has justified the changes to ensure "patriots" were administering Hong Kong and as a response to the 2019 protest movement, which was silenced by last year's stringent national security law. The protesters had demanded universal suffrage, promised in the 1997 handover. That the protest movement had wide backing was clear in the 2019 district council elections, after which the pro-democracy camp ended up with 90% of the seats. That will now count for little, as the amendments no longer give district councillors a place either in LegCo or in the Election Committee. With the new change and the national security law in place, Beijing's grip on Hong Kong is tighter than ever. While Beijing may succeed in assuaging the business community's concerns with the continued attraction of the mainland's market, it remains no closer to winning the hearts and minds of Hongkongers. By reducing the space for democratic representation, Beijing appears to have given up efforts to do so, at least for now. That the changes are being framed by China as a historic political victory does little to change the perception.

# Stop the Ambassadorships for sale

U.S. President Joe Biden faces a new challenge as the demand for not appointing donor ambassadors gains momentum



T.P. SREENIVASAN

**I**magine this conversation. U.S. Senator: "Good morning, Ambassador designate. I see that you have been nominated as our Ambassador to Sri Lanka. Have you ever been to Colombo?"

Ambassador designate: "Yes, Senator. But I am going to Sri Lanka, not to Latin America."

U.S. Senator: "Colombo happens to be the capital of Sri Lanka. Have you heard of Bandaranayake?"

Ambassador designate: No, Senator. But I assure you, as soon as I arrive in Sri Lanka, I shall visit that place."

### Money counts

This conversation may be apocryphal. But given the way the Presidents of the United States appoint ambassadors out of those who have paid big financial contributions to the Democratic party, even more bizarre conversations may take place during the Senate confirmation hearings; the qualification is not knowledge of history or geography, but the weight of the money bags deposited. This is part of the 'spoils system', except that, over the years, a price tag has been fixed for ambassadorships.

U.S. President Richard M. Nixon had once even suggested that a floor price of \$250,000 should be suggested for ambassadorships.

Now that U.S. President Joe Biden is in the process of filling up thousands of high-level posts, and the Senate has begun considering the various names for confirmation, the ambassadorial aspirants, who had paid money to the party, have also begun to assert their claims. Making the right appointments is crucial for Mr. Biden to clean up the mess created by his

predecessor, Donald Trump. Mr. Biden has appointed Linda Thomas-Greenfield, a retired career diplomat as Ambassador to the United Nations and she has been confirmed by the Senate, but many heavy contributors are waiting in the wings. Anticipating that Mr. Biden will offer ambassadorial positions to some of his major donors – most of who are not particularly suited for such assignments – a member of the editorial board of *The New York Times*, Michelle Cottle, has made a fervent plea to Mr. Biden, in an article (March 18, 2021, "Stop letting rich people buy ambassadorships"; <https://nyti.ms/3wbdbLA>) to "jettison the skeezy practice of rewarding big campaign contributors with Ambassadorships".

### Entrenched as a 'tradition'

This is not the first time that a torch is being shone on this unfair practice. A study, some years ago, by some legal experts had recommended that rich people buying ambassadorships should be stopped. In 1980, a decision was taken that most ambassadors should be career foreign service officers. Still, succeeding Presidents have filled from a minimum of 30% to a maximum of 57% (under Mr. Trump) of the posts with donors. Since such a tradition has been established, Mr. Biden may not be able to stop it either. The crucial question would be on what to do with those who had made donations for diplomatic stardom.

The appointments have solid backing of the U.S. Constitution. Article II provides that the President "shall nominate, and by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, shall appoint ambassadors." (<https://bit.ly/3fxWmE>). The President enjoys wide latitude in selecting a nominee and the Senate is comparably free to choose whether to advise and consent. The onus for the quality and integrity of the nominees rests on the President, but the Senate has the right to hold back confirmation of



any nominee, including career diplomats.

### Complicated process

The path to ambassadorships for donors is not at all smooth. The Senate confirmation is quite a complicated process in which the investigating agencies examine their entire past to see whether they have ever been guilty of any misdemeanour, which disqualifies them for the high appointment. Anything adverse that comes to the notice of the agencies will be conveyed to the nominee concerned. It is then up to him to decide whether to face the charges or quietly withdraw his candidature. There is an example of an Indian-American having been considered as Ambassador to Fiji and some other Pacific island states but who had to withdraw his nomination after the Federal Bureau of Investigation had communicated to him that it would be in his interest to withdraw rather than face an investigation into his past.

There was another example of a donor ambassador, a rich businessman from Buffalo, who had apparently paid a huge sum for the U.S. Presidential campaign. He made no secret of his having been appointed on the strength of his financial contribution. He had his own grievances such as being denied permission by the State Department to bring his own private aircraft to Fiji. When he figured out that he would be accredited to six island states from Fiji and that there were only weekly flights from Fiji to the other capitals, he thought his own plane would be a

great asset.

The ambassador spent his own money to refurbish the Embassy residence and to entertain well, with the choicest food and wines flown in from the U.S. He did not bother much about the politics of the South Pacific as he knew that he was there not to pursue a career but to enjoy a well-earned holiday. He went to an island state called Tuvalu, which has a total population of 5,000 to present his credentials. He saw a little store at the airport which sold local handicrafts and asked the owner how much it cost. The bewildered owner asked which item he was looking for. "The whole shop," he said. The owner said that he would not be able to sell the whole shop as it would take several months to get the stock replenished and there would be no handicrafts shop at the airport.

### The Indian way

India has a more sophisticated system of appointing "political" ambassadors, not for donation to political parties, but as an avenue to recognise and reward talent. Till very recently, career diplomats could not aspire to ambassadorial posts in London, Washington or Moscow as distinguished people from different walks of life were appointed to add weight to the positions. In the early years, Maharasas were appointed to several posts. And later, politicians were sent abroad when they had to be kept away from the country. The Government apparently has the discretion of appointing political ambassadors in up to 30% of the posts. But now, the number of political ambassadors is small, if at all, and the senior posts are open to career diplomats.

India has had some very distinguished and successful political ambassadors, who had access to the Prime Minister back home and to high levels in the host countries. Examples are three political ambassadors in Moscow (Dr. K.S. Shelvankar, D.P. Dhar and I.K. Guj-

ral) and one in Washington (Naresh Chandra); all of them fulfilled certain criteria set by the Government, which included greater acceptability of political ambassadors in major capitals. Senior career diplomats were assigned to these posts as Deputy Chiefs of Mission, often with ambassadorial rank, to do much of the work, leaving the political ambassadors to deal with high policy.

The most celebrated political ambassador was Kushok Bakula Rinpoche, a Buddhist monk from Ladakh, who was appointed to Mongolia. He is credited with reviving Buddhism in Mongolia. The Head of State himself used to pay obeisance to him as the Mongolians followed the same Mahayana Buddhism practised in Ladakh. Even after he completed his diplomatic assignment (January 1990 to October 2000; <https://bit.ly/2PK55A4>), Kushok Bakula Rinpoche retained strong ties with Mongolia till he died in his eighties.

### False notion

In recent years, career ambassadors are occupying those posts which were considered political in nature. But the practice continues in many countries because of the general feeling that long careers in the Foreign Service are not necessary to be effective ambassadors. In other words, diplomacy is not considered a profession for specialists, a notion as ridiculous as appointing a politician as the Surgeon General or a General.

We do not know whether Mr. Biden will heed the advice not to appoint donors as ambassadors. But if he does, there will be many frustrated donors in Washington and one source of political funding will dry up. On the other hand, the credibility of Biden diplomacy will increase and career diplomats will have better prospects.

T.P. Sreenivasan is a former Ambassador of India, who spent 10 years in the U.S. in different diplomatic assignments

# An Act of colourable legislation

Enactment of the Places of Worship Act, 1991 in its current format damages the liberty of belief, faith and worship to all



SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY & SATYA SABHARWAL

**I**n his article, "The needless resurrection of a buried issue" (*The Hindu*, March 29, 2021), Dushyant Dave, senior advocate of eminence, has articulated why he opposes the challenges on constitutional grounds to the Places of Worship Act, 1991, now before the Supreme Court.

We have by way of a public interest litigation (PIL) in the Supreme Court (WP(C) 619 of 2020, which was filed earlier but notice was issued later *vide* order of the Supreme Court dated March 26, 2021), challenged Sections 3 and 4 of the Places of Worship Act, 1991 being unconstitutional, *void ab initio*, and against the Basic Structure of the Constitution of India.

### No precedential value

Mr. Dave has relied mainly on the Supreme Court's observation in the Ram Janmabhoomi Case of November 9, 2019 (*M. Siddiq vs. Mahant Suresh Das*) with respect to the Places of Worship Act, 1991. However, there was no application of the provisions of the Places of Worship Act, 1991 to the case (Shri Ram Janmabhoomi dispute).

Section 5 of the Places of Worship Act, 1991 clearly states that nothing in the Act shall apply to

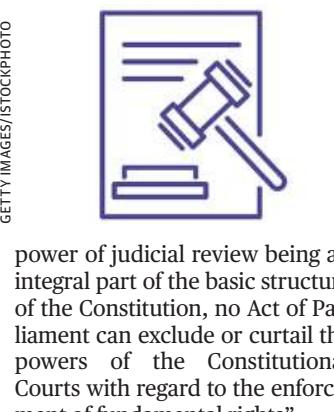
any suit, appeal or other proceedings relating to the said place or place of worship, i.e. the Ram-Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid situated in Ayodhya, in the State of Uttar Pradesh. Thereby, the 2019 judgment of the Supreme Court's (Shri Ram Janmabhoomi dispute (2020 1 SCC 1)) observation(s) with respect to the Places of Worship Act, 1991 lacks any precedential value.

The pith and substance of the Act of 1991 is that it is *ultra vires* the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution since it bars the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and furthermore nullifies the Fundamental Right(s) guaranteed by the Constitution of India as elucidated in Article 32 of "enforcement of fundamental rights" which cannot be suspended except as otherwise stated in the Constitution.

This importance of Article 32 can be understood by the words of the Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee, B.R. Ambedkar who asserted, *inter alia*, that Article 32 is the very soul of the Constitution and the most important Article in the Constitution.

Under Article 32 of the Constitution of India, the Supreme Court has the power to issue writs appropriate for enforcement of all the Fundamental Rights conferred by Part III of the Constitution.

The top court, on various instances, ruled that in view of the constitutional scheme and the jurisdiction conferred on the Supreme Court under Article 32 and on the High Courts under Article 226 of the Constitution that "the



power of judicial review being an integral part of the basic structure of the Constitution, no Act of Parliament can exclude or curtail the powers of the Constitutional Courts with regard to the enforcement of fundamental rights".

The Act of 1991, is appropriately called an Act of colourable legislation. As the Courts have held, "you cannot do indirectly what you are prohibited from doing directly".

### A weakening

The Preamble in the Constitution gives prominent importance to liberty of belief, faith and worship to all citizens, and the same is sought to be weakened and effectively nullified or severely damaged by the enactment of the Act of 1991 in its current format.

The concepts of faith, belief and worship are the foundations of Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution of India. Therefore, prohibiting citizens from approaching appropriate courts with respect to suit or any other proceedings to handover the land of any temple of certain essential significance (such as being the birthplace of Lord Rama in Ayodhya and Lord Krishna in Mathura or Lord Shiva sending his fiery Jyotirlinga in the Gyanvapi premises of Varanasi), is arbitrary, unreasonable and *mala fide*

in the context of the fundamental rights to pray and perform religious practice as guaranteed by Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution of India. The intent of the Act of 1991 under Section 5, i.e. exception extended to the "Ram-Janmabhoomi matter" identifies the need and importance of resolution of such a controversy and settling long on-going disputes before the courts. But such an exception should be made for other two matters of dispute stated above.

### Other disputes

The exclusion of the Mathura and Varanasi disputes as being additional exceptions from the Act of 1991 is wholly unacceptable and against what is given by the people of India to the makers of the Constitution, which is part of the Basic Structure of the Constitution.

Those who rely on the Act of 1991 to avoid the settlement of the disputes in Varanasi Mathura have failed to anticipate the legal principles enunciated in the judgment of the top court (in *Ismail Faruqui vs. Union of India* (1994 6 SCC 360)),

on the religious significance of mosques and temples. Even in countries like Saudi Arabia, only Mecca and Medina have the immutable religious protection from demolition. And only authorised demolition is permitted.

Section 4 (I) of the Act declaring that religious character of a place of worship existing on the 15th day of August, 1947 shall continue to be the same as it existed on that

day, is no longer good law after this Court's judgment in ((1994) 6 SCC 360) which held that a mosque is not an essential part of the practice of the religion of Islam and *namaz* (prayer) by Muslims can be offered anywhere, even in the open *maidan*, on the road, railway platforms or airports.

Ultimately, students of law are also students of history and we must not lose sight of the past. We must learn from it. But we accept one sentiment of Mr. Dave – that we cannot open the flood gates of rebuilding all 40,000 temples which were demolished on *firman*s of the Mughal emperors.

Yet, where by faith Hindus believe there was a forcible demolition of an irreplaceable non-shiftable temple, it has to be rebuilt. There are only two more such temples in the list of 40,000 – the Gyanvapi Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi and the Krishna Janmabhoomi Temple in Mathura.

Hence, by the doctrine of *casus omisso*, the Supreme Court can in an appropriate case before it order that the number of exceptions in Section 5 of the Places of Worship Act, 1991, be three as an alternative solution. The Supreme Court under Article 142 of the Constitution can pass any order to carry out for doing complete justice being in the public interest, while upholding the Constitution of India.

Dr. Subramanian Swamy is a Member of Parliament and former Union Minister for Law and Justice. Satya Sabharwal is an advocate practising before the Supreme Court and High Courts

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

### Rate reversal

The Central government's flip flop on the interest rates of small savings schemes such as the PPF has confirmed the worst fears of the public. That the order was then taken back in less than half a day only suggests that the government has no idea how to steer the economy, leave alone manage its borrowings in this crucial time. The Finance Ministry, by sheer practice, has become more adept at drafting demand notices than monetary policy.

RACHIT BHATIA,  
Hyderabad

Such an important decision would have had to go through many channels of officialdom before it was announced. After it was in the public domain the government may have developed cold feet on realising that it was in the middle of election season and that any adverse reactions would have hurt the BJP badly. The belated explanation of 'oversight' is a tall story.

