



SNOWDEN IN  
WONDERLAND

P6



PEACE WITH PAK WILL  
GIVE INDIA ACCESS TO  
CENTRAL ASIA: IMRAN

P9



'PUTIN APPROVED  
OPERATIONS TO HELP  
TRUMP AGAINST BIDEN'

P10



INDIANS UNDER  
PRESSURE  
TO CATCH UP

P12

## WEATHER

Partly cloudy sky. Mist in the morning. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 34 and 18 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: Nil

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Max: 90% Min: 34%

TEMPERATURE

Max: 34.2°C (+4) Min: 16.8°C (0)

SUN RISES

06:26 hrs

MOON RISES

09:51 hrs

SUN SETS

18:31 hrs

MOON SETS

22:55 hrs

## THUMBNAILS



Navy officers perform a salute beside the 'Swarnim Vijay Varsh' torch on the deck of INS Airavat, as part of golden jubilee celebrations of the 1971 India-Pakistan war, at Khidderpore dock in Kolkata on Wednesday.

AGENCIES

**Farmers to intensify agitation:** Ahead of their Sampurna Bharat Bandh on March 26, farmer leaders on Wednesday said they were preparing to intensify the agitation against the three farm laws. During the nationwide strike on March 26 that also marks four months of the farmers' movement, all shops and other business establishments will remain shut for 12 hours, followed by the burning of the copies of the three laws during "holika dehan" on March 28.

P5

**PC Thomas-led Kerala Congress quits NDA:** Ahead of the April 6 Assembly polls, the Kerala Congress headed by former Union Minister C Thomas on Wednesday quit the BJP-led NDA and merged with another Kerala Congress faction headed by P J Joseph, which is a constituent of the Congress-led UDF. Thomas alleged that his party was neglected by the front when the seats were allocated for polls.

P4

## BJP MP found dead at Delhi residence

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Ram Swaroop Sharma, the BJP MP from Himachal's Mandi was found hanging from a ceiling fan at his Delhi residence on Wednesday morning, police said.

The body of sixty-two-year-old Sharma was found in his apartment near RML hospital in New Delhi area. He was suffering from various ailments, police said, adding "prima facie it appears to be case of suicide". However no suicide note has been found yet.

According to police, a call was made to the Police Control Room around 7.45 a.m. by the MP's aide after the parliamentarian did not respond to repeated knocks on his door.

A police team reached the spot and broke down the door and found Sharma was hanging from a ceiling fan. He was rushed to the hospital where he was declared brought dead. A forensics team and the crime team also reached the spot and carried out a thorough investigation, police said.

Mos Finance and Corporate Affairs Anurag Thakur visited Sharma's residence.

The BJP Parliamentary Party meeting scheduled for today has been cancelled after his demise.

The Lok Sabha was also adjourned till 1 p.m. after expressing condolences over his death.

Incidentally, Sharma took the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine last week on 13 March, police said.

Atlanta-area shootings kill eight, mostly of Asian descent

ATLANTA (US), 17 MARCH

A series of shootings over nearly an hour at three Atlanta area massage parlours left eight people dead and raised fears that the attack was yet another hate crime against people of Asian descent.

Police arrested a 21-year-old Georgia man and said the motive wasn't immediately known, though many of the victims were women of Asian descent.

The attacks began Tuesday evening, when five people were shot at Young's Asian Massage Parlor in Acworth, about 50 km north of Atlanta. Two people died at the scene, and three were taken to a hospital where two died, it was reported.

Details on page 10

## Ration card cancellation serious, says SC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Wednesday termed the cancellation of around three crore ration cards by the Centre due to non-linking with Aadhaar card as "too serious", and sought response from the Central government and all states on the issue.

A bench of Chief Justice SA Bobde and Justices AS Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian said this matter should not be treated as adversarial as it is too serious a matter. The bench said the matter will be put up for final hearing.

At the outset, senior advocate Colin Gonsalves, appearing for petitioner Koili Devi, said the petition deals with the larger issue.

We see the problem at hand and I have dealt with this kind of matter in Bombay High Court and I think this matter should be filed before the high court concerned, the CJI said.

The bench told Gonsalves that he has sought a very omnibus kind of relief and widened the scope of the matter.

Gonsalves persisted with his arguments that it is an important issue as the

Centre has cancelled around three crore ration cards.

The bench said it will hear the matter on some other day as it is persuaded by Gonsalves that the Central government has cancelled the ration cards.

Additional Solicitor General Aman Lekhi said it is a wrong statement made by Gonsalves that the Centre

has cancelled the ration cards. We are asking you (Centre) to respond because of Aadhaar issue. This is not an adversarial litigation. We will hear it finally. Issue notice returnable in four weeks, the bench said.

On December 9, 2019, the top court had sought responses from all the states over allegations of starvation deaths of people who were deprived of their ration supplies for not having valid Aadhaar cards.

The Centre had earlier said that reports suggest that the deaths were not due to starvation



ing ration from March 2017 due to non-linking of Aadhaar card

The Centre had earlier said that reports suggest that the deaths were not due to starvation

## IAF group captain killed in Mig-21 Bison accident

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

A group captain of the Indian Air Force (IAF) was killed in an accident involving a Mig-21 Bison aircraft in Gwalior on Wednesday morning, officials said.

The pilot has been identified as Group Captain A Gupta. The accident took place at around 10:50 a.m., when the aircraft was taking off for a combat training mission.

The air headquarters has ordered a court of inquiry to ascertain the cause of the crash.

"The IAF lost Group Captain A Gupta in the tragic accident. IAF expresses deep condolences and stands firmly with the family members. A Court of Inquiry has been ordered to determine the cause of the accident," the IAF said in a tweet.

The Soviet-origin Mig-21 Bison is an upgraded version of the Mig-21 aircraft that the IAF began inducting in the 1960s.

The Mig-21 Bison is capable of carrying beyond visual-range missiles and other potent weapons.

On February 27, 2019, Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman flew a Mig-21 Bison and shot down an F-16 aircraft of the Pakistan Air Force, before his aircraft went down in a dogfight. He was captured by the Pakistan Army and released two days later.

The IAF has lost many Mig-21s and other aircraft in accidents in the last few years.

In June 2019, the Ministry of Defence informed Parliament that 27 IAF aircraft have crashed since 2016.

## Mumbai top cop shunted, NIA says other players in Waze episode

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI, 17 MARCH

Under fire over the handling of the bomb scare outside industrialist Mukesh Ambani's house in Mumbai, the Maharashtra government on Wednesday transferred city Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh to the low-key Home Guard.

Senior IPS officer Hemant Nagrale, holding additional charge of the state Director General of Police post, will be the new Mumbai Police Commissioner, state Home Minister Anil Deshmukh said.

Singh's transfer came even as the case of recovery of gelatin sticks near Ambani's residence turned murky with the National Investigation Agency (NIA) claiming there

were "other players" who had been allegedly instructing arrested policeman Sachin Waze.

NIA sources said the case had virtually been cracked and soon the "entire conspiracy" behind would be unravelled.

"Big decision of the government. Shri Hemant Nagrale will be the new Mumbai Police Commissioner. Shri Rajnish Seth will have the additional charge of the post of Director General of Police, Maharashtra," tweeted Deshmukh, who met Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray earlier in the day.

Shri Sanjay Pandey will have the responsibility of Maharashtra State Security Corporation. Shri Param Bir Singh will have the responsi-

bility of the Home Guard, he added.

Nagrale, a 1987-batch IPS officer, has handled cases such as the Ketan Parekh scam and the Harshad Mehta scam.

BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis claimed that when he was Maharashtra chief minister in 2018, Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray had called him to seek reinstatement of the then suspended police officer Sachin Waze in the police force.

An 'encounter specialist' of the 1990 batch of the state police cadre, Waze was suspended in 2004 over his role in the custodial death of a 2002 Ghatkopar blast suspect Khwaja Yunus and was reinstated last year.

Waze, who led the team that arrested journalist Arnab

Goswami in November last year in a suicide abetment case, had joined Shiv Sena while he was under suspension. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray recently said Waze was a member of Shiv Sena till 2008.

The Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government's decision to transfer Singh follows a series of meetings among the ruling Shiv Sena-NCP-Con-

gress alliance leaders.

Waze is at the focus of NIA's probe in the recovery of an SUV with explosives near Ambani's house. Arrested in the case on March 13 for his alleged role in the crime, Waze was attached to the Crime Intelligence Unit (CIU) till recently. He was suspended after NIA arrested him.

Singh's transfer follows

Monday's talks between Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and NCP chief Sharad Pawar amid reports that Waze stage-managed the bomb scare on instructions from Singh.

The NIA team recovered some "incriminating" documents and electronic evidence such as laptop, iPad and mobile phones from Waze's office, an official of the agency said on Tuesday.

The NIA questioned Mumbai crime branch officer Riyazuddin Kazi for the fourth consecutive day on Wednesday in connection with its probe into a case related to the recovery of the SUV with explosives.

Another assistant police inspector (API) of the crime branch, Prakash Howal, also appeared before the agency

here in the afternoon.

Kazi had allegedly produced the fake number plates found in the SUV, an official claimed. NIA sources said a letter from the terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed, posted on Telegram app, demanding ransom and claiming responsibility for the incident will also be investigated.

The Delhi Police's special cell has already taken into custody Tehseen Akhtar, an associate of the Indian Mujahideen.

Meanwhile, the former owner of the Mercedes car which was allegedly used by Waze and seized by the NIA, said he will "fully cooperate" with the probe agency if it approaches him for any information related to the vehicle.



Newly-appointed Mumbai Police Commissioner Hemant Nagrale attends a Press conference in Mumbai, on Wednesday. ■ AGENCE





Everything is settled. We are soldiers of a regimented party

SAYANTAN BASU, WEST BENGAL GENERAL SECRETARY, BJP

ON ANGER SEEN IN THE ALIPURDUR BJP CAMP OVER SELECTION OF SOME POLL CANDIDATES

# Kejri urges Modi govt to withdraw GNCTD Bill

Addressing AAP's Jantar Mantar protest, CM appeals to Centre 'not to cheat' Delhi people with this Bill

## SNS &amp; PTI

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Delhi chief minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) supremo Arvind Kejriwal today urged the BJP-led Centre to withdraw the Bill that seeks to give sweeping powers to the Delhi Lieutenant Governor vis-a-vis the elected government.

He said the AAP-led Delhi dispensation was even ready to fall at the Narendra Modi government's feet for the withdrawal of this Bill.

Kejriwal asked where the Delhi chief minister will go if the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021 brought by the Modi government becomes a law.

"Do elections, votes and

our 62 out of 70 seats don't mean anything," the CM asked.

Addressing a protest organised at Jantar Mantar here this afternoon by the AAP against the Centre's "conspiracy" to "weaken" his elected government through this Bill, Kejriwal said, "I want to appeal to the Centre to take back the GNCTD Bill, don't cheat the people with this legislation."

He alleged that the Modi government wants to undermine his government through this amendment legislation.

The BJP has brought this Bill as it is scared of the AAP's reach in other states, Kejriwal claimed. "That is why they are trying to stop our development work in Delhi," he charged.

The CM said there are two



Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal during the AAP's protest against the Government of NCT Delhi (amendment) Bill 2021 at Jantar Mantar in the Capital on Wednesday.

SUBRATA DUTTA

tasks before his government now - the first is to put the power back in the hands of the public and the second is to ensure that no development work stops in Delhi.

"Now whether we have to plead with them (Centre)

and fall at their feet for this or pull their hands... we will do it," Kejriwal said.

Delhi ministers and AAP MLAs and councillors took part in this protest against the GNCTD (Amendment) Bill, which, they have maintained,

gives overarching power to the LG.

Deputy CM Manish Sisodia charged that the GNCTD (Amendment) Bill is against "deshbhakti" (patriotism) and "aims to stop the development of Delhi".

Delhi environment minister Gopal Rai alleged that by bringing this Bill, the BJP was seeking to enter Delhi through the "backdoor".

"After losing the (Delhi Assembly) elections, the BJP brought this Bill to enter Delhi through the backdoor. If you have the guts, fight and win the elections. Prove your worth with your work," Rai said.

The GNCTD (Amendment) Bill, 2021 was introduced in the Lok Sabha by Union minister of state for home G Kisan Reddy last Monday.

According to the Bill, the "government" in Delhi would mean the "Lieutenant Governor" in context of any law made by the Legislative Assembly. The Bill also makes it mandatory for the Delhi government to take the opinion of the LG before any executive action.

Kejriwal had earlier slammed the BJP dispensation for seeking to drastically curtail the powers of his elected government in Delhi through this Bill. He asserted that the proposed amendment Bill seeking to give overarching powers to the Delhi LG vis-a-vis the elected government was an "unconstitutional and anti-democracy move". He said the Bill was contrary to the Supreme Court's Constitution Bench judgement.

# Delhi Congress also holds protest against GNCTD Bill

## STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

The Delhi Congress workers, led by its chief Anil Kumar, today staged a sit-in protest at Jantar Mantar against the Centre's Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) Act (Amendment) Bill. They demanded that the Narendra Modi government should withdraw this Bill.

The Bill, introduced by the BJP-led central government in the Lok Sabha last Monday, seeks to define certain roles and powers of the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi.

Addressing the Congress workers, Kumar said that although the Congress currently does not have any MP or MLA from Delhi, "we, as a responsible Opposition, deem it as our duty to protest against this Bill, as we are concerned



Congress workers protest the Government of NCT Delhi (amendment) Bill 2021 at Jantar Mantar on Wednesday. SNS

about the welfare of the people of Delhi".

He said the Congress wanted to "expose the hidden clauses in the Bill, which will make mockery of the people's power to elect a government and representatives of their choice in Delhi".

He said this amendment Bill, when enacted, will allow the Centre to "remote-control the Delhi government through the Lt Governor".

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Whereas it has proved to the satisfaction of this court that you, the avowedenamed accused/accused persons can be served in the ordinary way. Hence, this proclamation Under 82 of Code of Criminal Procedure is hereby issued against you with a direction that you should appear personally before this court on 01-06-2021 at 10.00 a.m. or within 30 days from the date of publication of this proclamation.

Take notice that, in case of default on your part to appear as directed above the above-said case will be heard and determined as per law, in your absence, for details logon to : [http://highcourtchd.gov.in/?trs=district\\_notice&district=Ludhiana](http://highcourtchd.gov.in/?trs=district_notice&district=Ludhiana) JMC Ludhiana

**SITUATION VACANT**

COUPLED WITH THE POSITION OF CHIEF JUDGE OF THE HIGH COURT OF LUDHIANA, THE POSITION OF CHIEF JUDGE OF THE HIGH COURT OF LUDHIANA IS VACANT.

WHEREAS IT HAS PROVED TO THE SATISFACTION OF THIS COURT THAT YOU, THE AVOWEDENAMED ACCUSED/ACCUSED PERSONS CAN BE SERVED IN THE ORDINARY WAY. HENCE, THIS PROCLAMATION UNDER 82 OF CODE OF CRIMINAL PROCEDURE IS HEREBY ISSUED AGAINST YOU WITH A DIRECTION THAT YOU SHOULD APPEAR PERSONALLY BEFORE THIS COURT ON 01-06-2021 AT 10.00 A.M. OR WITHIN 30 DAYS FROM THE DATE OF PUBLICATION OF THIS PROCLAMATION.

TAKE NOTICE THAT, IN CASE OF DEFAULT ON YOUR PART TO APPEAR AS DIRECTED ABOVE THE ABOVE-SAID CASE WILL BE HEARD AND DETERMINED AS PER LAW, IN YOUR ABSENCE, FOR DETAILS LOGON TO : [http://highcourtchd.gov.in/?trs=district\\_notice&district=Ludhiana](http://highcourtchd.gov.in/?trs=district_notice&district=Ludhiana) JMC Ludhiana

**CORRIGENDUM** — The conditions of qualification mentioned in Andaman & Nicobar Administration Notice dated 28.02.2021 inviting applications from interested person for appointment to the post of Chairperson on Forum for Redressal of Grievances of Consumers set up in this UT under the said Regulation published in local / National Dailies may be corrected and read as "Not below the rank of Assistant Engineer in case of Lakshadweep and Andaman & Nicobar Islands" instead of "Not below the rank of Assistant Engineer in case of Lakshadweep". Other contents of the Corrigendum remains the same.

This issue with the approval of Competent Authority.

Assistant Secretary (Power)  
A&N Administration

**CHANGE OF NAME**

I, NUSRAT Elahi, W/o. Md. Siraj, R/o. 72/1, Pheasant Lane, Kolkata-700073, declare that Nusrat Elahi & Nusrat Siraj is same and one identical person vide affidavit sworn before Notary Public Nusrat Elahi, dated 17.03.2021 shall henceforth be known as Nusrat Elahi for all purposes.

I, ASIT Nandy Bhattacharya, R/o. 15/8B, Haridevpur Road, Kolkata-700082, do hereby declare that I, 'Asit Nandy Bhattacharya' and 'Asit Kumar Nandy' is same and identical person vide affidavit sworn before Notary Public Nusrat Elahi, dated 17.03.2021 shall henceforth be known as Asit Nandy for all purposes.

I, TARANNUM Yasmin, wife of late Shakil Ahmed Khan, residing at 1/D, Gulam Jilani Khan Road, P.T.I. Tijlala, Kolkata-700039 should henceforth be known as Yasmin Tarannum by affidavit of Notary Public, Kolkata on 12 March, 2021.

**TENDER**

TENDER No. SPL / 2021-00029 & 0030 – Saraswat Press Ltd. invites sealed offer from experience vendors or manufacturer for supply of Tamper Proof Envelope, Cloth Line Envelope & Ball point pen. For details and any amendment please visit our website: [www.saraswatpress.com](http://www.saraswatpress.com)

# Classified

## LEGAL NOTICES

## PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT (Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure)

In the Court of Vinay Kumar Jha Addl. District Judge-02 (East) Room No.13 Karkardooma Courts, Delhi CS-559/2016 Chhabria Electricals Versus

MS AAR VEE Controls Pvt. Ltd. & Ors.