V. PADMANABHAN,  
Bengaluru

This is evidently an election-induced breather for the middle class for at

# ASSEMBLY POLLS

DEHLI THE HINDU | FRIDAY, APRIL 2, 2021

## NEWS ANALYSIS

# West Side Story: battle intensifies in 8 Tamil Nadu districts

There's more than one claimant to the ruling party's traditional bastion of 57 Assembly constituencies in this region of the State

T. RAMAKRISHNAN  
V.S. PALANIAPPAN  
CHENNAI/COIMBATORE

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) is making all-out efforts to demolish the hold of its principal adversary, the ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), over the western region of Tamil Nadu, a traditional bastion of the latter.

The DMK, which has been out of power for the past 10 years, has devised its strategy for the 57 Assembly constituencies spread over eight revenue districts in the region. It is conscious of the fact that this belt made a huge difference to the fortunes of the AIADMK five years ago, yielding 45 seats and accounting for one-third of the ruling party's overall tally of 137 seats.

Old-timers in the DMK still recall how former Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi, after returning to power in 2006, did not take his long-standing Coimbatore colleague, Pongalur N. Palaniswamy, into the Cabinet initially as he held the latter responsible for a washout of his party then in the district. Perhaps keeping all these factors in

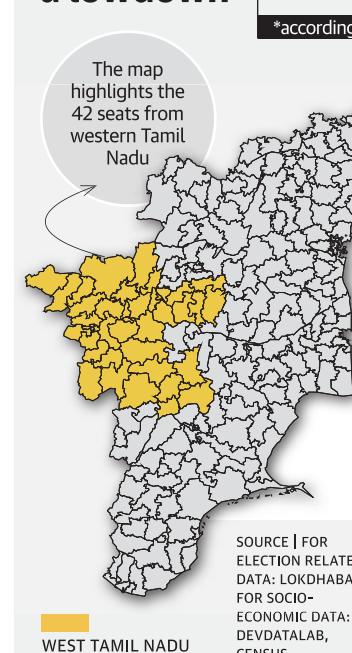
mind, DMK leader M.K. Stalin made it clear at the beginning of the election campaign that his party would give a robust performance to prove that the western region was no longer an AIADMK stronghold.

Also called the Kongu region, the western districts are Krishnagiri, Dharmapuri, Salem, Namakkal, Erode, Tiruppur, Coimbatore and the Nilgiris. There is a balanced mix of communities such as Kongu Vellala Gounders, Naidus and Vanniyars, apart from Arunthathiyyars, who are regarded as the most backward among the Scheduled Castes. In addition, the region has a sizeable number of denotified communities. Compared with the southern region of the State, the west has more urban and semi-urban areas.

### Big names

Another reason for the DMK to target the region is that a large number of the ruling party's heavyweights are from here. Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami, his trusted lieutenants and high-profile Ministers S.P. Velumani and P. Thangamani, the AIADMK's deputy coordi-

### West T.N.: a lowdown



In the 42 seats in the West region\* of Tamil Nadu, the AIADMK had won about 76% of the seats with a vote share of nearly 46% in 2016. A look at the demographics and socio-economic data from the region. By The Hindu Data Team

\*according to the regional classification by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies

#### ■ 2016 PERFORMANCE IN WEST T.N.

Party	Seat share %	Vote %
AIADMK	76.19%	45.8%
DMK	19.05%	32.8%
INC	4.76%	7.5%
BJP	-	3.8%
DMDK	-	2.0%
NOTA	-	1.6%
PMK	-	1.4%

#### ■ RURAL/URBAN POPULATION SHARE

Type	Rural %	Urban %
West	52.9	47.2
All seats	51.6	48.4

#### ■ SC/ST POPULATION SHARE

Type	ST (%)	SC (%)
West	1.4	20.9
All seats	1.1	20

this task, it is being supported by allies such as the Congress, the Left and the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), which have pockets of influence in the region.

Among the issues being pursued by the Opposition to embarrass the ruling party

are the move to acquire farm lands for an eight-lane Salem-Chennai highway and the alleged involvement of functionaries of the ruling party in the Pollachi sex abuse case. What is of comfort to the DMK and its allies is their performance in the 2019 Lok Sabha election,

where the Opposition bagged all the nine seats in the region, and had a lead over the AIADMK and its allies in 56 of the 57 Assembly segments.

#### No stone unturned

Knowing that its stakes in the region are quite high, the

#### ■ SHARE OF RURAL HOUSEHOLDS WITH MAIN INCOME FROM CULTIVATION

Type	%
West	18
All seats	18.2

#### ■ PER CAPITA ANNUAL CONSUMPTION

Type	Urban	Rural
West	₹33,478	₹25,512
All seats	₹29,962	₹22,413

Campaign trail: DMK leader M.K. Stalin campaigning among morning walkers in Coimbatore on Thursday.

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT.

AIADMK too is leaving no stone unturned by channelling its energy and resources.

It has renominated all its seven Ministers, apart from the Chief Minister, who belong to this belt. It is banking on the performance of the State government and believes that the implementation of a number of infrastructure projects such as the Avinashi-Athikadavu groundwater recharge and drinking water supply scheme, a long-standing demand of people in the region, and the concrete lining of the Lower Bhavani Project Canal, will yield immense political benefits.

The AIADMK is pinning its hopes on netting most of the 21 seats in the districts of Krishnagiri, Dharmapuri and Salem, riding on its government's last-minute important policy decision of providing 10.5% reservation for the Vanniyars within the 20% quota for Most Backward Classes and denotified communities.

The ruling party can stand to gain in the west, the benefit of its alliance with its major allies – the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The BJP, too, has attached

Trinamool has problems with people wearing saffron, sporting tilak and choti; they call them demons

NARENDRA MODI  
Prime Minister



P7

## Frenzied campaign for UDF and NDA

LDF opts for a low-key approach

G. ANAND  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A galaxy of high-profile BJP and Congress leaders has descended on Kerala in a last-minute bid to turn the tide of the electoral battle against the LDF government. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Union Ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, Prakash Javadekar and Smriti Irani, BJP national president J. P. Nadda, and others have gone on whirlwind tours covering large swathes of the State. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has spearheaded the UDF election campaign. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Sachin Pilot, Salman Khurshid, Jairam Ramesh, A.K. Antony and Shashi Tharoor lend leverage to the UDF's election pitch.

**Different styles**  
Mr. Modi has obliquely referred to the UAE gold smuggling case that had dogged the LDF government. Referring to the Sabarimala issue, he said the Kerala government had "used lathis against devotees and trampled on their faith."

Mr. Gandhi has talked about the LDF's alleged attempt to allow foreign trawlers to raid the State's traditional fishing grounds. He



U.P. CM Yogi Adityanath arriving at a roadshow in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. ■ MAHINSHA S.

also promised a law to preserve Sabarimala traditions. Ms. Vadra spotlighted governmental corruption, nepotism, crimes against women, "inherent misogyny" in the LDF, political murders, backdoor appointments and unemployment.

In contrast, the LDF has opted for a low-key approach. Apart from a few and comparatively less frenzied roadshows by CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury and Polit Bureau member Brinda Karat, it has focused on door-to-door campaigning.

It has strived to make the elections a referendum of its governance record and management of the COVID-19 crisis. The LDF has positioned itself as a bulwark against the BJP's brand of majoritarian politics.

## New experiments in Muslim politics

Can a Muslim party as part of a secular coalition address Muslim marginalisation?

VARGHESE K. GEORGE  
GUWAHATI/KOLKATA



Abbas Siddiqui launching the Indian Secular Front in Kolkata, ahead of the West Bengal Assembly election. ■ PTI

munty this year, compared to 53 in 2016.

While the catchment areas of the ISF and the AIUDF are Muslim pockets of Bengal and Assam, respectively, both parties claim to be catch-all rather than exclusive, and both claim to represent

### The rise of the BJP is leading to a partial erosion of linguistic divide in the community.

MIRZA ZULFIQAR RAHMAN  
Researcher

sent tribals and Hindus as well. And both face linguistic and class diversities within the Muslims that question any notion of a monolithic identity.

"ISF presence is only among the Bengali-speaking peasants among Muslims in pockets of south Bengal. The Urdu-speaking Muslims in Kolkata, Asansol and Islampur are not part of this. They

used to speak for the whole community," said Mr. Ahamed.

The AIUDF is largely confined to the Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam. "The Assamese Muslims are not part of the AIUDF politics," said Mirza Zulfiqar Rahman, a researcher based in Guwahati.

"Language still remains a major factor among the Muslims. There isn't much social intermingling between the Bengali Muslims and the Assamese Muslims."

#### Can class politics work?

The ISF, founded by Abbas Siddiqui, says it is party of the poor, not Muslims. "Poor people have no religion. We have Dalits, tribals and all castes and religions with us," said Gazi Shahabuddin Siraj, ISF candidate in Canning East, in South 24 Parganas.

The leader of the AIUDF, Badruddin Ajmal, claims to speak for all Assamese. "I am Assamese first and Muslim

second," he said in a recent interview. These claims of inclusive politics are weakened by facts on the ground and labelling by their opponents.

The combined votes of the Congress and the AIUDF in 2016 was above the BJP in enough number of constituencies to overturn the latter's victory. But the Congress-AIUDF alliance has triggered other dynamics. A Muslim Congress leader in Assam said: "The BJP's campaign that Ajmal will become the CM has been effective among Bengali Hindus and Assamese nationalists. This alliance is a net loss for the Congress, and beneficial for the BJP."

"The rise of the BJP is leading to a partial erosion of linguistic divide in the community. In BJP politics, all Muslims are the same," said Mr. Rahman.

Muslims are cognisant of the possibility that a vote to the ISF could benefit the BJP. "TMC could remain the primary choice of the community," said Mr. Rahman. The religious hostilities could overwhelm the class solidarity that the ISF proposes in Bengal. For instance, the Dalit Matuas who migrated from Bangladesh to West Bengal expect to benefit from the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and find little common ground with Muslims who feel threatened by the law.

## Is development taking a back seat in Kerala campaign?

Opposition UDF and BJP are trying to drive their campaigns by attacking CPI(M), triggering sentiments over Sabarimala issue



Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan at an election convention of the Left Democratic Front in Pattambi, Palakkad. ■ K.K. MUSTAFAH

deep-sea fishing vessels which the LDF said was signed by an officer without government concurrence.

"Kerala wants to know if the Opposition would dare to compare their performance in 2011-16 with that of ours over the last five years. Are you ready?" Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan challenged Opposition leader Ramesh

del," he said.

#### Job generation

The vision is to create a modern knowledge society, said S. Ramachandran Pillai, CPI (M) Polit Bureau member. "Take K-PON [Kerala Fibre Optic Network] for instance, which connects every household. Since 'work from home' is an accepted practice now, this is going to generate employment for lakhs of people, especially housewives," he said.

"KIIFB is a brilliant model for the medium term to meet the State's finances," said writer N.S. Madhavan, a former IAS officer. But the focus has remained largely on welfare measures, without any clear-cut policy initiative on taking forward the 'Kerala Model'. Mr. Madhavan doesn't see

the campaign around Sabarimala cutting ice with the electorate, as all fronts are almost on the same page on the issue. "That apart, Kerala's demography doesn't allow the kind of polarisation that happens in the north."

K.V. Thomas, working president of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee, thinks that the Opposition responded positively to the government when the State faced a string of crises, but is duty-bound to call the government's bluff when it falters. "Wasn't the government forced to annul the deep-sea fishing vessel building contract after we cried foul," he asked. The UDF took pains to collect public opinion before putting together its manifesto which is its road map for development, he said.

## POLL POURRI

Red card shown to Mahajot: Modi



RAHUL KARMAKAR  
GUWAHATI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said the football-loving people of Assam have already shown the Congress-led Grand Alliance the 'red card' in the first two phases of polling. Addressing a rally for candidates of the BJP's ally, the United People's Party Liberal, in Kokrajhar, he also slammed Congress for trying to make 'tala chabi (lock and key)', the symbol of the AIUDF, led by Badruddin Ajmal, the identity of Assam.

**Candidate quits BPF, joins BJP**

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI

In a setback for the Congress-led Mahajot or Grand Alliance, a candidate of the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) joined the BJP on Thursday, five days ahead of the third phase of polling.

FROM PAGE ONE

## No interest cut on small savings

The government resets the interest rate on small savings instruments every quarter, but this round of cuts was significant after three quarters of the rates being left untouched. The last round of reductions was in the April to June quarter of 2020, when small savings rates had been cut between 0.5% and 1.4%.

On Wednesday, the sharp cut was proposed in the quarterly interest rate paid on one-year term deposits, from 5.5% in the January to

March quarter to 4.4% in this quarter. The rate of return on the Senior Citizen Savings' Scheme was cut from 7.4% to 6.5%, while the Sukanya Samridhi Account Scheme's return was reduced from 7.6% to 6.9%.

The rate of return on the popular Public Provident Fund (PPF) scheme was reduced from 7.9% to 7.1% last April and further slashed to 6.4% for this quarter, before the Minister announced the rollback on Thursday morning.

## Pakistan freezes plan to open imports from India



A file photo of an Indian truck with goods at the Wagah border. ■ AP

Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah have publicly said that the Statehood of Jammu and Kashmir, which has been downgraded to a Union Territory at present, would be restored at an "appropriate" time.

The Ministry of External Affairs declined to comment, both on the earlier decision to open imports, and the latest one to defer any easing of trade ties.

## Dadasaheb Phalke + Award for Rajinikanth

It is presented annually at the National Film Awards Ceremony by the Directorate of Film Festivals, an organisation of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The award was decided by a jury of five members – Asha Bhonsle, director Subhash Ghai, Mohanlal, Shankar Mahadevan and actor Biswaajeet Chatterjee.

After Amitabh Bachchan received the award in 2018, there had been no nominee

for the past three years. The decision comes five days ahead of the Assembly election in Tamil Nadu, where the superstar has a huge fan following.

Three years after taking the first step towards politics, Rajinikanth recently announced that he would not be taking the plunge after all, citing failing health as a reason. The BJP had hoped for a tie-up with his proposed political party.

## Vaccine centres will be open on all days in April

"This step has been taken after detailed deliberations with the States/UTs on 31st March, to optimally utilise all COVID-19 Vaccination Centres across the public and private sectors to ensure rapid increase in the pace and coverage of COVID-19 vaccination," the statement said.

It added that the decision was in line with the graded and pro-active approach employed for COVID-19 vaccination.

"Vaccination exercise is a tool to protect the most vulnerable population groups in the country from COVID-19 and continues to be regularly reviewed and monitored at the highest level," said the statement.