To : 1.) M/s. AAR VEE Controls Pvt. Ltd. Through its Manning Director, 2.) Sh. Vinod Kumar Sharma, Director M/s. AAR VEE Controls Pvt. Ltd.

Defendants No. 2 and 3 Also At: F-23, Sector-6 Noida, U.P.-201301

The Defendant abovenamed.

Whereas you are intentionally evading service of summons, it is hereby notified that if you shall not defend the case on the 13-04-2021 the day fixed for the final disposal, it will be heard and determined ex parte.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court on this 03-03-2021.

Addl. District Judge-02 (East) Karkardooma Courts, Delhi Seal of the Court

## PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT (Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure)

In the Court of M.C. Gupta District Judge Commercial Court (Central)-03 Room No.308 Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi CS (COMM) No. 1497/20 ICICI Bank Ltd. Versus

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT (Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure)

In the Court of M.C. Gupta District Judge Commercial Court (Central)-03 Room No.308 Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi CS (COMM) No. 1497/20 ICICI Bank Ltd. Versus

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT (Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure)

In the Court of Sh. Raghuram SINGH Additional District Judge-01 East District, Room No. 08, 2nd Floor Karkardooma Court, Delhi GP No. 10/2021

1. Mr. Subhash Chand Kohli, s/o Late Sh. Chintan Kohli, w/o R. 11, Plot End Enclose, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi-110092

Presently at: C-148, East End Apartment, Near New Ashok Nagar, Metro Station, Delhi-110005.

1st Defendant

**NOTICE**

Please take notice that in the above matter the Hon'ble XXI Addl. Judge, City Civil Court, Chennai by order dated 02-02-2021 has directed the 1st Defendant to Delhi Properties and Building Society Private Ltd. Previously Delhi Properties and Building Society Private Ltd.) to appear before the aforesaid Court on 10-06-2021 at 10:30 a.m. or soon thereafter in person or through counsel, failing which, the 1st Defendant may be set ex parte and the matter would be decided in its absence.

B.R. Raja Advocate 27, Law Chamber High Court Buildings, Chennai 600014 Seal of the Court

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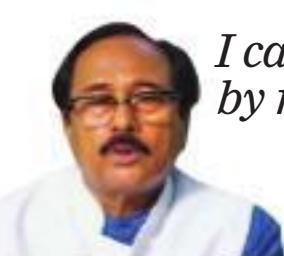
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&lt;p



I call it poetic justice. The two built their political careers by misleading the innocent people of Nandigram

ON THE POLL BATTLE BETWEEN SUVENDU ADHIKARI AND MAMATA BANERJEE IN NANDIGRAM

CONGRESS LEADER LAXMAN CHANDRA SETH

# Capt seeks review of Covid immunisation strategy

During PM's virtual Covid review meeting with CMs, Capt Amarinder expresses concern over fresh surge in corona cases in Punjab, says a stricter policy to curb it will come into force from today

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
CHANDIGARH, 17 MARCH

A spective Covid-19 cases in Punjab surged to 12,616 and the positivity rate climbed to over 5 percent. Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh on Wednesday urged the Centre to review its immunisation strategy to vaccinate all age groups in selected areas, while announcing a stricter policy to deal with the Covid problem.

Capt Amarinder also called for occupation-based immunisation for school and college students and teachers, judges, bus drivers and conductors, local body and village council members, legislators and others to pave the way for normalisation of crucial activities and check "super-spreaders".

He advocated early opening of the courts to end the wait for



justice for citizens, and also of schools and colleges to bridge the gap between poor and affluent families in terms of education. Capt Amarinder blamed the fresh surge in coronavirus cases on fatigue and laxity in following Covid-appropriate behaviours, large social and religious gatherings, and efforts at normalisation such as opening of schools and colleges. Large positivity was seen in the state's young population, he said.

The Punjab CM said the trend was "worrying" as the state had reported a total of 1475 cases and 38 deaths on Monday.

## Himachal govt taking effective steps to curb Covid spread: CM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
SHIMLA, 17 MARCH

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur on Wednesday said the state government was taking effective steps to check the spread of Covid in the hill state.

He made the remarks during a virtual review meeting on the Covid pandemic situation in the country with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in which the PM also reviewed progress of vaccination campaign in the country with the Chief Ministers of states, Lt Governors and Administrators of the Union Territories.

Thakur said PM Modi expressed concern over the sudden spike in the number of Covid-19 cases in a few states of the country and felt the need for taking effective steps to curb this virus so that the resurgence in virus cases could be checked.

The Prime Minister also

## HP provides Swiss entrepreneurs ample opportunities for investment: Jai Ram

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
SHIMLA, 17 MARCH

Switzerland and the state of Himachal Pradesh share virtually identical geographical conditions and climate thereby providing ample opportunities for Swiss entrepreneurs to invest in sectors such as tourism, winter sports and information technology, said HP Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur.

These views were expressed by CM Thakur while interacting with Ambassador of Switzerland to India Dr Ralf Heckner, who called on him here today.

The CM said the HP government has taken several initiatives to facilitate the entrepreneurs willing to invest in the state. He said that the state has made considerable improvement in ease of doing business by taking many steps to woo investors.

The state also has a good ecosystem and investor-friendly environment for potential entrepreneurs, he said adding that the HP government was also investing in creation of infrastructure to facilitate the entrepreneurs.

Thakur said that the state's salubrious climatic conditions and serene environment also attract lakhs of tourists round



Himachal CM discusses the state's investment potential during his meeting with Switzerland Ambassador to India

years.

Thakur said the state government has also decided to set up a hospitality hub near Waghati in Solan district, which would give a boost to the efforts of the government in the tourism sector.

Dr Ralf Heckner said that Switzerland is 12th biggest investor in India and has over 300 Swiss companies working in India. He said that similarly 100 Indian companies are also working in Switzerland.

He said Himachal Pradesh is an ideal place for investment in tourism, hospitality, health, mechanical tools and allied sectors. He said that the similar climatic conditions of the state could prove an added advantage for Switzerland entrepreneurs.

Chief Secretary Anil Khachi urged the Ambassador to highlight the potential of the state in various sectors amongst the entrepreneurs of Switzerland willing to invest in Himachal Pradesh.

We are taking all necessary COVID-19 Precautionary Measures.

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- NOIDA, Nirula's Sec-2, Near Metro Station, Sec-15, Noida, UP
- LAJPAT NAGAR, 49, Main Ring Road, Adj. Haldi Ram, Near Moolchand Crossing

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NOIDA, Nirula's Sec-2, Near Metro Station, Sec-15, Noida, UP



## Delhi records 536 new Covid cases, 3 deaths

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Delhi today recorded a spike of 536 new coronavirus cases - the highest in about two-and-a-half months - while 3 more persons died from the contagious, deadly virus, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin.

The number of active cases in the national capital rose to 2,702 from yesterday's 2,488, the health bulletin stated.

The fresh Covid cases took Delhi's infection tally to 64,025, even as 6,31,375 people have recovered from it so far. Its Covid death toll climbed to 10,948 now, the bulletin said.

**Amid a fresh uptick in coronavirus cases, for four consecutive days till 14 March the single-day count of Covid cases in Delhi had crossed the 400-mark**

The positivity rate rose to 0.66 per cent. The fresh cases were detected out of a total of 80,856 tests, including 50,216 RT-PCR and 30,640 rapid antigen. The number of Covid patients under home isolation rose to 1,438 from 1,401 the previous day, the bulletin added.

The national capital had yesterday recorded 425 cases with

a positivity rate of 0.61 per cent. It had then logged one coronavirus-linked fatality.

A total of 585 Covid cases were reportedly logged in Delhi on 1 January and 424 on 3 January.

The Covid cases in the city had on 15 March dipped to 368 from Sunday's 407 cases. The positivity rate was 0.59 per cent. The city had then reported 3 coronavirus-linked deaths.

Amid a fresh uptick in coronavirus cases, for four consecutive days till 14 March the single-day count of Covid cases in Delhi had crossed the 400-mark. It was 419 cases on 13 March, 431 on 12 March, and 409 on 11 March.

## PC Thomas-led Kerala Cong quits NDA

Says party was neglected by BJP-led alliance; will merge with Joseph faction

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
KOCCHITHIRUVANANTHAPURAM  
17 MARCH

**T**he Kerala Congress headed by former Union minister P C Thomason Wednesday quit the NDA alleging that his party was neglected by the BJP-led alliance when the seats were allocated for the 6 April polls.

The faction led by Thomas would merge with the Kerala Congress headed by senior leader P J Joseph, which is a constituent of the Congress-led UDF. Thomas was elected as MP

in NDA ticket from then Muvattupuzha seat in 2004 Lok Sabha polls.