## GST mop-up hits a record in March

Apart from a recovery in the economy, GST collections were also bolstered by closer monitoring against fake-billing, deep data analytics using data from multiple sources, including GST, Income Tax and Customs IT systems, and effective tax administration over the past few months, the Ministry said. "The all-time high GST collection ... shows a sustained economic recovery and also is a result of audit closures and the government tightening compliance and anti-evasion measures," said Abhishek Jain, tax partner at EY.

## Chennai gets direct air link with Paris

MURALI N. KRISHNASWAMY CHENNAI Chennai will finally get its direct air link with Paris from Friday.

To be operated as a once-a-week service under the air

bubble/Vande Bharat Mission programme, national carrier Air India will connect the two capitals using a 256-seat, two-class (business and economy) Boeing 787 Dreamliner aircraft.

## NIA searches 31 locations in A.P., Telangana

Case relates to furthering the activities of proscribed CPI (Maoist)

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

of frontal organisations, the official said.

The case was originally registered in November last year at Visakhapatnam (Rural) district and was re-registered by the NIA in March.

The case pertains to the seizure of revolutionary literature of CPI (Maoist), press notes, medicines, wire bundles and explosives substances from Pangi Naganna, who was intercepted by the police in Visakhapatnam Rural during vehicle checking.

Naganna had been ostensibly working as a journalist and was passing information about the police movements to CPI (Maoist) leaders.

He has also been involved in allegedly instigating the



**Wide search:** Police deployed at the residence of an advocate in Hyderabad, during the search on Wednesday night. ■ PTI

villagers to obstruct combing operations of police and prevent them from entering into villages and motivating the villagers to revolt against the police parties and hold rallies against the government.

Till now, six accused – Naganna, Anduluri Annapurna, Jangala Koteswar Rao, Manukonda Srinivasa Rao, Rela Rajeswari and Boppudi Anjamma – have been arrested in the case.

During the searches, 40 mobile phones, 44 SIM cards, 70 storage devices such as hard discs, Micro SD cards and flash cards, 184 CDs/DVDs, 19 pen drives, tab, audio recorder, ₹10 lakh in cash from one accused, sickles, axe, machetes besides CPI (Maoist) flags, as well as huge number of incriminating documents, handwritten letters of Maoist party literature, CPI (Maoist) press notes among others seized for examination.

The raids were conducted at the houses of Chalam of All People's Lawyer Association, V.S. Krishna of HRF, Padma of CRPC and Seeramurthy and Balakrishna of APCLC.

It is learnt that Mr. Krishna, Mr. Balakrishna, Mr. Chalam and Mr. Seeramurthy were asked to present themselves before the investigating officers from the NIA, at their camp office on Thursday. Both Mr. Krishna and Mr. Balakrishna had also been told to be present on Friday.

(With Vijayawada inputs)

## Eshwarappa episode brings rift into the open

Minister has alleged interference by CM in his department

B.S. SATISH KUMAR  
BENGALURU

The unprecedented action of senior BJP leader and Karnataka Minister K.S. Eshwarappa complaining to the Governor against the alleged interference in his department by Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa has not only kicked up political dust in the ruling party but also indicated that divisions in the party are getting further deepened.

Some leaders in the party believe that the situation is similar to that during the BJP rule in 2008 whose performance was marred owing to infighting between the pro and anti-Yediyurappa camps.

Mr. Eshwarappa has raised serious issues such as interference in administration, violation



K.S. Eshwarappa

of norms related to division of powers between Ministers and the Chief Minister, nepotism, and indiscriminate release of funds from outside the budgetary allocation. He has also alleged violation of norms related to the Panchayat Raj Act.

But party insiders admit that the issue

goes beyond these technical contentions as it is a clear indication of the party facing trust deficit again. It is also an indication of "leadership vacuum," the party having no suitable alternative for the 78-year-old Mr. Yediyurappa, observed another leader. He pointed out that there was no cohesion between the party old guards and those who came from other parties.

**Arun Singh's stand**  
BJP national general secretary Arun Singh, who is in charge of party's State affairs, has maintained that Mr. Eshwarappa should have resolved the issue over alleged interference of the Chief Minister in his department through mutual talks instead of approaching the Governor.

## CBI to probe death of Walayar siblings

The minors were found dead in 2017

STAFF REPORTER  
PALAKKAD

The Central Bureau of Investigation has taken over the Walayar case, in which two minor sisters of a Dalit family, aged 13 and 9, were found hanging in their house under mysterious circumstances on different dates in 2017.

The case, in which rape and murder were alleged, had sparked an outrage and invited national attention when a POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act) court here set free all the accused for want of evidence in October 2019.

CBI sources said rape and murder charges would be investigated seriously.

The victims' mother, with the support of an action forum formed by Dalit and human rights activists, approached the government

seeking a reinvestigation, and later the High Court demanding an inquiry by the CBI.

The government in January this year formed a special investigation team (SIT) led by Superintendent of Police (Railways) R. Nishanthini to reinvestigate the case.

Amid continuing protests by the victims' mother under the banner of the Walayar Action Forum, the High Court on March 19 asked the CBI to take over the case. Ms. Nishanthini's special investigation team handed over the case files to the CBI on March 26. The CBI formally took over the case on Thursday by registering two separate cases before the Judicial First Class Magistrate at Alathur, who is in charge of the POCSO court here.

**TTD gets 62 acres to build temple in Jammu**  
SRINAGAR  
The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), which manages the Tirumala Venkateswara Temple in Andhra Pradesh, will build its first-ever temple in J&K. J&K Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha has approved the transfer of 496 kanal (62 acres) and 17 marla in the Jammu region to the TTD for a period of 40 years to build the temple and allied infrastructure.

**Maudany moves SC for relaxation of bail norm**  
NEW DELHI  
PDP leader Abdul Nazir Maudany has moved the Supreme Court for relaxation of his bail condition and permit him to stay in his hometown in Kerala till the pendency of the trial in the 2008 Bengaluru bomb blast case in which he is an accused. The SC granted him bail in 2014 till the conclusion of the trial before a court at the Parappana Agrahara Central Jail in Bengaluru.

**Facial recognition app 'locks out' Uber driver**  
HYDERABAD  
An Uber driver, who went on a pilgrimage to Tirupati and returned with a tonsured head, claimed that he was locked out of the system as part of the log-in process, was rejected by the company's facial recognition app. The company has denied the claim. The issue created a flutter on social media, with organisations such as Internet Freedom Foundation voicing their support for the driver.

## 'CPI(M) has no right to speak on data sanctity'

Chennithala lashes out at M.A Baby

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Leader of the Opposition in the Kerala Assembly Ramchandran Chennithala on Thursday said the CPI(M) had no moral ground to sermonise on data sanctity.

He was responding to CPI (M) Polit Bureau member M.A. Baby's allegation that Mr. Chennithala had invaded citizens' privacy by publishing the personal details of nearly 4,34 lakh citizens on the charge that they had illegally come into possession of multiple voter identity cards.

**Sensitive information'**  
Mr. Baby alleged that Mr. Chennithala had published voters' personal information on a website hosted on a Singapore-based server.

"This is a serious matter. Mr. Chennithala should explain how voter IDs, names, addresses and other details of

people here were handed over for storing abroad. As cross-border data transfer regulations are applicable in our country, he should spell out which legal permission did he seek to share sensitive data with a website hosted in Singapore," Mr. Baby said.

Mr. Baby also asked whether Mr. Chennithala had procured individual consent before uploading their photographs and individual details on a foreign server. "Double voting should be prevented, there are no two ways about it. But Mr. Chennithala is politicising this too by hinting that adding voters is an LDF ploy to return to power," Mr. Baby said.

Mr. Chennithala said the LDF had compromised the private medical information of lakhs of citizens at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Addressing an UDF election rally at Thuvvoo, near Wandoor, Mr. Gandhi said



**Reaching out:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi at an election rally in Thuvvoo, Malappuram district, on Thursday.

## We will end poverty in Kerala, says Rahul

STAFF REPORTER  
MALAPPURAM

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday reiterated his assurance that there would not be any single person in Kerala without an annual income of ₹72,000 from the day the United Democratic Front (UDF) came to power in the State.

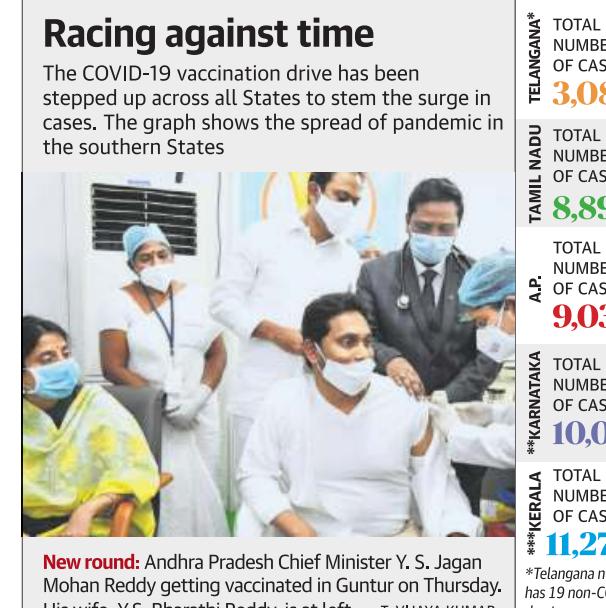
Addressing an UDF election rally at Thuvvoo, near Wandoor, Mr. Gandhi said

the UDF, if elected to power, would revolutionise the State's economy.

"With one stroke, we will finish poverty in Kerala, we will revive the economy of Kerala, and we will give jobs to the youngsters of Kerala," Mr. Gandhi said amid loud cheers from the crowds. "Kerala is going to be the first State in India to have a guaranteed income for all its people. This is a revolutionary idea," he said.

## Racing against time

The COVID-19 vaccination drive has been stepped up across all States to stem the surge in cases. The graph shows the spread of pandemic in the southern States



Fresh COVID-19 infections in Bengaluru near 3,000

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala's COVID-19 graph rose on Thursday, with 2,798 new cases. The test positivity rate (TPR) was 5.15%.

The death toll from the virus rose as 11 more fatalities were recorded on Thursday. Of this, Pathanamthitta reported four deaths. Kozhikode led the case tally with 424 cases.

Karnataka reported 4,234 cases and 18 more deaths, Bengaluru Urban reporting 2,906 cases. Among the dead, 11 were from Bengaluru Urban.

Andhra Pradesh reported 1,271 new infections and three deaths on Thursday

morning. The new deaths occurred in Guntur, Visakhapatnam and Anantapur districts. Chittoor again topped the districts with 285 infections.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Thursday launched the phase-3 vaccination for all people 45 to 60

years old in Guntur and said the State would vaccinate one crore people by the end of April.

"Our volunteers or ASHA workers will collect the details of all those above 45, including their health condi-

tion and enrol them. They will inform the date and place of vaccination," Mr. Jagan said. In all, 28,06,548 doses were administered in Andhra Pradesh.

Telangana saw a sharp spike and 887 tested positive on Wednesday. Four more patients died. Greater Hyderabad added 201 new cases.

Chennai along with five districts of Chengalpattu, Coimbatore, Kancheepuram, Thanjavur and Tiruvalam accounted for more than 70% of the 2,817 fresh cases reported in Tamil Nadu. There were 19 more deaths. (With inputs from Vijayawada, Hyderabad, Chennai bureaus and PTI)

COVID-19

tion and enrol them. They will inform the date and place of vaccination," Mr. Jagan said. In all, 28,06,548 doses were administered in Andhra Pradesh.

"Our volunteers or ASHA workers will collect the details of all those above 45, including their health condi-

tion



**CBSE clarifies on practical examinations**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Students of Classes 10 and 12 who are not able to appear for their practical examinations because of being infected with coronavirus will get another chance before June 11, the CBSE announced on Thursday.

"If any candidate is absent in the practical exam because of being COVID-19 positive or if any family member tests positive, the school will conduct practical examination for such candidates at an appropriate time in consultation with the regional authority by June 11," CBSE Exam Controller Sanyam Bhardwaj said.

## 6.75 crore doses given

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The cumulative number of COVID-19 vaccine doses administered in the country has crossed 6.75 crore with a total of 17,47,094 doses given on Thursday till 8 p.m., the Health Ministry said.

The figure includes 4 crore beneficiaries aged above 45 years. Thursday marked the opening of the third phase of vaccination, where all above the age of 45 are considered eligible.

# 'Younger people at risk during second wave'

Expert fears super spreader events in colleges, workplaces

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN  
NEW DELHI

The second surge of COVID-19 puts children and younger adults at high risk with the situation being very grim especially in rural and tribal areas which were spared in the first wave, warn experts.

"Children and young adults are mostly uninfected so far and therefore are at high risk of contracting the infection. The schools and colleges are functioning in most States resulting in higher risk of transmission in closed settings. Young adults have resumed working from office and are again at higher risk in closed spaces," explained Giridhar R. Babu, Head of Life Course, Epidemiology, Public Health Foundation of India.

He said there are multiple super spreader events happening in schools, colleges, offices, public transport (metros).

"There is no doubt that many States are surging and as a result, the country is witnessing a rise in cases amounting to the ascending phase of a second wave. Based on some of the results of modelling done by experts at the COVID-19 study group, the peak of this wave seems to be around May, 2021. If the rise in cases continues as steeply as they are



**Stricter testing:** People queuing up to give nasal swab samples to test for COVID-19 in Mumbai. •AFP

## Sputnik V approval pending

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Sputnik V vaccine hasn't got the emergency use authorization on Thursday, confirmed an official, following the meeting of the

Subject Expert Committee (SEC). The Committee, set up by the government, looked into Dr. Reddy's application seeking the approval for the vaccine use in India.

now, there will be a strain on the health system," he said.

### Rural belt

Stating that rural and tribal areas are facing a grim situation now, Ravi Wankhedkar, member, Indian Medical Association (IMA), said malnutrition leading to decreased immunity, not following safety norms and lack of proper quarantine facilities have increased the incidence of infection.

On the third phase of the vaccination drive, Sahar Qureshi, medical superintendent, Max Smart Super Speciality Hospital, said, "We commenced with phase three of drive which allows vaccination for those above 45 years. The footfalls were lesser than expected [if we compare with March 1] since it was a working day. However, we hope this will rise during the upcoming long weekend, starting Friday."

## Finance Ministry defends EPF's tax-free thresholds

Incorrect to say it is double taxation: Revenue Secretary

VIKAS DHOOT  
NEW DELHI

The Finance Ministry has strongly defended its decision to grant a higher tax-free threshold of ₹5 lakh for Provident Fund contributions by government employees, compared with private sector workers whose income on annual contributions beyond ₹2.5 lakh will be taxed from this year.

"I would like you to clarify this. There are two ways the contribution can be made – by the employer and by the employee. In case where the contributions are made by both of them, the employers' contribution up to ₹7.5 lakh is exempt and for employees, it's ₹2.5 lakh. So the total threshold for private sector employees is at ₹10 lakh," Revenue Secretary Tarun Bajaj explained.

"For the government (or

for such) funds where only the employee is contributing, we have put a threshold only of ₹5 lakh. So, in fact, it's the other way round," he said, stressing that private sector employees with higher salaries can have a contribution up to ₹10 lakh a year into their EPF accounts with tax-free interest, while those who only contribute themselves face a threshold of ₹5 lakh.

Mr. Bajaj said that it was incorrect to suggest the tax on EPF income amounted to double taxation as contributions beyond ₹1.5 lakh are made from tax-paid income.

### Section 80C

Section 80C limits tax breaks on employees' PF contributions along with other similar savings instruments to ₹1.5 lakh per year, so some experts have pointed out that a part of EPF con-

tributions beyond ₹1.5 lakh will face taxation at the contribution stage and savings beyond ₹2.5 lakh will be taxed at the income stage as well.

"I think that's a wrong interpretation. We are not taxing your contribution; we are taxing the interest income on your contribution. When you invest in FDs, when you invest in shares, when you invest in company deposits, you are doing the same thing. You are taxed for your income there also," he pointed out.

It is quite possible that one has put ₹1.5 lakh in EPF, ₹1.5 lakh in an insurance policy, and then ₹1.5 lakh in PPF also. Then he doesn't get any benefit under PPF. Basically, anything you invest is from your tax-paid income only, but the interest on that will be taxed as that is again your income," the Secretary said.

4 airports to get machines to recognise faces

MINI TEJASWI  
BENGALURU

NEC Corporation India, a part of the Tokyo-based IT and electronics company, NEC Corporation, has bagged contracts from the Airports Authority of India (AAI) to deploy facial recognition-based passenger identification technology in four airports in the country – Varanasi, Vijayawada, Pune and Kolkata.

Pradeep Kushwaha, head of public safety at NEC Corporation India, told *The Hindu*, "Varanasi airport will be ready for passenger trials of the technology this month, while work has begun in the other three airports and they are expected to be ready for passenger trials in three months. In Varanasi, trials are already on with airport staff." "Our focus is on creating a technology which accurately identifies people and delivers services to them. We are also working with some banks to create finer print supported money transfer systems," he added.

As part of measures to boost tri-service integration and resource optimisation, Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat on Thursday operationalised the third joint logistics node (JLN) in Mumbai.

"These JLN will provide integrated logistics cover to the armed forces for their small arms ammunition, rations, fuel, general stores, civil hired transport, aviation clothing, spares and also engineering support in an effort to synergise their operational efforts," a Defence Ministry statement said.

## Rawat launches joint logistics hub

Move to boost tri-service integration

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

As part of measures to boost tri-service integration and resource optimisation, Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat on Thursday operationalised the third joint logistics node (JLN) in Mumbai.

"These JLN will provide integrated logistics cover to the armed forces for their small arms ammunition, rations, fuel, general stores, civil hired transport, aviation clothing, spares and also engineering support in an effort to synergise their operational efforts," a Defence Ministry statement said.

The initiative would accrue advantages in terms of saving of manpower, economise utilisation of resources, besides financial savings. "Establishment and operationalisation of JLN is a very important first step in the direction of logistics integration of our three Services. Acceptance of each other's limitations and learning

from each other's strengths and best practices is essential to help improve the functioning and efficacy of these nodes," Gen. Rawat said. He also released the standing operating procedure of the JLN.

The government sanction letter for the establishment of the JLN in Mumbai, Guwahati and Port Blair was signed on October 12, 2020. The JLN in Guwahati and Tri-Services, Andaman and Nicobar Command, Port Blair, were operationalised in January this year.

## Three more Rafale jets arrive in India

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The fourth batch of three Rafales landed on Wednesday evening flying directly from the Istres Air Base in France, the IAF said. This takes the number of Rafales in service to 14.

"Rafales were refuelled in-flight by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Air Force tankers. This marks yet another milestone in the strong relationship between the two air forces," IAF said on Twitter.

The IAF is also set to raise the second Rafale Squadron at Hasimara in West Bengal by mid-April. More are expected to arrive shortly completing the first squadron, a defence official said.

Last September, the IAF inducted the batch of five Rafales of 36 jets contracted from France under a ₹7.8-billion Inter-Governmental Agreement signed in September 2016. The second batch of three arrived last November, also flying non-stop with three inflight refuellings.

# Covaxin for those who got placebo

Panel allows Bharat Biotech to unblind trial participants aged above 45

R. PRASAD  
CHENNAI

On March 24, the Subject Expert Committee (SEC) permitted Bharat Biotech to unblind all "participants of age group of more than 45 years and offer to administer the vaccine free of cost as and when they become eligible for the vaccine in the national programme". The Committee recommended that the company unblind the participants as "vaccines [including Covaxin] are [already] available under the immunisation programme, and therefore all the eligible age groups under the immunisation programme should be permitted for unblinding for vaccination".



**Safe dose:** The decision by the expert committee was based on the ready availability of vaccine in the country. •AFP

blinded, the trial can continue only in those below that age bar. "A significant number of participants will no longer be available to study the vaccine efficacy once unblinding of participants above 45 years is carried out," says Dr. Anant Bhan, global health and bioethics researcher based in Bhopal.

"With the current surge in cases, more younger people are getting infected." In all likelihood, the phase 3 trial may achieve its final endpoint of 130 cases but the trial will not include the most vulnerable population of participants above 45 years.

"More cases might have been recorded in March. Reliability would increase if further analysis too showed efficacy of over 80% It is not the ideal, but what else is the alternative now?" says Dr. Jacob John, formerly with CMC Vellore.

Could the SEC have asked the company to request participants above 45 years to be un-

continue in the study for the successful completion of the trial and unblind only those who want to withdraw from the trial? According to Dr. Bhan, this could have been done as long as participants are provided adequate information about eligibility to get the vaccine and are allowed to exercise an informed choice.

Dr. Jameel goes further to say that India should not insist on bridging studies especially in the case of Johnson and Johnson, Novavax, and Sputnik V vaccines, where there is an Indian company manufacturing the vaccines. "Restricted use authorisation was granted to Covishield even before the bridging studies were completed. Today, there is a surge in cases across many States. More groups will be eligible for a vaccine if vaccine supply is not limited. Israel has demonstrated how large scale vaccination can control the pandemic. We must rethink our policies," says Dr. Jameel.

## Recovering well, says President

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Days after a successful bypass heart surgery, President Ram Nath Kovind on Thursday said he was recovering well and thanked his doctors and caregivers.

"I've been recovering well after the bypass surgery, thanks to the amazing dedication of the doctors and caregivers." Mr. Kovind was quoted by the official handle of Rashtrapati Bhavan.

"I'm touched by messages, from citizens and leaders from India and abroad, wishing me speedy recovery. It's difficult to express in words my gratitude to you all," the President added.

## Kerry to visit New Delhi this month

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN

American Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry will visit New Delhi, Dhaka and Abu Dhabi during April 1-9, the State Department announced on Wednesday, confirming reports in *The Hindu*, from last week.

The purpose of the travel is for "consultations on increasing climate ambition ahead of President Biden's Leaders Summit on Climate April 22-23 and the 26th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change later this year," the State Department said.

## Policeman dies in attack by militants

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
SRINAGAR

A policeman was killed as unidentified militants attacked BJP leader Anwar Khan's house in Srinagar on Thursday. Mr. Khan was not present in the house at the time. A sentry, Rameez Ahmad, was critically injured in the attack and succumbed to his wounds in hospital.

## Dues from mills to sugarcane farmers go up to ₹23,000 cr.

Appeal made to Centre to hike the MSP of sugar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI



A load of sugarcane being taken to a mill in Punjab.

the current situation of very high cane price arrears. Otherwise, it is feared that if current situation persists, then cane price arrears will jump very fast to alarming levels," it added.

Apart from price hikes, the other way to increase liquidity is reduce surplus stocks through exports. ISMA estimates that contracts worth 45 lakh tonnes have already been made. The export target for the marketing year ending September 2021 is 60 lakh tonnes.

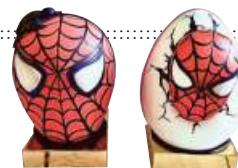
"The prevailing low ex-mill sugar prices for the last several months, has adversely affected the liquidity of mills and their ability to pay the FRP [Fair and Remunerative Price] to cane farmers," said the Indian Sugar Mills Association. "The cane farmers and sugar mills are hopeful of an early announcement by the government regarding increase in MSP of sugar as a measure to improve revenue realisation by mills and payment to farmers, which will in turn ease



General Bipin Rawat releasing the SoP of the logistics hub in Mumbai.

from each other's strengths and best practices is essential to help improve the functioning and efficacy of these nodes," Gen. Rawat said. He also released the standing operating procedure of the JLN.

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# How to lay an Easter egg

Staying indoors this weekend? Whip up a batch of Easter eggs with your loved ones.

Experts share tips for first-timers

RUTH DHANARAJ

From pretty pastel marzipan shades to velvety chocolate hues and everything in between, there is a childlike wonder to receiving Easter eggs. It really does not matter if they are elaborately designed or just wrapped in shiny tin foil, the anticipation of being gifted one is well worth the wait.

The fact you get them just as this time of year, makes them all the more desirable. Every other delicacy and baked delight can be conjured up at birthdays or Christmas or any other special occasion – except Easter eggs.

And while egg-shaped chocolates with little toys inside can be bought off the shelf any day of the year now, there is still a lot of fun to be had in making your own Easter eggs. They may not look perfect the first time round, but the glorious mess and lingering aroma of hot chocolate or the sticky sweetness of marzipan that goes into fashioning one, will have you at it till you get it right.

Though the process seems pretty straightforward, there are some directions you must keep in mind to achieve the desired ovoid result.

**First, the basics**  
**You will need:** Cooking chocolate, food thermometer, candy treats

To begin with, one needs to melt chocolate to the right temperature. Called ‘tempering’, this step is needed to keep the chocolate smooth and glossy

and more importantly, to keep it from melting easily; a big plus when fashioning an Easter egg.

So how do you temper chocolate? Firstly, never heat chocolate directly. Put two-thirds of your cooking chocolate in a bowl and hold it over a saucepan of boiling water. Keep stirring till it melts. Take it away from the heat and add the rest of the chocolate, all the while stirring so it melts too.

“Make sure you use a food thermometer while tempering chocolate. It will break easily if the consistency is not right,” says Sunita Rebecca, a home baker from Hyderabad.

Ideally, the temperature of the chocolate should not exceed 120°F for dark chocolate or 105°F for milk or white chocolate.

Sounds tiresome? Rohit Thomas Kadicheeri of Silvis Creations, Kochi, recommends that first timers use compound chocolate instead of cooking chocolate, as it does not need tempering.

“It doesn’t melt so fast either, making it easier to work with. Melt it, set it and your egg is done,” he says.

However, he does warn against trying to melt a bar of store-bought chocolate. “It would need tempering too,” he cautions.

Next, smear the melted chocolate on the insides of a mould with a basting brush. If you do not have a brush, swirl the chocolate around the insides of the mould and remove the excess.

“If you don’t have a mould,

reuse a Kinder Joy casing or any other rounded object to make your eggs,” says Meena Faszer, a home baker from Bengaluru.

Online tutorials advocate the use of balloons for the same purpose.

Next, refrigerate the mould for 10-15 minutes till the chocolate solidifies. Apply another layer of chocolate and refrigerate for another 10-15 minutes. Repeat the process for a third coat.

Remember, the more layers you have, the stronger the ‘egg shell’.

Once you are done with the layering process, ease the egg halves out of the moulds.

Oiling the moulds before you begin makes this step easier and

gives your egg shell a glossy finish. Fill one half of your egg with smaller sweet treats.

Place the other half on a warm surface, just enough to melt the edges a bit and then ‘glue’ both the halves together.

Voila! And there you have it – your very first Easter egg!

“Once you have a number of eggs ready, decorating them is a fun family pastime – whether you are icing shapes or names on them or just getting them ‘basket ready’,” says Meena.

You can decorate your eggs with melted chocolate or icing sugar. White chocolate or milk chocolate stands out if you are writing something on the egg, though you can use the same chocolate base for simple deco-

## Easter popsicles for the culinarily challenged

Don't sweat it if your Easter eggs resemble golf balls or worse. This easy dessert idea will save your face as well as your time.

### INGREDIENTS

- Hollow chocolate eggs
- Ice cream
- Popsicle sticks

### METHOD

Open each egg. Fill each half with ice cream of your choice. Place a popsicle stick in one half of your egg and cover with the other. Freeze for two hours. Eat, enjoy, repeat.

(Image by Chef Club Network)

rative designs. (It is also a great way to use up any extra melted chocolate).

You can use icing sugar paste that can be coloured for brighter designs. Just fill up a piping bag and use different nozzles to make a variety of patterns.

### If you don't have a piping bag:

Find a small plastic bag that is of a sturdy quality, roughly about the

size of your palms. Fill it halfway with your icing of choice. Squeeze the filling to a corner of the plastic bag, giving it a conical shape and secure the opening with a rubber band or tape.

Finally, cut the tip of the cone – you now have a home made piping bag. Keep in mind the surface area you will be working on. Snipping out a biggish piece of the corner will leave you with a lot of icing gushing out; which might be difficult to manage on a small egg.

If you are fairly confident of your skills and/or have a steady hand, you can also roll up butter paper or parchment paper into a cone and use it instead of a piping bag.

### If not chocolate...

“Easter eggs can be made with marshmallows too,” says Sunita Rebecca. “Melt marshmallows and add crushed rice Krispies to the mix to get a pliable, colourful medium you can use

to shape eggs.”

Rice cereal is required to bring stiffness to the melted marshmallows, which would otherwise be too much of a liquid to use.

“Moisten your hands with water or dab butter on your palms to make the moulding easier,” advises Sunita.

According to Srivatsan S of Sri's Cake Lab, Bengaluru, “Marzipan is a great medium to make Easter eggs as you can use a lot of colours on them.” Srivatsan, who has been creating themed Easter eggs this season, uses cashew paste instead of the traditional almond paste for his marzipan.