The Kerala Congress leader, who was a minister in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA government, said his party was given four seats in the 2016 Assembly polls but not a single seat was allocated this time.

Thomas said the BJP leadership had offered him Pala assembly seat but he did not opt for it due to some personal reasons. The Joseph led Kerala Congress said both the parties will merge today.

It said Thomas has agreed to accept P J Joseph as the party's chairman and leader.

**Congress alleges fraud in voters' list in Kerala:**

The Opposition Congress on Wednesday raised serious allegations of fraud and irregularities in the preparation of voters' list in Kerala ahead of the 6 April assembly polls.

Citing the voters' list published by the Election Commission on 20 January 2021,

Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Ramesh Chennithala said bogus votes have been added extensively in each constituency across the state.

There were instances of the name of a person being included in the voters' list of the same constituency five or six times, he told reporters here in a press meet.

"In most cases, same address and photo have been used for committing the fraud. In some other cases, minor changes have been made in the address and the photo," the senior Congress leader alleged.

Accusing the Election Commission of issuing multiple voter identity cards to the same person in the same constituency, Chennithala cited an example of a person named Kumari, a 61-year-old voter in Udamasegum in northern Kasaragod district, who had allegedly been given five identity cards.

To prove, the leader shared the serial numbers and voter identity card numbers of all the five cards issued to her.

**BJP rejects charge of secret deal with CPM**

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,  
17 MARCH

Union minister V Muraleedharan on Wednesday dismissed allegation by BJP leader R Balashankar on a deal between the CPI(M) and the saffron party in some constituencies in the 6 April Assembly polls, as an emotional outburst of a person disappointed over denial of a seat. The candidates were decided by the central election committee of the party, which includes Prime Minister, party chief, home minister and the defence minister, Muraleedharan told reporters in Delhi.

Balashankar is not a person who is against the BJP. His statement comes after seats were allocated. It seems he was upset.

An official announcement related to her candidature was made on Wednesday. However, the decision to field her in Kazhakkuttam was informed her on Tuesday night.

A senior leader at the BJP central leadership has contacted her late on Tuesday and asked her to be ready to contest from the seat.

SNS

## TENDER

**Government of Himachal Pradesh,  
Rural Development & PR Department.**  
e-Procurement Notice  
**Re-INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)**

1. The Executive Engineer (HQ) Rural Development & PR Department SDA Complex Block No. 27 Kasumpi Shimla-9 (H.P.) on behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh Re-invites the online bids on item rate, in electronic tendering system, in 2 cover system for the under mentioned work from the eligible and approved contractors/Firms registered with HPPWD Department.

Sr. No.	Name of work	Estimated cost	Earnest Money	Cost of tender form	Time limit	Eligible Class of contractor
1	C/o Mukhya Mantri Lok Bhawan Bharti in G.P. Shiva; Dev. Block Paonta sahib; Distt. Shimour H.P.	22,61,162/-	41420/-	500/-	12 months.	C&D

2. Availability of Bid Document and mode of submission:- The Bid Document is available online and Bid should be submitted in online mode on website <https://htenders.gov.in>. Bidder would be required to register in the website which is free of cost. For submission of bids, the bidder is required to have Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) from one of the authorized Certifying Authorities (CA)."Aspiring bidders who have not obtained the user ID and Password for participating in e-tendering in RDD may obtain the same from the website <https://htenders.gov.in>. Digital Signature is mandatory to participate in the e-tendering. Bidders already possessing the Digital Signature issued from authorized CAs can use the same in the tender.

3. Key dates:-

1. Date of online Publication	22/03/2021	10.00 Hrs
2. Document Download Start and End date	22/03/2021	10.00 Hrs upto 30/03/2021 17.30 Hrs
3. Bid Submission Start and End Date	22/03/2021	10.00 Hrs upto 30/03/2021 17.30 Hrs
4. Physical Submission of EMD and Cost of Tender Document	31/03/2021	11.00 Hrs
5. Date of Technical Bid opening, Evaluation of Technical Bid followed by opening of Financial Bid.	31/03/2021	2:30 PM

4. TENDER DETAILS:- The Tender Document shall be uploaded online in 2 cover:-

(i) Cover-I shall contain scanned copies of all "Technical Documents/Eligibility Information"

(ii) Cover-2 shall contain "BOQ/Financial Bid", where contractor will quote his offer for each item.

5. SUBMISSION OF ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS:- The bidders are required to submit (a) original demand draft towards the cost of bid document and (b) original bid security/Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) in the shape of FDR duly pledged in favour of Executive Engineer (HQ) Rural Development & PR Department Shimla-9 and other Technical Document in the O/O the Executive Engineer (HQ) RDD Shimla-9 as specified in Key dates Sr. No. -3 on tender opening date, failing which the bids will be declared non responsive.

6. LIST OF MACHINERY, TOOL, PLANT:- The bidders must have to submit/upload the list of machinery/tools/equipment in the form of affidavit.

7. CONTRACTOR'S REGISTRATION:- The bidders have to produce the enlistment of competent authority in appropriate class valid at the time of tender and upload as pdf.

8. GST REGISTRATION:-The bidders have to produce/upload the GST registration at the time of tender and upload as pdf.

9. EMPLOYEES POVIDENT FUND:-The bidders have to produce/upload the EPF No. as pdf.

10. PAN NO:- The bidders have to produce/upload the PAN No in pdf.

11. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA:-

i) Work done certificate and work in hand certificate:- The bidders have to submit/upload the list of work which are completed /in hand (progress) in the proforma shown General rule No. 19 in Schedule "F". These statements should be countersigned by the Engineer-in-charge not below the rank of Executive Engineer or equivalent in State/Central Govt. PSU's with his seal. The original/tested copies of same may be submitted at the time of physical submission of tender.

ii) Affidavit:- Contractors have to submit an affidavit wherein mentioned that they have not more than two works in hand in Rural Development Department.

12. BID OPENING DETAILS:- The bids shall be open on 31/03/2021 at 2:30 Hrs in the O/O Executive Engineer (HQ) Rural Development & PR Department Block No. 27 SDA Complex Kasumpi Shimla-9 and by the authorized officer. In their interest the tenderer are advised to present along with original documents at the time of opening of tenders. If the office happens to closed on the date of opening of the bids as specified, the bids will be opened on the next working day at the same time and venue.

13. The bids for the work shall remain valid for acceptance for a period of 120 days after the deadline date for bid submission.

14. Other details can be seen in the bidding documents. The officers inviting tender shall not be held liable for any delays due to system failure beyond its control. Even though the system will attempt to notify the bidders of any bid updates, the Employer shall not be liable for any information not received by the bidder. It is the bidders responsibility to verify the website or the latest information related to the tender.

Executive Engineer (HQ),  
Rural Development & PR Department,  
Block No. 27 SDA Complex,  
Kasumpi, Shimla-9

**HIMACHAL PRADESH  
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT  
NOTICE INVITING TENDER**

Sealed item rate tenders are hereby invited by the Executive Engineer, Hamirpur Division HPPWD, Hamirpur in form No. 6 & 8 on behalf of Governor of H.P. for the following works from the contractors of appropriate class enlisted with HP.PWD. The tender shall be opened in the presence of the contractors / firms or their representative who wish to be present.

TIME SCHEDULE OF TENDER:-

1 Date and time of receipt of application for tender form:-	07/04/2021 up to 4.00 P.M.
2 Date and time of issue of tender form :-	09/04/2021 up to 3.00 PM.
3 Date and time of receipt of tenders:-	12/04/2021 up to 10.30 A.M.
4 Date and time of opening of tenders:-	12/04/2021 at 11.30 A.M.

The request for issue of tenders should be on the PRESCRIBED APPLICATION FORM which can be obtained from the office of undersigned and tenders will be issued to only those contractors who qualify the criteria after the +scrutiny of application forms by the Committee constituted for this purpose.