“You have to realise this is a very delicate material and an oily substance as well, so don't be discouraged if it doesn't turn out well the first few times. You'll eventually get the hang of it,” he says.

Once you do, it is almost as versatile as edible play dough, and can be moulded into any shape on its own without casings.

Though marzipan eggs are not hollow, Srivatsan says people have been known to customise them by placing useful items like stationery instead of candy inside. Once you have your fillings decided, all that is left is icing. Pour some icing sugar into a piping bag and just have fun!

Happy Easter cooking.



## HORS D'OEUVRES



### The cheesy dilemma

It was a delicious little crisis. Monks at the Citeaux Abbey in Saint-Nicolas-lès-Citeaux, France (in picture), known for their artisanal raw milk cheese that is usually sold on-site, were forced to resort to e-commerce last week, to help shift at least 4,000 extra wheels (around 2.8 tonnes) of the dairy products, after sales were hit by the prolonged and widespread closure of restaurants due to COVID-19 lockdowns since October last year. “We tried explaining to our 75 cows that they needed to produce less milk but they don't seem to have understood,” Brother Jean-Claude said, in an interview to *The Guardian* that has since been widely quoted with much hilarity. The 19 Trappist monks partnered with an online retailer that sells products made by abbeys and monasteries.

Through divine providence (or perhaps good marketing), within

24 hours of the sale's announcement, customers had pre-booked

2,006 kilograms of the abbey's Reblochon-style cheese. Often

used to turning down orders, the monks were reportedly glad to

be relieved of their unexpected dairy burden.



### Toot, toot! Your poultry's here

Fresh meat and seafood brand Fipola has over 18 stores across Chennai, but is now spreading its reach in the metropolis further with a new initiative. The brand has launched its first ever mobile store, Fipola on Wheels – food trucks that are doing rounds in remote spaces, communities, associations and large building complexes that may not have quick access to the retail store. Three such vehicles are on commission to reach as many localities, ferrying fresh meat food trucks while maintaining hygiene, quality assurance and variety to all its customers. Their offerings range from poultry and lamb to seafood and marinated items. The company is also expanding to 22 new outlets all over Tamil Nadu in the next six months. “We aim at taking Fipola to people everywhere because we believe everyone should have access to fresh, clean and quality assured meat and seafood,” the company's managing director and CEO Sushil Kanugolu stated.



MEGHNA MAJUMDAR

The summer heat is upon us. Thankfully, so is that underrated queen of summer fruits, the watermelon. The fruit is more versatile than most of us realise, lending itself not only to juices and salads, but also to sorbets, soups and *kheers*.

A bowl or plate heaped with watermelon slices is a simple summer joy. But if you are up for a challenge, and do not mind tinkering around the kitchen to bring out more from the fruit, there is plenty of fun to be had. Take, for instance, the simple chilled watermelon soup, inspired by the slightly more complex Spanish gazpacho that uses a blend of various produce. All you need for this soup is a blender, some spices to temper and

ice cubes to chill it down, and you are good to go for a hot Sunday afternoon.

Among salads, the first option, of course, is a simple watermelon and feta salad with a dash of lime juice and a toss of basil – recipes galore wherever you care to look for them. A less famous option is the nutty, light Thai watermelon salad. This is

where the ingredients begin to get complicated – the dressing requires fish sauce, among other things. If you want to step it further up a notch, guidance is at hand. London- and Delhi-based Chef Alfred Prasad has popularly paired his grilled tiger prawns with a salad of melon, watermelon and arugula or rocket leaves, in a recipe featured by *Great British Chefs*.

For something more substantial (or more traditional), watermelon rind can be diced and cooked into both quick, crunchy stir-fries and sweet, tangy curries. These have always been a part of traditional North Indian kitchens, but, as Mumbai-based Chef Aaron Coutinho points out, have never been the most popular part of restaurant menus. “People are not used to sweet things like watermelon and sugarcane being used in savoury dishes. They might compliment you for trying something interesting, but they would hesitate to order it. There is a bit of a mental block there,” says the chef, who currently runs the virtual kitchen Chefcous Foods and Wellness.

He adds, “Diners are far more open to the idea of the rind being used in condiments and *kimchis*. Watermelon rind can be also be made into a pickle or a sweet and sour relish.” But do not let the public trends dictate your culinary adventures – the rind of a watermelon lends itself quite well to an Indian main course, reiterates Chef Aaron. “The watermelon itself can be chopped into cubes and cooked, but the rind is far more firm and retains its shape and crunch,” he says. “It also has a mild taste – slightly like raw papaya – and so it will take up the

taste of whatever dish you decide to cook it into.”

In desserts, again, you can choose between the simple and the not-so-simple options. Making granita – a sorbet-like dessert of frozen fruit – is straightforward in theory and needs minimal ingredients.

However, the chilled blend of watermelon cubes, lemon juice, sugar and salt will have to be taken out of the fridge time and time again, to be scraped, frozen and re-scraped over and over again till it reaches just the right, crushed texture and dryness. Another option, as Chef Aaron suggests, is watermelon *kheer*. Once again, the mild flavour of the rinds are a point of advantage here. “Just grate it in,” he says. “Because it has such a mild taste, it will add plenty of body, without really changing the taste that you enjoy.”

## In the pink of summer

Forget painstakingly strained juices. With watermelon season upon us, here's how you can play with the fruit for your appetisers, main course and desserts



**Too good to eat** Marzipan eggs, like these by Sri's Cake Lab in Bengaluru, can be moulded like play dough and have more creative scope

▪ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

# The theory of rap



The Dharavi Dream Project, India's only school of hip hop, led by AR Rahman, completes one year of online classes with students from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Canada.

SWETA AKUNDI

What is the best way to stare down your opponent? And if the crowd starts turning against you, how do you not choke? Thirty students listened to MC Kode with rapt attention as he explained the art of battle rap.

Kode is the teacher of the day at a school like none other in India. The Dharavi Dream Project is a free school of hip hop: rapping, beatboxing, graffiti styles, and beeboying. Students here learn the theory of hip

hop, how to write beats and lyrics, produce music and more.

Started in 2016 by the late Samir Bangara and his mentee Dolly Rateshwari, The Dharavi Dream Project was actualised with the help of composer AR Rahman and filmmaker Shekhar Kapur to promote the musical talents of children in the locality.

This April, the school completes one year of online classes. "Going online was never part of the plan. Our plan was to open more physical schools and



make it a proven model for teaching facets of hip hop," says Dolly. "But when the pandemic hit, we thought if not now, when? This was the time when people were at home, helpless."

Dolly, with MC Heam, started the first online class for rapping, on April 1. In one year, this would open avenues for youth across India, even abroad.

"Through our online classes, we have reached out to 800 people of different backgrounds, from Dharavi, to villages of Uttar Pradesh, and even other countries including Canada, Nepal and Bangladesh," she says.

The Dharavi Dream Project started six years ago, when as part of Qyuki digital media company that promotes content, creators Samir and Dolly were visiting Dharavi. Here, they chanced upon a few young people beeboying on the streets.

"At first, we wanted to see if these artistes needed help with digital marketing. They told us that what they needed was space to practise."

Dolly and her team rented a room and turned it into a dance studio.

Eventually, they were given four rooms in a school, Ganesh Vidyalmandir in Kalyanwadi, which became their base. The average age of the students is between 11 and 26, with their youngest, a nine-year-old beeboy hopeful from Dharavi.

Offline, it would take in about 70 students, but online, the school has nearly 200 students

spread across various classes: 60 in rap classes, 40 in beatboxing, 10 in graffiti, 30 in beeboying, and 30 in rap battle.

Popular names in the Indian hip hop scene, such as Gully

Gang, DCypher for beatboxing, and artist Gauri Dabholkar for graffiti, have come on board as teachers. Online classes are making space for instructors from outside Mumbai too.

One of them is New Delhi-based MC Kode, the school's battle rap instructor. Learning battle rap is something that needs you to be on-ground in front of crowds, so his classes were first oriented more towards raising awareness about the battles being conducted in different countries.

The other focus is on writing. "It is like an English class! We look at poetic devices and how to use them," says Kode. As rap becomes more mainstream in India, young rappers also need to understand how to operate in a country that gets easily offended. "The first thing I like to do is sensitivity training. In India, it is easy to cross lines, we have to realise that we live in a country where there are a lot of thin-skinned people. We need to understand what kind of jokes and roasts we can or can't make."

The school holds a 10-month weekly course from April to October and then January to March, and the classes are free. Dolly is now working on moving the school to a mobile app.

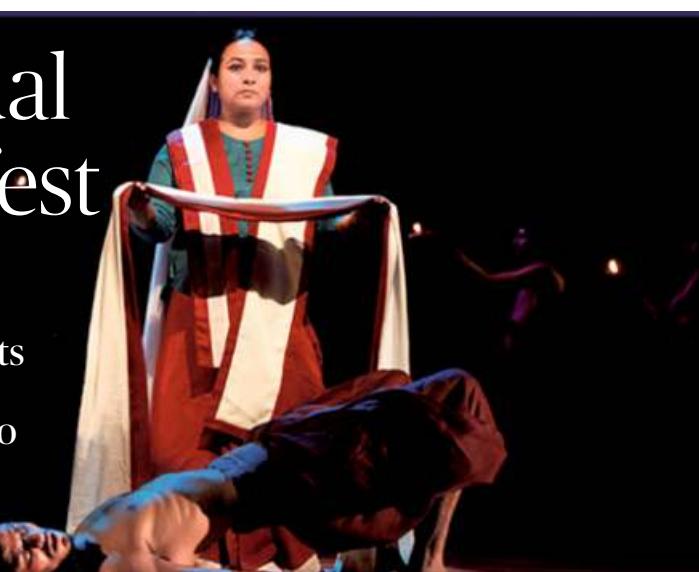


**Level up**  
Students at The Dharavi Dream Project school

\* SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

## A virtual stage-fest

The Mahindra Excellence in Theatre and Arts brings award-winning plays to an online audience



The Mahindra Excellence in Theatre and Arts brings a wide variety of its award-winning plays online along with conversations on many aspects of theatre. After migrating online in 2020, the team makes its best plays available to a global audience. Here is a look into the line-up:

On Friday, April 2, a deep dive into the legendary theatrical production *Andha Yug* and why this age-old story, a retelling of *The Mahabharata* myth, continues to be relevant even today, will be streamed. The conversation titled 'Andha Yug: The theatrics of visual & improv', will also explore the visual aspects of theatre and the importance of stage, colour, space, movement and improvisation.

The plays that are being discussed in these talks will also be streamed. They are:

**April 3:** A verse play, *Andha Yug* is set against the backdrop

of the last day of the Mahabharata war until the final moments of Lord Krishna's life.

**April 10:** *Nona*, a socio-political satirical play, directed by acclaimed Malayalam theatre personality, Jino Joseph, is set in rural India and examines pseudo-nationalism and casteism.

**April 17:** Set in a present-day rural heartland, *Lassanwala* is the tale of Kallu Bahman and traces the tragic-comic events that shake his firm belief in the caste system.

**April 24:** Inspired by Indian mythology and mysticism, *Elephant in the Room* pays homage to Ganesh, tracing his destiny as the most beloved god, through a loophole in time.

All plays and conversations will be streamed in Facebook and YouTube at 7 pm

## The boy who wants to breathe

Winner of Let Me Breathe's Clean Air Punjab Competition, Akshya Singh, talks about the discourse around pollution



Foggy tale Akshya (below) and a still from the film \* SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

DIVYA KALA BHAVANI

Akshya Singh is excited about his first-place win in the Clean Air Punjab Competition. He talks of the need to keep the planet safe. "It is important to recognise the next generation's right to a cleaner world and can be done by analysing the consequences of ignoring that right."

The competition held across February and March 2021 was put together by Let Me Breathe, a Delhi-based organisation that provides space for people to document stories of living and surviving air pollution and climate change. The space also allows for positive stories on sustainability.

The Clean Air Punjab Competition aimed to address a staggering number of deaths as a consequence of unbreathable air. According to Global Burden of Disease Study 2019, air pollution led to 41,090 deaths in Punjab just that year alone.

The 18-year-old has been fo-



cussing on his green initiatives since Class IX, having done several projects including walkathons, plantation drives and online challenges at school, residence, and other places, events and programmes. He is also the head of Saas Saas (which means 'clean breath'), a knowledge-sharing platform about pollution.

"My brother in Delhi has asthma and I often watched him struggling to breathe and having

to be nebulised all the time. We did a protest march in November 2019 in the local market and urged people not to burst crackers for Diwali. We shouted slogans and people around the market joined in."

By the time the Clean Air Punjab Competition rolled around he had already compiled several interviews with local activists and people affected by the unclean air. The video starts with Aksh-

yae's sister acting like she is struggling to breathe. "We had to make it engaging. Yes, it is a 'fictional start' but the rest of the video has hard facts and figures. Most people prefer emotional appeal over scientific analysis. Feelings are more effective compared to facts and figures."

The first version of the video was more than 15 minutes long. The three-minute requirement for the competition was a blessing in disguise. Akshya found making the film concise actually enhanced the video.

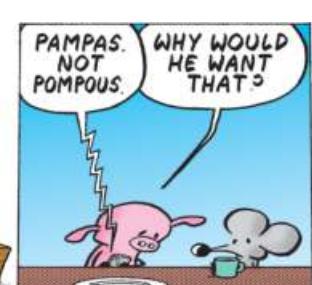
Akshya has hopes of pursuing environmental engineering in the United States, pointing out the fight against climate change gets more traction there due to media attention.

Akshya has his own green heroes, including Sir David Attenborough, Leonardo DiCaprio, Greta Thunberg, local storytellers Anuj Ramatri, Abhi and Niyu, and young activist, Licypriya Kangjam. He is an active volunteer at Fridays For Future Delhi.

### POOCH CAFE



### PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



### HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



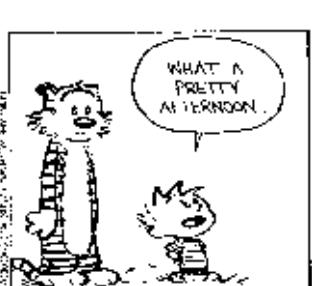
### PEANUTS



### TIGER



### CALVIN AND HOBBES



# Biden allows H1-B visa ban to expire

Trump had imposed the restrictions last year to 'protect' jobs; industry bodies welcome the move

SIRAM LAKSHMAN  
WASHINGTON

The White House has allowed a 2020 ban on H1-B skilled worker and certain other temporary visas to expire on March 31. H1-B visas, used more by Indian professionals than any other nationality, were suspended by President Donald Trump in June last year, ostensibly to protect American jobs, already reeling under the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Visas for intra-company transfers (L1), exchange visitors (J1), temporary non-agricultural workers (H-2B) and dependents of H1-B holders (H4) were also impacted by the expiring ban.