Sr. No. Name of Work Estimated cost EMD Time Limit Cost of tender Eligible class of contractor

1. Improvement of black spots on Lamblio Sikandar road km 0/0 to 6/040. (SH:- C/o R/wall at RD 5/410 to 5/419 Left Side, 5/425 to 5/425 Right Side).	146108.00	3000.00	One Month	350/-	Class- D
2. A/R & M/O on various roads under Hamirpur Sub Division (Jhanriani Section). (SH:- Repair of pot holes on (i) Pucca Bharo Matan Khaggal road km 0/0 to 6/350. (ii) Jhanriani Darbeli road km 2/070 to 2/900. (iv) Hamirpur road km 0/060 to 7/0. (v) Masyana Bhatwara road km 0/0 to 4/0.	318962.00	6400.00	One Month	350/-	Class- D
3. A/R & M/O on various roads under Hamirpur Sub Division (Baru Section). (SH:- Repair of pot holes on (i) Mohin Darkoti road km 3/0 to 8/375. (ii) Baru Hamirpur road km 0/0 to 6/250. (iii) Link road to Anu via Braj Bahl km 0/0 to 3/0.	494170.00	9900.00	One Month	350/-	Class- D

4. A/R & M/O on various roads under Hamirpur Sub Division (Nalli Section). (SH:- Repair of pot holes on (i) Dhaned Shiv Nagri Talasi road km 0/0 to 1/500. (ii) Tikkar Kapara road km 0/0 to 1/500. (iii) Link road to village Than km 0/0 to 1/500. (iv) Beri to Harian Basti Khatwan Dhar road km 0/0 to 1/500	481475.00	9700.00	One Month	350/-	Class- D
5. C/c 120.00 metre span Kunah Khad bridge at RD 2/660 (MDR-36) on Nadaun Sujanpur road km 0/0 to 14/620. (SH:- Providing 26mm thick mastic asphalt wear course).	492642.00	9900.00	One Month	350/-	Class- D
6. Restoration of rain damages on Kudhiar Masyana road km 0/0 to 13/0. (SH:- Providing and laying Roller Compacted Cement Concrete pavement (RCCP) at RD 3/280 to 3/390).	429367.00	8600.00	One Month	350/-	Class- D
7. Additional and alteration of Indira Gandhi District Library Building at Hamirpur. (SH:- C/o Ladies and Gents toilets in glazing for newly created COVID Centre in Twenty Bedded Ayurvedic Hospital at Hamirpur).	153088.00	3100.00	One Month	35	



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GOA CHIEF MINISTER PRAMOD SAWANT  
PAYING TRIBUTES TO FORMER STATE CM MANOHAR PARRIKAR ON HIS DEATH ANNIVERSARY

BJP: Devp, security poll issues, not Ajmal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
GUWAHATI, 17 MARCH

A battery of leaders belonging to the saffron party might have focussed on Badruddin Ajmal and his party AIUDF; alleged-

ly "out to divide the country", while campaigning in Assam, but the party's state unit chief Ranjeet Kumar Dass has said, development and security are the only two issues for the approaching assembly polls.

## TENDER

### NORTHERN RAILWAY

#### E-Tender Notice

Sr. DEE-TRS-GZB acting for and on behalf of President of India invites E-Tender against Tender No. 230-TRS-GZB-2019-20-24. The details are as under:

1. Name of the work	Annual Maintenance Contract (AMC) for two years of EOT Cranes with stand by spare installed in Electric Loco Shed, Ghaziabad.
2. Approx. cost of work	Rs. 14,21,077.35
3. Last date & Time of Submission of tender bid of tender	08.04.2021 (11.00 Hrs.)
4. Date & Time of opening of tender document	08.04.2021 (11.30 Hrs.)
5. Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen	<a href="http://www.ireps.gov.in">www.ireps.gov.in</a>

NOTE:-

- (i) The tenderer must be registered on the Indian Railway E-Procurement System (IREPS) site i.e. [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in) for participating in e-tender system.
- (ii) For all terms and conditions please refer tender document.
- (iii) No manual offers are acceptable.
- (iv) Cost of Tender document and Earnest money will be acceptable through net banking or payment gateway only.

No.: 230-TRS-GZB-2019-20-24 Dated: 16.03.2021 599/2021

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### HOLI SPECIAL TRAINS - 2021

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

04032/04031 ANAND VIHAR (T) - VARANASI JN. - ANAND VIHAR (T) - SUPERFAST EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (TRI WEEKLY)	10 Trips
Train No.: 04032	STATIONS
ARR. DEP.	ARR. DEP.
--- 18:15	ANAND VIHAR (T) 09:30 ---
08:05 ---	VARANASI JN. --- 19:30

DAYS OF RUN: 04032 from Anand Vihar (T) from 22.03.21 to 31.03.21 (Wed., Fri. and Mon.) and 04031 from Varanasi Jn. from 21.03.21 to 01.04.21 (Tue., Thu. and Sun).

STOPPAGES: Moradabad, Bareilly, Lucknow, Rai Bareli Jn., Amethi, Partapgarh Jn. & Bhadohi Stations.  
ACCOMMODATION: AC 3 Tier.

04034/04033 H. NIZAMUDDIN - TRIVANDRUM CENTRAL - H. NIZAMUDDIN SUPERFAST EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (DAILY)	02 Trips
Train No.: 04034	STATIONS
ARR. DEP.	ARR. DEP.
--- 05:00	HAZRAT NIZAMUDDIN 22:40 ---
04:55 ---	TRIVANDRUM CENTRAL --- 00:30

DAYS OF RUN: 04034 from Hazrat Nizamuddin on 26.03.21 (Fri.) and 04033 from and Trivandrum Central on 31.03.21 (Wed.).

STOPPAGES: Mathura Jn., Bharatpur Jn., Sawai Madhopur, Kota Jn., Ratlam Jn., Vadodara Jn., Bharuch Jn., Surat, Vapi, Dahanu Road, Vasai Road, Panvel, Ratnagiri, Karmali, Madgaon, Karwar, Udupi, Mangalore Jn., Kannur, Kozhikode, Shorapur Jn., Thiruv., Ernakulam, Town, Kottayam, Kayankulam Jn., Kollam Jn. Stations.

ACCOMMODATION: AC 2 Tier, AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved 2nd Seating.

04036/04035 ANAND VIHAR (T) - JOGBANI - ANAND VIHAR (T) SUPERFAST EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (DAILY)	24 Trips
Train No.: 04036	STATIONS
ARR. DEP.	ARR. DEP.
--- 08:10	ANAND VIHAR (T) 20:45 ---
07:50 ---	JOGBANI --- 20:30

DAYS OF RUN: 04036 from Anand Vihar (T) from 19.03.21 to 30.03.21 and 04035 from Jobani from 20.03.21 to 31.03.21.

STOPPAGES: Ghaziabad, Aligarh, Tundla, Kanpur Central, Prayagraj Jn., Mirzapur, Pt. Deendayal Upadhyay Jn., Dildar Nagar, Danapur, Patliputra, Begusarai, Khagaria, Naugachia, Katihar, Purnia, Araria Court & Forbesganj Stations.

ACCOMMODATION: AC 2 Tier, AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved 2nd Seating.

04038/04037 H. NIZAMUDDIN - H.S. NANCED - H. NIZAMUDDIN SUPERFAST EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (WEEKLY)	04 Trips
Train No.: 04038	STATIONS
ARR. DEP.	ARR. DEP.
--- 23:15	HAZRAT NIZAMUDDIN 10:10 ---
21:40 ---	H.S. NANCED --- 11:05

DAYS OF RUN: 04038 from Hazrat Nizamuddin from 25.03.21 to 01.04.21 (Thursday) and 04037 from H.S. Nanced from 27.03.21 to 03.04.21 (Saturday).

STOPPAGES: Mathura Jn., Agra Cantt., Gwalior, Jhansi, Bina, Bhopal, Habibganj, Itarsi, Khandwa, Malkapur, Akola Jn., Washim, Hingoli Deccan & Purna Jn. Stations.

ACCOMMODATION: AC 2 Tier, AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved 2nd Seating.

04040/04038 H. NIZAMUDDIN - H.S. NANCED - H. NIZAMUDDIN SUPERFAST EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (WEEKLY)	04 Trips
Train No.: 04040	STATIONS
ARR. DEP.	ARR. DEP.
--- 08:10	ANAND VIHAR (T) 20:45 ---
07:50 ---	JOGBANI --- 20:30

DAYS OF RUN: 04040 from Anand Vihar (T) from 19.03.21 to 30.03.21 and 04039 from Jobani from 20.03.21 to 31.03.21.

STOPPAGES: Mathura Jn., Agra Cantt., Gwalior, Jhansi, Bina, Bhopal, Habibganj, Itarsi, Khandwa, Malkapur, Akola Jn., Washim, Hingoli Deccan & Purna Jn. Stations.

ACCOMMODATION: AC 2 Tier, AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved 2nd Seating.

04040/04039 NEW DELHI - SHRIMATA VAISHNO DEVI KATRA - NEW DELHI SUPERFAST EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (DAILY)	22 Trips
Train No.: 04040	STATIONS
ARR. DEP.	ARR. DEP.
--- 23:15	SHRIMATA VAISHNO DEVI KATRA 10:10 ---
21:40 ---	NEW DELHI --- 11:05

DAYS OF RUN: 04040 from New Delhi from 20.03.21 to 30.03.21 and 02445 from Shrimate Vaishno Devi Katra from 21.03.21 to 31.03.21.

STOPPAGES: Mathura Jn., Agra Cantt., Ludhiana Jn., Jalandhar Cantt., Pathankot, Kathua, Jammu Tawi, Ram Nagar J.K. & Udhampur Stations.

ACCOMMODATION: 1st AC, AC 2 Tier, AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved Second Seating.

02445/02446 NEW DELHI - SHRIMATA VAISHNO DEVI KATRA - NEW DELHI SUPERFAST EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (DAILY)	22 Trips
Train No.: 02445	STATIONS
ARR. DEP.	ARR. DEP.
--- 20:50	NEW DELHI 06:55 ---
08:05 ---	SHRIMATA VAISHNO DEVI KATRA --- 19:55

DAYS OF RUN: 02445 from New Delhi from 20.03.21 to 30.03.21 and 02446 from Shrimate Vaishno Devi Katra from 21.03.21 to 31.03.21.