The White House did not make an official statement on the suspension's expiration, as President Joe Biden travelled to Pittsburgh on Wednesday to unveil his \$2 trillion American Jobs Plan – a massive, eight-year infrastructure plan.

While the stated reason for Mr. Trump's suspension was protecting American



Welcome back: Firms hiring foreigners 'struggled to fill jobs', despite high domestic unemployment, says a study. • AP/FILE

jobs in the face of unprecedented unemployment last year, the ban did not have its intended impact, according to the preliminary findings of a *Wall Street Journal* study.

The analysis found that businesses employing foreigners "struggled to fill jobs" despite very high domestic unemployment.

The ban, which was opposed by several prominent industry bodies, was litigated last year. The American

Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers had won a preliminary injunction against the ban for their members from a federal court last October (the start of the U.S. fiscal year).

Indian IT industry body NASSCOM said it applauded the decision to let the visa ban expire.

"Allowing the suspension to lapse makes great sense for the United States. As the courts seemed to agree,

there was no credible evidence that the visa holders do harm to the U.S. labour market. Quite the contrary, these individuals are a vital part of the U.S. workforce and their presence enhances and helps enable the U.S. economy, innovate, and grow jobs across the country. NASSCOM believes this will help U.S. businesses access talent critical to the economic recovery phase in the post-COVID world," the NASSCOM statement said.

The Information Technology Industry Council, an IT and tech industry association with members such as Amazon, Google, Cognizant and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), also said it welcomed the ban expiration.

**Immigration reforms** "ITI welcomes the expiration of the prior administration's H1-B visa ban today, and we look forward to working with @POTUS and the U.S. Congress on advancing sound immigration reforms moving forward," a tweet from the

organisation read. U.S. Senator Josh Hawley, a member of the right flank of the Republican Party, wrote to Mr. Biden asking him to consider a ban extension.

"I urge you to extend the temporary foreign worker entry suspension until the national unemployment rate has meaningfully declined, and until your administration has conducted a thorough review of non-immigrant visa programs to ensure that American workers are fully and effectively protected from harm," he said. U.S. joblessness claims fell to 6,84,000 in March – the lowest since the pandemic began a year ago.

While the ban has expired, some workers wanting to travel to the U.S. will not be able to due to pandemic-related U.S. travel restrictions on regions and countries, including South Africa, most of Europe and Brazil.

(With inputs from Yuthika Bhargava in New Delhi)

# Seven Hong Kong activists convicted over 2019 protests

Media tycoon Jimmy Lai and 5 former lawmakers found guilty

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
HONG KONG

Seven of Hong Kong's leading pro-democracy advocates, including a media tycoon and an 82-year-old veteran of the movement, were convicted on Thursday for organising and participating in a march during massive anti-government protests in 2019 that triggered a crackdown on dissent.

The verdict was the latest blow to the flagging democracy movement as the governments in Hong Kong and Beijing exert greater control over the semi-autonomous Chinese territory.

Hong Kong had enjoyed a vibrant political culture and freedoms not seen elsewhere in China during the decades it was a British colony. Beijing had pledged to allow the city to retain those freedoms for 50 years when it took the territory back in



Latest blow: Former lawmakers Lee Cheuk-yan and Cyd Ho in Hong Kong on Thursday. • GETTY IMAGES

1997, but recently it has ushered in a series of measures that many fear are a step closer to making Hong Kong no different from cities on the mainland.

Jimmy Lai, the owner of *Apple Daily* tabloid; Martin Lee, the octogenarian founder of the city's Democratic Party; and five former pro-democracy lawmakers were found guilty. They face up to five years in prison.

According to the ruling, six of the seven defendants

convicted on Thursday, including Mr. Lee and Mr. Lai, carried a banner that criticised police and called for reforms as they left Victoria Park on August 18, 2019, and led a procession through the centre of the city. The other defendant, Margaret Yee, joined them on the way and helped carry the banner.

Former lawmaker Lee Cheuk-yan, who was among those convicted, expressed disappointment at the verdict.

## ELSEWHERE



### Pakistan court lifts ban on TikTok app

A High Court in Pakistan said the country's telecommunications authority can lift a ban on social media app TikTok, after government officials said the company was working with them on monitoring what they called "immoral" content. On March 11, the court had ordered the app be blocked based on a petition alleging it had "obscene content". REUTERS

### 'N. Korea facing shortages after COVID-19 measures'

MOSCOW Russia's Embassy in Pyongyang said on Thursday that conditions in the capital had become exceptionally difficult after severe COVID-19 measures, such as locking down borders, were imposed. Not everyone can endure "acute shortage of essential goods, including medicine", it said in a Facebook post. AFP

### Europe vaccine rollout unacceptably slow: WHO

COPENHAGEN The World Health Organization on Thursday slammed Europe's vaccine rollout as "unacceptably slow" and said it was prolonging the pandemic as the region sees a "worrying" surge in infections. To date, only 10% of the region's total population have received one vaccine dose, and 4% have completed the course, the organisation said. AFP

## China pushes to expand virus origin search beyond its border

It rejects charges that Beijing limited WHO's access to data

ASSOCIATED PRESS BEIJING

Chinese health officials pushed on Wednesday to expand the search for the origins of the novel coronavirus beyond China, one day after the release of a closely watched World Health Organization report on the issue.

They also rejected criticism that China did not give enough data to a WHO team of international experts that visited Wuhan, the Chinese city where the first cases were detected, earlier this year.

If we limit the study of

origin within China, I think this is a scientific misunderstanding, because the source is still unclear," said Liang Wannian, the head of the Chinese team that worked with the WHO group of experts.

He said the experts agreed that the place where the first case was identified is not necessarily where the virus emerged. "Based on this scientific consensus, we should have a broader viewpoint in terms of sourcing," he said.

Experts agree that the virus could have come from elsewhere, with neighbouring

countries in Southeast Asia a prime possibility, but China's insistence on broadening the research seems partly politically motivated in the face of Western criticism.

The WHO report concluded that the virus or a progenitor of it was most likely carried by a bat, which infected another animal that infected a human.

Researchers have not been able to trace the bat or the intermediate animal yet, but suspicion has fallen on bat habitats in southwest China or nearby Southeast Asia.

## Jailed Barghouti backs challenge to Abbas

He endorsed a list of opponents to the President for the first polls in 15 years

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE JERUSALEM

Imprisoned Palestinian leader Marwan Barghouti has endorsed a list of challengers opposing President Mahmud Abbas's Fatah movement in legislative elections next month, the head of the dissident list said on Thursday.

Mr. Barghouti, who is serving multiple life sentences in an Israeli jail and is described by some as the "Palestinian Mandela," has been a closely watched figure ahead of the first Palestinian



Marwan Barghouti

elections in 15 years.

The deadline for submitting candidate lists for the May 22 legislative polls expired on Wednesday.

Mr. Barghouti's wife Fadwa is the second candidate on the "Freedom" list headed by Nasser al-Kidwa, nephew of the late iconic Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

Freedom "is supported by Marwan Barghouti, and the proof of course is the presence of his wife" on the list, Mr. Kidwa said, adding that Mr. Barghouti's input helped

shape the movement.

Mr. Kidwa was expelled from Fatah earlier this year after announcing his intention to run for the Palestinian presidency in a July 31

vote, a move seen as a direct affront to the Mr. Abbas. 85.

There remains widespread speculation that Mr. Barghouti may mount a presidential run from prison.

Israel has convicted him of orchestrating deadly attacks during the 2000-2005 second Palestinian *intifada*, or uprising. Mr. Barghouti refused to recognise the court during his trial.

A recent poll showed that 22% of Palestinians support him as their next President.

Leader of the Hamas Islamist movement that controls Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, polled second with 14% support, followed by Mr. Abbas at 8%.

## Child among four dead in California office shooting

This is the third such incident of gun violence in weeks

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE LOS ANGELES

The gunman who killed four people and wounded a fifth at an office complex knew all the victims either through business or personally.

Southern California police said on Thursday.

Orange police Lt. Jennifer Amat also revealed that the gunman had chained gates to the complex closed, forcing officers who responded on Wednesday to engage

him from outside.

Police recovered an automatic handgun and a backpack with pepper spray, handcuffs and ammunition.

Police withheld the identities of the dead but said one was a 9-year-old boy. The others were a man and two women. The wounded victim was only identified as a woman.

The suspect, identified as Aminadab Gaxiola Gonzalez, 44, was also wounded

and hospitalised. It was unclear whether he suffered a self-inflicted wound or was shot by police.

When officers arrived, shots were ringing out at the building. Police said the shooting involved the office suites of a company called Unified Homes, a mobile home brokerage.

It is the third such shooting in weeks, with 18 people killed in two separate gun violence incidents in March.

## SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to puzzle 13210

C	O	N	S	E	R	V	A	T	O	R	Y
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## MARKET WATCH

	PRICE	% CHANGE
Sensex	50,030	1.05
Gold	44,701	1.77
Brent oil	63.68	-0.34

## NIFTY 50

	PRICE	% CHANGE
Adani Ports	736.25	33.85
Asian Paints	2551.75	14.35
Axis Bank	713.00	15.55
Bajaj Auto	3743.05	72.45
Bajaj Finserv	9789.50	120.90
Bajaj Finance	5272.15	122.20
Bharti Airtel	520.80	3.50
BPCL	347.40	9.45
Britannia Ind	3618.50	-6.55
Cipla	1818.30	3.20
Coal India	132.15	1.80
Divis Labs	3616.10	-6.70
Dr Reddys Lab	4587.65	71.65
Eicher Motors	2631.15	27.20
Grasim Ind	1454.50	3.95
HCL Tech.	1002.60	19.95
HDFC	2531.45	33.35
HDFC Bank	1486.75	-6.90
HDFC Life	691.00	-5.20
Hero MotoCorp	2956.10	42.50
Hindalco	350.25	23.40
Hind Unilever	2399.10	-32.40
ICICI Bank	594.40	12.30
IndusInd Bank	993.30	38.85
Infosys	1385.20	17.15
Indian Oil Corp	93.15	1.30
ITC	220.05	1.55
JSW Steel	508.75	40.30
Kotak Bank	1804.55	51.55
L&T	1444.60	25.70
M&M	807.60	12.35
Maruti Suzuki	6923.90	64.70
Nestle India Ltd.	17083.15	-82.05
NTPC	107.90	1.35
ONGC	104.35	2.20
PowerGrid Corp	218.70	3.05
Reliance Ind	2021.85	18.75
SBF Life	883.45	2.60
State Bank	370.65	6.35
Shree Cement	29951.95	486.55
Sun Pharma	610.75	12.95
Tata Consumer Products Ltd.	650.15	11.25
Tata Motors	307.75	5.95
Tata Steel	863.05	51.20
TCS	3165.00	-12.85
Tech Mahindra	992.15	0.70
Titan	1559.35	1.30
UltraTech Cement	6898.85	160.90
UPL	653.60	11.75
Wipro	416.40	2.25

## IN BRIEF



**TAFE's CMD Mallika Srinivasan to head PESB**  
CHENNAI  
Mallika Srinivasan, CMD, TAFE Ltd., has been appointed as the chairperson of the Public Enterprises Selection Board (PESB). This is the first time a person from the private sector has been made head of the PESB which is responsible for the appointment of personnel in the posts of chairman, CMD and functional directors in public sector enterprises.

**'March gold imports surge to 160 tonnes'**  
MUMBAI  
India's gold imports in March surged 47% from a year earlier to a record 160 tonnes, a government source told Reuters, as a cut in import taxes and a correction in prices from record highs drew retail buyers and jewellers. The surge could increase trade deficit and pressure the rupee. In value terms, March imports surged to \$8.4 billion. REUTERS

## Interups Inc picks up 49% stake in Trujet

NEW DELHI  
Cash-strapped regional airline Trujet announced 49% foreign direct investment from New York-based Interups Inc, in a bid to expand its operations. "The funds will be used to expand operations and explore newer opportunities in civil aviation," said K.V. Pradeep, group director, MEIL and Palepu Lakshmi Prasad, chairman, Interups Inc.

## NIIF invests ₹2,100 crore in Manipal Hospitals

BENGALURU  
National Investment and Infrastructure Fund Ltd. (NIIF) on Thursday announced an investment of ₹2,100 crore in Bengaluru-based Manipal Hospitals through its Strategic Opportunities Fund (SOF). "Through this investment, we look forward to playing a role in serving the healthcare needs of India," said Sujoy Bose, MD and CEO, NIIF.

## RInfra sells premises to Yes Bank for ₹1,200 cr.

MUMBAI  
Anil Ambani-run Reliance Infrastructure Ltd. has sold Reliance Centre, its large office premises in Mumbai, to Yes Bank for ₹1,200 crore. "The entire proceeds will be utilised only to repay the debt of Yes Bank," Reliance Infrastructure said in a regulatory filing. Yes Bank's ₹4,000-crore exposure has now reduced to ₹2,000 crore, according to Reliance Infrastructure officials.

# GST Council meeting unlikely before May-end, June: Bajaj

Revenue Secretary cites non-availability of 5 States due to elections as reason

VIKAS DHOOT  
NEW DELHI

Any reforms or rate changes under the Goods and Services Tax regime, including the much-anticipated discussion between the Centre and the States on high fuel taxes, may have to wait till the end of May or June, as the GST Council is not expected to meet before the ongoing assembly elections conclude and new governments take charge in those five States.

"Five States are going for polls, and they are important States," said Economic Affairs and Revenue Secretary Tarun Bajaj. "Their participation is very essential in the GST Council," he added.

The council, chaired by



In limbo: The much-anticipated discussion on high fuel taxes will have to wait for the meeting of the GST Council. •K.V.S. GIRI

## NMDC iron ore sales rose 6% in FY21

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD

Mining major NMDC Ltd. has posted a 5.58% increase in iron ore sales at 33.27 million tonnes (MT) in FY21 compared with the 31.51 MT in the previous fiscal. The higher sales came on the back of iron ore output of the public sector enterprise rising by 8.32% to 34.11 MT (31.49 MT).

CMD Sumit Deb said he was hopeful NMDC would surpass 42 MT in FY22.

A good show in March when iron ore production increased to 4.57 MT (2.76 MT) and sales grew to 4.08 MT (2.70 MT) also boosted the annual performance.

## States get ₹45,000 cr. as additional devolution

Buoyant Q4 revenue spurs govt. move

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

The Finance Ministry on Thursday said it had released ₹45,000 crore to the States as additional devolution in FY21 following revenue buoyancy in the March quarter.

As per the Revised Estimates for FY21, ₹5,49,959 crore, being 41% of the shareable pool of taxes and duties, were estimated to be released. However, the Finance Ministry has devolved ₹5,94,996 crore, based on initial estimates of the shareable pool that would be collected in FY21, the Ministry said in a statement.

The ₹4,500 crore was released along with the 14th regular instalment of devolution on March 26; the second instalment was released on March 31. "The Ministry... has released the amounts to share the revenue buoyancy seen in Q4 FY21 and in the true spirit of fiscal federalism," it added.

## Indian Bank set for better growth: MD

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI

The company added that total sales in FY21 were about 14.57 lakh units, 6.7% lower than for FY20.

Hyundai Motor's domestic sales in March saw a 100% year-on-year growth to 52,600 units.

Tata Motors' domestic PV sales stood at 29,654 units as against 5,676 units in March 2020. Its commercial vehicle sales also saw exponential growth to 36,955 units from just 5,336 units a year earlier. Mahindra & Mahindra's (M&M) passenger vehicles sales grew 94% to 16,700, while commercial vehicles sales climbed to 17,116 as against 2,742 units.

Commercial vehicle maker Ashok Leyland saw sales zoom to 15,761 units last month, as against 1,734 units in March 2020.

Tractors continued their good run, with M&M's Farm Equipment Sector (FES) selling 29,817 units in India as against 13,418 units.

## Personal mobility needs boost car sales in March

Tractors continue healthy run

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

A majority of vehicle makers posted significant growth in wholesale numbers for March, mainly on the back of last year's low sales base.

A year earlier, the nationwide lockdown and the move to new emission norms had dampened sentiment. Vehicle makers said the pandemic-driven preference for personal mobility boosted demand.

Maruti Suzuki sold more than 1.46 lakh passenger vehicles (PVs) last month in the domestic market compared with 76,240 units in March 2020, and 1.45 lakh in March 2019. The company's "domestic sales in FY20 had fallen by 18%... and [sales] in FY21 have been impacted due to COVID-related factors... It will be seen that domestic sales in March 2021 have only recovered to March 2019 levels," it said in a statement.

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## Mastercard to invest in Airtel Africa arm

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Airtel Africa said Mastercard will invest \$100 million in its wholly owned subsidiary Airtel Mobile Commerce (AMC) BV.

On completion of the deal, Mastercard would hold a minority stake of 3.75% in AMC BV, while Airtel Africa would continue to remain the majority stake owner.

The transaction values Airtel Africa's mobile money business at \$2.65 billion on a cash and debt free basis, the company said in a statement.

The proceeds from the transaction will be used to reduce group debt and invest in network and sales infrastructure in the operating countries.

## Cotton exports may touch 70 lakh bales: CCI

Prices likely to remain stable: Ganatra



Cotton exports so far have clocked 47 lakh bales and may touch 70 lakh bales by the end of season, according to Pradeep Kumar Agarwal, CMD, Cotton Corporation of India (CCI). The CCI, which has 47 lakh bales in stock and has exported almost one lakh bales so far this season (October 2020 to September 2021), is looking at shipping an additional 10 lakh bales. There may be exports of 10-12 lakh bales to Bangladesh, Mr. Agarwal said.

### Prices may damp

However, Atul Ganatra, president, Cotton Association of India, said CAI estimated total cotton exports this sea-

## INTERVIEW | TARUN BAJAJ

# 'Economy, jobs to continue to bounce back this year'

Avoiding lockdowns will help: Economic Affairs Secretary

VIKAS DHOOT  
NEW DELHI

*India is much better geared to cope with the resurgence of COVID-19 cases and the economy as well as informal sector job creation is expected to continue to bounce back through this year,*

**Tarun Bajaj, Secretary, Revenue & Department of Economic Affairs in the Finance Ministry said in an interview.**

would be paid.

"A decision has already been taken that July 2022 onwards, whatever is left out, the compensation cess will continue till it is paid. It is a good thing in a way, because from July 2022, when the 14% revenue growth promise will go away, then some States' revenue may fall steeply. The fall may not be so steep because of this; it will help them," he added.

The Centre will assess how long the compensation cess is to be levied beyond June 2022 in order to pay States' outstanding GST dues and repay the ₹1 lakh crore borrowed in FY21 to bridge the gap between dues and compensation cess receipts.



## March trade deficit widens to \$14.11 billion

REUTERS  
NEW DELHI

India's trade deficit in goods widened to \$14.11 billion in March from \$9.98 billion in the year-earlier period, preliminary data released by the government on Thursday showed.

Merchandise exports rose 58.2% in March to \$34 billion, while imports climbed 52.9% to \$48.12 billion, the data showed.

With the financial year 2020-21 behind us, where do you see the state of the economy this year? Is the second wave a worry?

■ The state of the economy is far better.

You have seen the growth rate being projected by various agencies. We have assumed a 10.4% growth this year, but IMF has projected more than 11%, while Fitch Ratings yesterday projected a rate of 12.8%. So, I think we are now looking at the economy in a much healthier state.

However, the second wave is a small worry, I would say. But at the same time, we are better equipped to handle it.

Now, no State is saying it is going for a lockdown. Maharashtra announced, but it is not doing, which is very sensible.

To live with COVID is a new normal. So now that our health infrastructure is upgraded and vaccines are there, we should handle it with these methods rather than a lockdown.

If we do that, we will also ensure jobs in the informal

sector, and that the economy keeps growing. And, we have got great adaptability.

Now, when I see Delhi compared to when it was a full lockdown, one could drive down at 100 kmph.

Right now, the traffic is perfectly normal.</p

# When a nation erupted in happiness

Ten years ago, Dhoni's Dashers wrote this day into Indian cricket folklore by lifting the World Cup

## FLASHBACK

S. DINAKAR  
CHENNAI

The spectators swung to the beating of the drums. The Wankhede Stadium was a blaze of colours. And the cup of joy was filled to the brim in the Maximum City.

Outside the arena, there were traffic jams under the night sky. Yet, nobody cared. Those at the wheels honked in delight. The whole of India and Mumbai roared in appreciation. The fragrance of victory swirled around.

And a six to bring up a six-wicket World Cup conquest! What a finish!

### 'Spiritual' inspiration

Sachin Tendulkar was, finally, a part of a World Cup-winning squad. The maestro was the 'spiritual' inspiration of India's triumph.

After the miracle of '83 by Kapil's Devils in England, followed by an agonisingly barren run, Dhoni's Dashers had lifted the ICC ODI World Cup in the sub-continent.

April 2, 2011 has now become a part of Indian cricket



**Masterly display:** The Indian team reached the pinnacle after some consummate performances throughout the tournament. • FILE PHOTO: K.R. DEEPAK

et's folklore. A day, 10 years ago, when the country celebrated as one.

The World Cup was won by tact and brawn. Both symbolised by skipper M.S. Dhoni. He showed his cricketing nous by boldly promoting himself ahead of an in-form Yuvraj Singh to bring into play a left-right partnership and then dismantled the Sri

Lankan bowling with strokes of brutal force.

A chase of 275, a target set up principally by the fleet-footed Mahela Jayawardene's 103 not out of pristine beauty and timing, appeared challenging under the lights. Ambushes lurked.

But then, Dhoni's 79-ball unbeaten 91 and his match-altering 109-run association

with the left-handed No. 3 Gautam Gambhir, all finesse and class, propelled India from a wobbly 114 for three.

**Brilliant Gambhir**  
Gambhir, brilliant during his 97, used the depth of the crease and coaxed the ball through the gaps on both sides. His footwork was nimble and stroke-making crisp

as he blunted the threat from Muttiah Muralitharan; he picked the Lankan wizard from the hand and gauged the length to perfection.

Initially, Dhoni, his swagger unmistakable in a pressure situation, ran like a slithery cat between the wickets, and then opened out with some audacious strokes of dexterous wrists and sensational bat-speed.

And you could freeze the frame when he bludgeoned a full-length ball from Nuwan Kulasekara over the long-on ropes to bring the curtains down on the final and open up new avenues for Indian cricket.

The stadium had gone quiet when slinger Lasith Malinga struck with the new ball, trapping Virender Sehwag in front and getting Tendulkar to nick one that moved away.

But then, a young Virat Kohli steadied the innings with Gambhir and then came the Skipper's Gambit.

Fittingly, Dhoni ended the contest with a booming blow as a nation erupted in happiness. What a night!

# Indeed a job done well: Yuvraj

'Winning matters but winning in style matters a little more'

RAKESH RAO  
NEW DELHI

A decade has passed since M.S. Dhoni hit one of the most recalled sixes in Indian cricket to end the country's wait for an ODI World Cup triumph since 1983.

It was April 2, 2011, when a nation rejoiced like never before. The victory over Sri Lanka brought the country to a standstill, with cricket-lovers taking to the streets in

celebrations that went into the wee hours of the next morning. Dhoni and his men had lived up to the expectations. And the man who saw Dhoni's finishing touches from 22 yards was Yuvraj Singh – the Man of the World Cup.

From the euphoria of holding the World Cup to the excruciating pain of undergoing chemotherapy, Yuvraj went through extreme emotions during the past decade. He penned his biography, got married and then retired from active cricket.

**Sense of pride**  
Today, at 39, Yuvraj looks back with an obvious sense of pride. Ever so thankful to



**We've done it!** Yuvraj reacts to India's win over Australia.

the almighty for the life he is leading today, the left-hander strikes the right note. "God has indeed been very kind to me. I've been part of two World Cup triumphs and each one gives me an added reason to feel good about contributing to the team."

"In 2007 (in the inaugural T20 World Cup), those six sixes in an over brought a different kind of joy to the people, especially the young cricket fans. I still get lots of people coming to me and recalling how it was for them to watch the ball sail over the boundary, ball after ball."

"Again in 2011, I think I could play a hand in most of the games. When I did not contribute with the bat, like against Pakistan (in the semi-finals), I took two top-order wickets (Asad Shafiq and Younis Khan) and again two against Lanka, including Sangakkara's."

Mention Dhoni's Cup-winning six and the joy in Yuvraj's voice is hard to miss. "Winning matters but winning in style matters a little more. That's the difference between taking a winning single and sending the ball into the stands. It was indeed a job done well!"

# Can consistently inconsistent Kings finally ascend the throne?

Rahul leads a Punjab side that has the arsenal to win any battle, but it must seize the big moments more frequently

## IPL COUNTDOWN

RAKESH RAO

Kings XI Punjab enters the 2021 edition as Punjab Kings. Whether this rechristening brings a change in its fortunes remains to be seen as K. L. Rahul returns to lead a side whose performances so far have not matched the potential.

Runners-up in 2014 and semifinalists in the inaugural edition in 2008, Kings continue to search for a maiden title.

On paper, the team looks armed with the arsenal needed to win any battle. However, its consistent inconsistency has stood in the way of seizing the big moments.

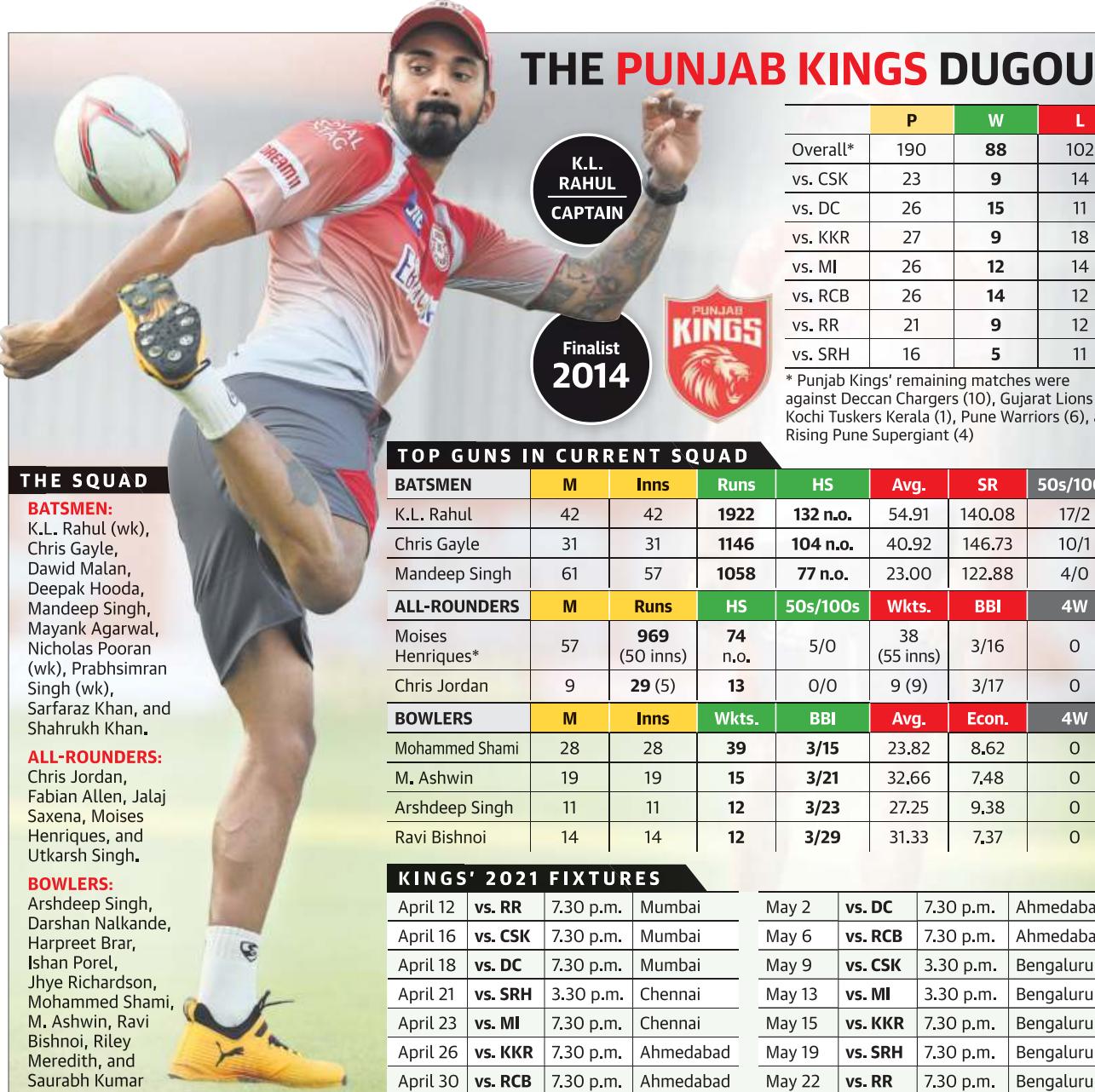
The calming presence of Anil Kumble, Director of Cricket Operations, and assistant coach Andy Flower in the dugout should help keep the flamboyance of Chris Gayle or the emotions of Rahul in check.