STOPPAGES: Mathura Jn., Agra Cantt., Ludhiana Jn., Jalandhar Cantt., Pathankot, Kathua, Jammu Tawi, Ram Nagar J.K. & Udhampur Stations.

ACCOMMODATION: AC 2 Tier, AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved Second Seating.

04046/04037 H. NIZAMUDDIN - H.S. NANCED - H. NIZAMUDDIN SUPERFAST EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (WEEKLY)	04 Trips
Train No.: 04046	STATIONS
ARR. DEP.	ARR. DEP.
--- 08:10	ANAND VIHAR (T) 20:45 ---
07:50 ---	JOGBANI --- 20:30

DAYS OF RUN: 04046 from Anand Vihar (T) from 19.03.21 to 30.03.21 and 04037 from Jobani from 20.03.21 to 31.03.21.

STOPPAGES: Mathura Jn., Agra Cantt., Gwalior, Jhansi, Bina, Bhopal, Habibganj, Itarsi, Khandwa, Malkapur, Akola Jn., Washim, Hingoli Deccan & Purna Jn. Stations.

ACCOMMODATION: AC 2 Tier, AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved 2nd Seating.

04048/04038 H. NIZAMUDDIN - H.S. NANCED - H. NIZAMUDDIN SUPERFAST EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (WEEKLY)	04 Trips
Train No.: 04048	STATIONS
ARR. DEP.	ARR. DEP.
--- 18:45	SHRIMATA VAISHNO DEVI KATRA 09:20 ---
22:15 ---	VARANASI JN. --- 06:35

DAYS OF RUN: 04048 from Shrimate Vaishno Devi Katra from 21.03.21 to 28.03.21 (Sunday) and 04607 from Varanasi Jn. from 23.03.21 to 29.03.21 (Mon.).

STOPPAGES: Rampura Phul, Barnala, Dhuri, Patiala, Rajpura, Ambala Cantt., Yamuna Nagar, Saharanpur, Moradabad, Bareilly, Lucknow & Sultanpur Stations.

ACCOMMODATION: AC 2 Tier, AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved 2nd Seating.

04424/04423 H. NIZAMUDDIN - LUCKNOW - H. NIZAMUDDIN SUPERFAST A.C. EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (WEEKLY)	04 Trips
Train No	

## Maritime tensions

North Korea has upped the ante through a robust statement articulated by Kim Yo-jong, the powerful sister of its President, Kim Jong-un. Tuesday's caveat addressed to the United States of America has been advanced in the midst of the "security talks" being conducted by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin with Japan's minister of foreign affairs Toshimitsu Motegi and Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi. The overriding anxiety of the United States and Japan and also, of course, South Korea is to condemn what they call China's "aggression" in the region, most particularly the South China Sea. The North has in point of fact broken its silence after Joe Biden stepped into the White House. Kim Yo-jong's warning is, therefore, directed at both Washington and Seoul not the least in the context of the US and South Korean joint military exercises under way in South Korea. The geopolitical diplomatic demarche has warned the Biden administration against undertaking "war games" if it wants to "sleep in peace for the coming four years." While the North has been remarkably robust in its response, the US President has thus far stopped short of precipitating the inherent crisis that simmers in the choppy waters of the South China sea. Attitudes are, however, bound to stiffen in the wake of the forthright criticism expressed by Kim Yo-jong. She has said that the authorities in Seoul could face "consequences" for conducting the drills, which began earlier this month. The annual manoeuvres were scaled down this year due to the coronavirus pandemic and largely involve computer simulations, according to military officials. Yet the matrix of Pyongyang is decidedly confrontational, when geo-strategy warrants peace and goodwill in the region. Blinken has said that the US has recently tried to reach out to Pyongyang but has received no response. "We're looking at whether various additional pressure measures can be effective, whether there are diplomatic paths that make sense." There surely are and both the United States and North Korea must of necessity pursue diplomatic options, most importantly because President Biden is at the threshold of his office. While threats posed by North Korea are a common concern for both Washington and Tokyo, the increasingly assertive posture of China was the focus of Tuesday's bilateral security meeting in Tokyo. Defence Secretary Austin has asserted that the US will work together with its long-time ally, Japan, to counter what he called Beijing's "destabilizing actions" in the region. "We know that competing in today's shifting global dynamics can only be done through the spirit of teamwork and cooperation, which are the hallmarks of our alliance with Japan." Tokyo and Beijing both claim possession of a small chain of uninhabited islands in the East China Sea known as Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China. Beijing is said to have recently altered regulations for its maritime forces that increase the risk of hostilities in the area. The plot thickens in Asia's maritime belt.

## Merkel's predicament

Provincial elections in Germany would normally not have aroused much interest around the world, most particularly in Europe, were it not for the fact that the outcome will impact national elections on September 26 and the selection of a new Chancellor after Angela Merkel's 16-year innings at the crease. Sunday's portents were distressing. Mrs Merkel's conservative party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), suffered heavy losses in the south-western states of Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate. While the anti-incumbency mood has been pronounced, it might be presumptuous to speculate on the eventual psephological swing in September; nonetheless, the regional outcome is a barometer of the national mood ahead of the general elections. In affluent Baden-Württemberg, Mrs Merkel's centre-right CDU will have to contend with its worst-ever result at 23 per cent. In neighbouring Rhineland-Palatinate, CDU scored 26 per cent, shedding 5.8 percentage points compared to the result in 2016. While the data is confined to two provinces, they do provide a benchmark of Germany's road ahead. The CDU has slumped to a historic low in the two states. The irony must be bitter not the least because Mrs Merkel's stewardship has been fairly impressive during her unusually long stint. As in the 2016 vote, the Green party took first place again, garnering more than 31 per cent. If Sunday's fallout is a microcosm of the general trend, it is more than obvious that voters have vented anger over setbacks in the wake of the pandemic and a face-mask procurement scandal. The results mark a worrying start for the CDU/CSU to what has been dubbed Germany's "super election year". Mrs Merkel's federal government, which includes the SPD as junior partner, initially won praise at home and abroad for suppressing the first coronavirus wave last spring. She, it bears recall, was quite the most accommodating in her acceptance of migrants from North Africa and the Arab world when other countries of Europe, especially parties of the Right, were overwhelmingly loath to accept them. For all that, her party has increasingly come under fire over Germany's sluggish vaccination campaign, a delayed start to free rapid testing, and a resurgence in cases despite months of shutdown. The CDU and its Bavarian sister party, CSU, have also been roiled by damaging claims about MPs apparently benefitting financially from face mask deals early on in the pandemic, forcing three lawmakers to step down in recent days. The mask scandal has weighed heavily on the election contest. The fact of the matter must be that Mrs Merkel's government has for a while been mired in irregularities, and it shall not be easy to garner dividend at the hustings. Both the irregularities are linked to the deadly disease,

# Snowden in Wonderland

Analysts even utilised programmes to spy on their spouses, lovers and would-be lovers, which was hard to discourage because 'you can't exactly convict someone of abusing a secret system of surveillance if you refuse to admit the existence of the system itself.' Even Catch-22 never had it so good



Patriotism can be a very peculiar thing that only a mind as sublimely subtle – and comical – as that of Lewis Carroll might be equipped to reason out. Case in point: renowned whistleblower Edward Snowden resides in furtive exile for disclosing to fellow US citizens massive state surveillance crimes committed against them, which they otherwise were not allowed by the indignant perpetrators to discover. A few months ago Snowden also had all royalties to his autobiographical book 'Permanent Record' seized because he failed to submit it for clearance to the very agencies whose gross misdeeds he was exposing. All this illogicality is, of course, perfectly understandable if you look at it in just the right way.

If we were state security czars who routinely violated our oaths to the Constitution, we too likely would conceal it in the holy name of national security, which absolves everything. Disregard the facts that Federal Courts in 2016 and again in 2020 ruled that the unbridled surveillance programmes Snowden exposed were illegal and that intelligence leaders deliberately deceived the public. Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, still at large, flatly lied to a Senate Committee in March 2013 when he replied with a denial to the question "Does the NSA collect any kind of data at all on million or hundreds of millions of Americans?" Clapper later pleaded that he misunderstood the question.

So it is worth revisiting Snowden's book in the aftermath of the court decision to scoop up royalties and speaking fees. At least he got his side of the story out. Unlike the typical post-Cold War spy scandal, Snowden didn't funnel information to foreign agents nor do it for the bucks and bling. He gave up a six figure salary to reveal his bosses' lawless intrusions into all our lives. Meanwhile, the urbane lawbreakers Snowden exposed go on pocketing their handsome pay and pensions, nursing grudges against spoil-sport whistleblowers, and prattling on major news broadcasts.