Fielding coach Jonty Rhodes, in his second season with Kings, brings obvious value to the team.

Picking the batsmen in the playing XI should not be so difficult, with Rahul, Mayank Agarwal, Gayle, Mandeep Singh easily forming the top-order. Sarfaraz Khan can follow to play a cameo.

All-rounders Moises Henriques, Jhye Richardson, Jalaj Saxena, Deepak Hooda and Fabian Allen bring variety to the attack that includes Riley Meredith, Chris Jordan and M. Ashwin.

The manner in which Kings went all out for Richardson in the recent auction, spending a whopping ₹14 crore (base price ₹1.5 crore) and adding his Australian compatriot Meredith for ₹8 crore (base price ₹40 lakh), reflects the team man-



\*Henriques' first season for Punjab Kings. He has played for KKR, Delhi Daredevils, RCB, and SRH.

## FACTFILE

MOST MATCHES AS CAPTAIN



Adam Gilchrist  
Total | Won | Lost  
**34 | 17 | 17**

MOST MATCHES#



Mandeep Singh (61)

BEST BATTING STRIKE-RATE#



Pooran (165.39)  
Runs | Balls  
**521 | 315**

BEST ECONOMY RATE#



Ravi Bishnoi (7.37)  
Overs | Runs concd.  
**51 | 376**

(#CURRENT SQUAD)

# Hazlewood pulls out

'for personal reasons'

S. DINAKAR

CHENNAI

Josh Hazlewood has pulled out of the upcoming IPL "for personal reasons", his franchise Chennai Super Kings revealed on Thursday.

The decision of the Australian paceman took CSK by surprise, its CEO K.S. Viswanathan admitted to *The Hindu*.



Josh Hazlewood.

▪ FILE PHOTO

Bangladesh, the World T20 and the marquee Ashes.

Given the workload, Hazlewood reckoned a period of rest at home would enable him fire for Australia.

### Ngidi may miss a few games

Meanwhile, South African paceman Lungi Ngidi is likely to miss the first few matches for CSK.

Viswanathan said, "Whether there will be a replacement for Hazlewood will be decided by the team-management."

Back home, Hazlewood said, "I want to be in the best mental and physical shape for Australia's challenges in the long winter."

This includes a tour of the West Indies and perhaps

meanwhile, South African paceman Lungi Ngidi is likely to miss the first few matches for CSK.

Viswanathan said, "He has a series against South Africa at home and, following a period of quarantine, should be available for us from the third game."

*The skipper has landed*



**Following protocol:** RCB skipper Virat Kohli, who arrived in Chennai on Thursday, has gone into a seven-day quarantine before he joins the squad. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

# Mary Kom, Neeraj, Narain and Deepa among winners

Boxing legend M. C. Mary Kom, javelin star Neeraj Chopra and Indian Super League club Bengaluru FC were among the winners on the first day of the Sportstar Aces Awards 2021 on Thursday.

"This award is a big motivation for me and I hope I win the gold medal for India in the upcoming Olympics," said the 38-year-old Mary

Kom, who won the Sportswoman of the Decade (Individual Olympic Sports) award. Deepa Malik, who won her second Aces honour in three years for her achievements in para-sports, felt such awards would help in her effort towards inclusivity for parathletes.

Narain Karthikeyan, winner of the Sportsperson of

the Decade (Motorsports), said: "Our generation has a special connect with Sportstar. They have done a lot for my sport in terms of covering all forms of motorsports."

Asian Games gold medalist Neeraj Chopra was named the Sportsman of the Decade (Track and Field).

The 2021 Sportstar Aces Awards, held virtually due to

## The first list of Sportstar Aces award winners

- Sportsman of the Decade (Para Sports): Devendra Jhajharia
- Sportswoman of the Decade (Para Sports): Deepa Malik
- Best PSU for the Promotion of Sports: Indian Railways
- Sportsperson of the Decade (Motorsports): Narain Karthikeyan
- Sportsman of the Decade (Track and Field): Neeraj Chopra
- Sportswoman of the Decade (Track and Field): Krishna Poonia
- Sportswoman of the Decade (Individual Olympic Sports): Mary Kom
- Club of the Decade: Bengaluru FC
- Best State for Promotion of Sports: Odisha



**Acing it:** Mary Kom, Narain, Deepa, Jhajharia, Krishna Poonia and Neeraj. • V.V. KRISHNAN, M. PERIASAMY, VIJAY SONEJI AND TWITTER

# Odisha's remarkable hat-trick

## SPORTS BUREAU

The Odisha State government has won the Best State for Promotion of Sport honour in the 2021 edition of the Sportstar Aces Awards.

This is the State's third win in a row at the Sportstar annual awards, having won the award in 2019 and 2020 as well.

Olympic gold-medallist and Aces Awards jury member M.M. Somaya presented the trophy to the Chief Minister of Odisha, Naveen Patnaik, at a ceremony at the Lokaseva Bhavan in Bhubaneswar.

Also present on the occasion were Tusharkanti Behera, Minister of Sports and Youth Services, Ayon Sen Gupta, Editor of Sportstar, and L.V. Navaneeth, CEO of The Hindu Group.



Naveen Patnaik, Odisha CM, with the 2021 Sportstar Aces Award. • K.R. DEEPAK

"It's indeed a moment of great pride for us in Odisha to be honoured as the Best State for Promotion of Sport between 2011-2020. I humbly accept this award on behalf of the people of Odisha. I thank the eminent jury headed by renowned cricketer Sunil

## TV PICKS

**South Africa vs Pakistan:**  
1st ODI, Star Sports 1 (SD & HD), 1.30 p.m.

## IN BRIEF



**Sheriff keeps Woods crash cause under wraps**

LOS ANGELES  
The Los Angeles county sheriff said on Wednesday detectives had determined the cause of Tiger Woods' car accident on February 23 and that the investigation had been closed. However, the sheriff declined to release details, citing unspecified privacy concerns for the golf star. AP

**Karman blanks Lukacs; in last eight**

MONASTIR (TUNISIA)  
Karman Kaur Thandi blanked eighth seed Vanda Lukacs of Hungary 6-0, 6-0 to reach the quarterfinals of the \$15,000 ITF women's tennis tournament in on Thursday. In the quarterfinals, Karman will challenge the third seed Mallaurie Noel of France.



**Bucks overcome Lakers**

LOS ANGELES  
Giannis Antetokounmpo made it a family affair on Wednesday night scoring 25 points and joining his two brothers on the court as Milwaukee Bucks beat Los Angeles Lakers 112-97 at Staples Center arena.  
**The results:** Grizzlies 107 lost to Jazz 110; Thunder 113 bt Raptors 103; Timberwolves 102 bt Knicks 101; Spurs 120 bt Kings 106; Lakers 97 lost to Bucks 112; Suns 121 bt Bulls 116. AFP

**New Zealand sweeps T20 series**

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE AUCKLAND  
New Zealand beat Bangladesh by 65 runs in a rain-shortened third Twenty20 International here on Thursday to claim a 3-0 series sweep.

With its innings reduced to 10 overs due to bad weather, Bangladesh was all out for 76 with three balls left, well short of the 142 target.

The Black Caps made 141 for four after being asked to bat, with Finn Allen hitting 71 off 29 balls.

Todd Astle was the standout bowler, taking four for 13 runs.

**The scores:** New Zealand 141/4 in 10 overs (Martin Guptill 44, Finn Allen 71) bt Bangladesh 76 in 9.3 overs (Tim Southee 3/15, Todd Astle 4/13).

**Toss:** Bangladesh.  
**Man-of-the-Match:** Finn Allen.

New Zealand won match by 65 runs and series 3-0.

**Rana returns COVID negative test**

Y.B. SARANGI KOLKATA  
Kolkata Knight Riders batsman Nitish Rana has recovered from COVID-19 infection and is expected to start training soon.

According to a statement by KKR on Thursday, Rana was tested on March 22 during quarantine after checking into the team hotel on the previous day with a COVID negative certificate.

"As per the Indian Premier League (IPL) protocol, he isolated himself and was tested again today. We are glad to report that he has tested negative. We expect him to start training with the team shortly and be fully fit well before the start of the season," said the statement.

# North Macedonia ambushes Germany

Positive finishes for England, Italy, Spain and France

## WC QUALIFYING

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
LONDON

Germany's first World Cup qualifying loss in 20 years added another blemish to the final months of coach Joachim Low's 15-year reign in charge of the team.

Germany's 35-match unbeaten run in World Cup qualifying – a streak dating back to 2001 – ended with a stunning 2-0 home loss to North Macedonia on Wednesday that left the team sitting third in its group after three games.

Europe's other major powers ended the first batch of qualifying games on a successful note, with England, Italy, Spain and France all picking up wins before they switch their focus to the Euros.

## Disregarding protocol

Spain's 3-1 victory at home to Kosovo attracted attention because of the host country's non-recognition of the visitors, with the Spanish na-



**First strike:** Goran Pandev scores the opening goal with a tap-in past Marc-Andre Ter Stegen.

\* AFP

tional broadcaster disregarding normal protocol by not mentioning Kosovo as a country and using lowercase letters for "kos" in its graphics.

John Stones made amends for an embarrassing defensive blunder by setting up a late winner for fellow centre back Harry Maguire as En-

gland beat Poland 2-1 to stay perfect in Group I.

Italy's unbeaten run ex-

ended to 25 games with a 2-0 win in Lithuania as Roberto Mancini's halftime changes had an immediate impact.

Italy moved three points ahead of Switzerland atop Group C.

France continued its re-covery from an opening-round draw to Ukraine, beating Bosnia-Herzegovina 1-0 to follow up a 2-0 win over Kazakhstan on Sunday.

France is four points clear in Group D.

**The results:** Group B: Greece 1 (Kakabade 76-0g) drew with Georgia 1 (Kvaratskhelia 78);

Spain 3 (Olmo 34, Torres 36, Moreno 75) bt Kosovo 1 (Halimi 70).

**Group C:** Lithuania 0 lost to Italy 2 (Sensi 48, Immobile 90+4-pen); Northern Ireland 0 drew with Bulgaria 0.

**Group D:** Bosnia and Herzegovina 0 lost to France 1 (Griezmann 60); Ukraine 1 (Yaremchuk 20) drew with Kazakhstan 1 (Muzhikov 59).

**Group F:** Moldova 1 (Carp 29) lost to Israel 4 (Zehavi 45+2, Solomon 57, Dabbu 64, Natcho 66); Scotland 4 (McGinn 7, 53, Adams 60, Fraser 70) bt Faroe Islands 0; Austria 0 lost to Denmark 4 (Skov Olsen 58, 74, Maehle 63, Hojbjerg 67).

**Group I:** San Marino 0 lost to Albania 2 (Manaj 63, Uzuni 85); Andorra 1 (Pujo 90+3-pen) lost to Hungary 4 (Fiola 45+2, Gazdag 51, Laszlo 58, Negro 90); England 2 (Kane 19-pen, Maguire 85) bt Poland 1 (Moder 58).

**Group J:** Germany 1 (Gundogan 63-pen) lost to North Macedonia 2 (Pandev 45+2, Elmás 85); Armenia 3 (Spertys 56, Haroyan 87, Barseghyan 89-pen) bt Romania 2 (Cicalau 62, 72); Liechtenstein 1 (Frick 79) lost to Iceland 4 (Saevarsson 12, Bjarnason 45+1, Palsson 77, Sigurjonsson 90+4-pen).

## Niki Poonacha enters quarterfinals

Overcomes an insipid start to get the better of Filip Bergevi

## TENNIS

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Former National champion Niki Poonacha kept the Indian hopes alive as he beat Filip Bergevi of Sweden 6-4, 6-4 to make the quarterfinals of the \$15,000 ITF men's tennis tournament here on Thursday.

Despite getting off to an indifferent start when he trailed 0-3, the wiry Niki recovered his composure and put together a sparkling game to outwit the Swede.

Arjun Kadhe failed to bring out his best game and got beaten 6-0, 6-4 by qualifier Alexander Kotzen of the USA.

## Guns blazing

Also, former Asian junior champion Nitin Kumar Sinha went down with guns blazing against third seed Aidan McHugh of Britain.

After a slow start when he trailed 2-4, Nitin won the first set 7-5, and was up 3-0 in the second.

In the decider, Nitin led 4-2 but had to survive a matchpoint in the 12th game,



**Smooth sailing:** Niki Poonacha, the lone Indian to make it to the last eight. ■ KAMESH SRINIVASAN

with an ace. In the tie-breaker, Nitin saved four more matchpoints, before the Briton closed it out 5-7, 7-6(5), 7-6(7).

**The results:** Singles (pre-quar-

terfinals): Niki Poonacha bt Filip Bergevi (Swe) 6-4, 6-4; Lorenzo Bocchi (Ita) bt Luca Castelnovo (Sui) 4-6, 6-3, 3-0 (retd.); Aidan McHugh (GBR) bt Nitin Kumar

Sinha 5-7, 7-6(5), 7-6(7); Dalibor Srvicna (Cze) bt Jonathan Mridha (Swe) 6-3, 6-2; Alexander Kotzen (US) bt Arjun Kadhe 6-0, 6-4; Oliver Crawford (US) bt Fardeen Qamar 6-2, 6-1; Zsombor Velcz (Hun) bt Manish Sureshkumar 6-3, 6-2; Simon Carr (Irl) bt Marco Brugnerotto (Ita) 6-4, 6-3.

**Doubles (quarterfinals):** Arjun Kadhe & Saketh Myneni bt Si-

mon Carr (Irl) & Alexander Kotzen (US) 6-4, 7-5; Anirudh Chandrasekar & Niki Poonacha bt Marco Brugnerotto (Sui) & Davide Pozzi (Ita) 7-5, 6-3; Dalibor Srvicna (Cze) & Zsombor Velcz (Hun) bt Jonathan Binding & Henry Patten (GBR) 6-3, 6-6, [10-6]; Manish Sureshkumar & V.M. Ranjeet bt Rishi Reddy & Abhinav Sanjeev Shamugam 7-6(4), 5-7, [10-7].

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