This son of a US Coast Guard engineer and a Mayflower descendant mother hardly fits the profile of a turncoat. Early on, the geeky teen hacked into the Los Alamos

weapons lab site and then alerted the lab to its vulnerability, which required a dismaying amount of persistence. After 9/11 Snowden enlisted in the Army but suffered a disabling injury in training. At age 22 he "didn't have any" politics, just a web savant's giddy sense of the internet "as a wild, open new frontier". The intelligence services, where public and private entities now merged, hired the talented techie just as it transitioned from "targeted surveillance of individuals of mass surveillance of entire populations," with no limits on state power or corporate connivance. A contractor for the CIA at first, Snowden eventually worked for the National Security Agency where he abetted "the agency's ultimate dream which is permanency – to store all of



KURT JACOBSEN  
SAYEED HASAN KHAN

The writers are well-known commentators and the authors of *Parables of Permanent War and No Clean Hands*, among many other books

the files it has ever collected or produced in perpetuity and so create a perfect memory. The permanent record."

A post-9/11 programme under George W. Bush urged the NSA to collect data without restriction but was outed. The ensuing reforms, Snowden found, were mere ruses to re-enable the programs so that any NSA spook could, "as easily as flicking a switch, instantly track everybody with a phone or computer, know who they are, where they are, what they were doing with whom, and what they had ever done in the past." The cumulative metadata can be mined to make perfect maps of anyone's life. Snowden foresaw the rise of a Robocop world where "if you ever get out of line we'll use your private life against you." Analysts even utilized programmes to spy on their spouses, lovers and would-be

lovers, which was hard to discourage because "you can't exactly convict someone of abusing a secret system of surveillance if you refuse to admit the existence of the system itself." Even Catch-22 never had it so good. What Snowden beheld in the next few years was a "cynical attempt to turn terror into a permanent danger that required permanent vigilance enforced by unquestionable authority."

In this loco "Alice in Wonderland" atmosphere the NSA defended itself against a civil liberties lawsuit on the grounds that no one could not prove the Agency snooped on their clients. The court obligingly only recognized evidence the government permitted, not leaked documents, which were classified and so inadmissible. The intelligence community existed divinely above the law.

GCHQ, the NSA's British counterpart deployed a program that captured a snapshot every five minutes of everyone chatting on Yahoo. Another US program XKEYSCORE could burglarize computer records and leave no trace. How to rein it all in? Snowden opted against WikiLeaks because it resorted to data dumps, without the careful contextualizing he judged it required. Turning to certain press luminaries, "I would be aiding and abetting an act of journalism," which is indistinguishable these nervewracking days from treason. The US Espionage act forbids any chance of defense since it disregards changes in law caused by Snowden or the beneficial civic effect of public debate following his actions.

Despite the US Fourth amendment protecting against unreasonable searches and seizures, "you surrender your privacy rights in the very act of using modern technologies." Marooned in Moscow in 2013 after his passport was revoked while he was en route to Ecuador, Snowden now expresses more faith in encrypted smartphones than in legislative safeguards, though he views the 2016 EU General Data Protection Regulation as a step in the right privacy-protecting direction. He awaits an unlikely outbreak of logic and reason.

Though getting a helping hand via Julian Assange at a crucial moment, Snowden disapprovingly referred to Assange's "feral opposition to central power," which indicates not even he is totally immune to government smear campaigns.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

## Endemic wastage of food

SIR, The UN Food Waste Index Report 2021, released recently, has drawn attention to high wastage of food that happens everywhere in the world, even as millions of families go hungry every day in parts of it. It has said that around 931 million tonnes of food were wasted in 2019, 61 per cent of which came from households and the rest from food service and retail. According to the report, about 17 per cent of the total global food may be wasted and in pictorial representation it's weight "equals that of 23 million fully loaded 40-tonne trucks, bumper-to-bumper, enough to circle the Earth seven times!" In India, the household food waste estimate is 50kg per capita per year, which is less than in countries like the US and China. But this may not be because of more efficient use of food, but because the overall availability is less. It is estimated that food worth Rs 1 lakh crore is wast-

ed in India, and this does not include wastage of cooked food. A part of that should be enough to feed the large number of hungry people in the country, which is ranked 94 out of 107 countries in the Global Hunger Index. In India food is wasted massively at weddings and on other occasions. The UN report says that reducing food waste would also cut greenhouse gas emissions and slow the destruction of nature through land conservation and pollution. Avoiding food wastage should therefore become a national mission. It will have very positive environmental, social and economic impacts.

Yours, etc., Shovonali Chakraborty, Kolkata, 17 March.

**ALARM OVER VACCINE**  
SIR, In the context of the mass vaccination programmes against COVID-19 being pushed globally, some lobbyists are now sounding

alarm in the US. It is being argued that even though the vaccines work, it is quite probable that the vaccinated people breed other strains of the virus and act as their carriers. This would result in unleashing of another wave of uncontrollable virus that would further devastate the human race. These lobbyists are of the view that vaccinologists, clinicians, and scientists are focusing on short-term results only at the individual level and not the long term consequences at the global population level. They believe that soon, a virus which is less harmful now, would transform itself into an uncontrollable monster. In the early two-thousands, a paper published in one of the lead journals had erroneously claimed that the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccines had the ability to cause autism. The phenomenon was called 'pervasive developmental disorder' and had created a strong lobby

of anti vaccination campaigners in the US and the UK, in particular. In the resulting confusion, several youngsters had missed their vaccination schedules. Thereafter, a number of research papers appeared to dispel those fears.

It is therefore imperative that to prevent similar confusion, the ICMR, and other institutions undertaking research in virology also design experiments and investigate possibilities of any long term debilitating effect, if any, that the vaccines of corona virus are likely to contribute to.

Yours, etc., Scion Sarma, Kolkata, 16 March.

## IMPERVIOUS TO BANK AND INSURANCE STAFF

SIR, A government which has turned a deaf ear to the agitating farmers for more than three months is unlikely to pay much attention to the striking bank and insurance employees. The pro business tilt of the government is not secret. It is apparent that nothing is going to deter the government from its chosen path of privatisation. Those who support this move of the government must remember that not many have opted to migrate to private banks from the Public Sector Banks. While there is scope for improvement in PSB services, the services of the private banks too are not as good as imagined. The high net worth customers will be given service at their door step if needed, but those with small balances will be chased away as being a drain on the bank. Even the middle class which make their displeasure of PSB's on all platforms are going to rue the end of PSB's. Financial inclusion of the poor class will be a thing of the past and a new India of the rich and the invisible poor is in the making.

Yours, etc., Anthony Henriques, Mumbai 16 March.

## TECHNICAL EDUCATION

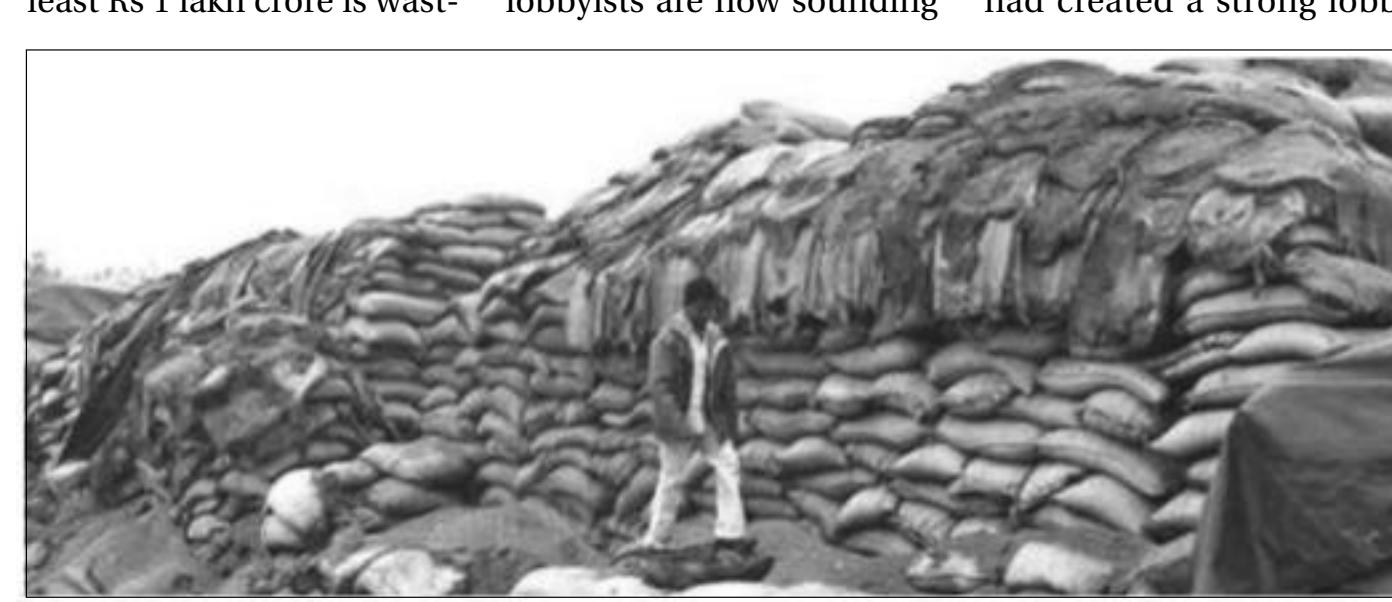
SIR, The All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) has recently announced that Physics and Mathematics will not be the compulsory subjects anymore in the high school stage for the students who want to pursue Engineering courses in undergraduate level. This comes as a shocker to the entire academic circle! It is really difficult to comprehend as to how one can study Engineering courses without the basic foundation of Physics and Mathematics. AICTE probably wants to project a liberal view and offers more flexibility to the students of different streams to fulfill their aspirations of being an engineer. This sounds fine but ultimately undermines the main objective of producing

quality engineers for the country. How can a student of Computer Science or Electronics & Telecommunications Engineering follow the curriculum without the knowledge of high school Physics and Mathematics? These two subjects are actually intertwined with almost all the branches of Engineering Science.

AICTE has a plan to offer bridge courses on these subjects to the students who will face difficulty. This will be again quite impractical as the students without any prior knowledge will definitely find it difficult to develop the required expertise by simply attending these bridge courses for a limited period! Teachers of Universities, Engineering Institutes should oppose this circular of AICTE which will severely dilute the quality of engineers in the long run. One must understand that Physics, Chemistry & Mathematics are the bedrock of Engineering Science which can't be kept as optional subjects along with different other subjects at high school stage. Is it possible to study Medical Science without having the basic knowledge of Biology and Chemistry?

AICTE should be sensible enough and must understand that this is not a testing ground! Their policy should not affect the standard of our engineers because the high quality of manpower always helps the country to prosper at a faster pace.

Yours, etc., Tapas Kumar Bhattacharyya, Kolkata, 16 March.



## Year of circumscribed living

IQBAL AHMED

**I**t was a terrifying proclamation. In the second week of March 2020, the World Health Organisation declared the Covid-19 outbreak to be a pandemic. Initially there was both fear and confusion at many workplaces until, three days after the spring equinox, the UK government decided to impose a lockdown and many of us heaved a sigh of relief.

However, our sense of relief proved to be short-lived because the full impact of the pandemic soon began to dawn upon us. A year later, it is hard to find a family that hasn't been impacted by the pandemic. I lost a close relative in Kashmir to the disease. My stable job of 20 years in the hospitality industry disappeared into thin air after the first lockdown. And the third lockdown appears to be dragging on forever.

I bumped into my barber on the street a few days ago and told him that I badly needed a haircut. He said that we should be grateful that we had so far survived the pandemic and worry less about how we look with our overgrown hair. I thought he had a point.

Even though I was able to finish writing a book last year, it still seems that I have lived a sterile life in 2020 because of the nature of the lockdowns. When my mother heard about the pandemic, she thought the end of the world was nigh. Not having seen each other for two years, she wanted me to travel to Kashmir just before the first lockdown to spend time with the family. When an Irish friend in London heard the news of the breakthrough in the search for a vaccine she wept, knowing that she would be able to travel to Ireland to see her mother again in the not too distant future. I also shed a few tears of joy when I got vaccinated a couple of weeks ago. My mother received her first jab a few days later in Kashmir and it will be possible to see her once travel restrictions are lifted.

What a humdrum existence it has been in a year without travel. How the so-called 'road warriors' (the industry's wry designation of travelling businessmen) desire to be back on the road. It might be a long road to full economic recovery but the green shoots of spring can already be seen.

Some commentators are comparing this pandemic with World War II. But we shouldn't equate the present restrictions even with a military lockdown, let alone with a period in our history when countries across the globe were ravaged and devastated on an unimaginable scale. And to call this crisis unprecedented is inaccurate.

rate. Perhaps we should have taken comfort from history, which teaches us that all previous pandemics have eventually come to an end.

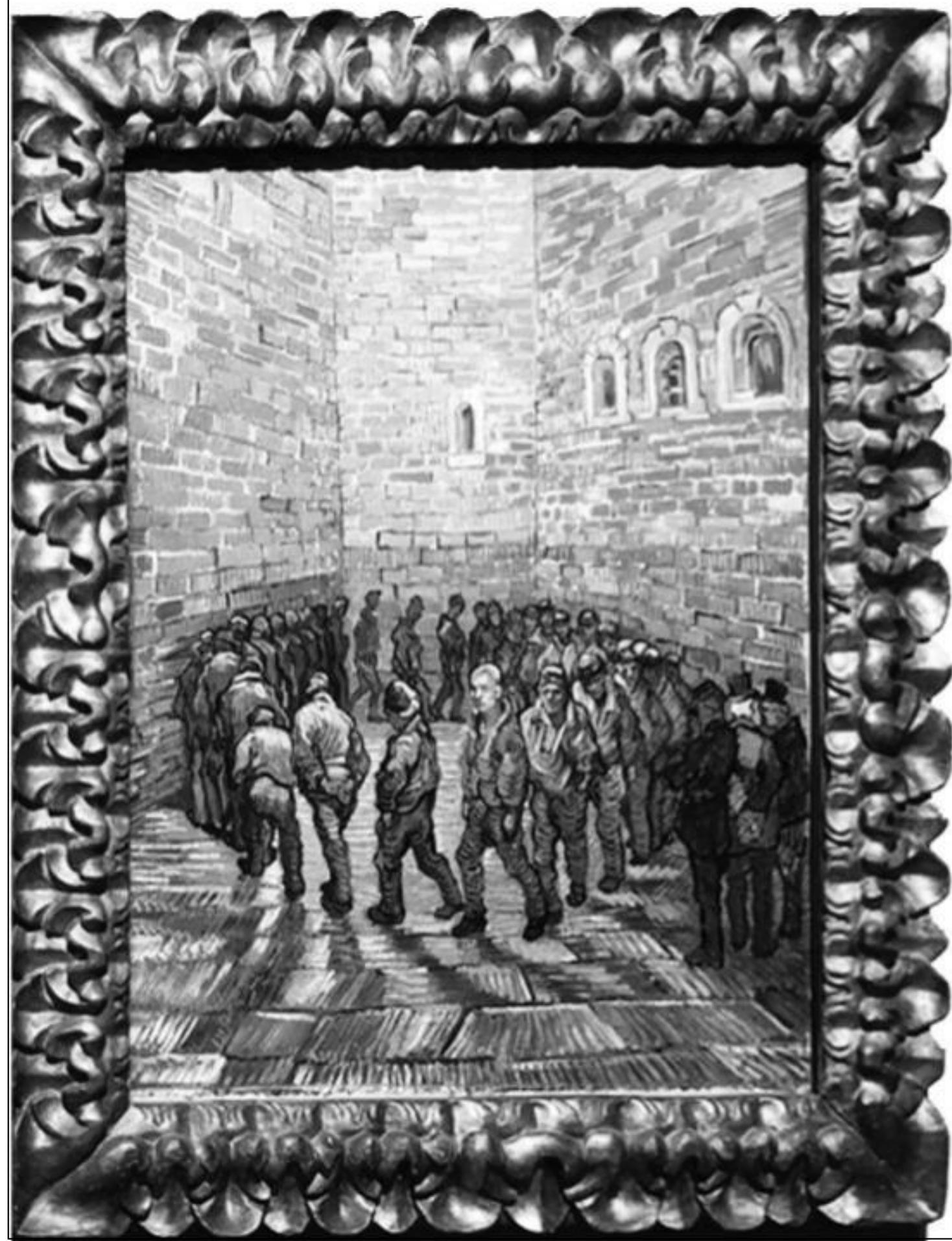
The only thing that the last year has taught us is that good times don't last forever - and neither do the bad times for that matter. Nonetheless, it has been a humbling experience for mankind in the face of nature. 2020 is the year we would like to forget but its impact will stay with us for years to come. Many people are envisioning a kinder world after their own brush with death, and in that respect their experiences will have a positive impact on our world. Let us hope that kindness is no longer regarded as a weakness.

It is the travel and hospitality industry that has been hardest hit during the pandemic. Despite many people managing to save some money by not travelling or eating out during the last year, we seem to have lived a poorer life. The old adage that travel is the only thing you buy that makes you richer rings very true at such a time as this. I am an inveterate traveller yet I haven't taken a train ride out of London, let alone boarded a plane, for a year. My memories of the last ten years are inextricably coloured by the places I have visited and therefore 2020 already draws a blank.

Vision 2020 was used as an aspirational slogan by some marketing guru a few years ago to denote an economic goal for a developing country. In fact, it is difficult to be clear-sighted about the future. As Jonathan Swift understood, 'vision is the art of seeing what is invisible to others.' There are just a handful of people in our world who had seen this pandemic coming. I recently read an article by Malcolm Gladwell about the Spanish Flu that was published in The New Yorker more than 20 years ago, and it comes across as completely contemporary.

We are still in the grip of the pandemic. There hasn't been an equitable distribution of vaccines in the world. But it is impossible any more to have a contagious disease raging in a distant city like Manaus in Brazil and the rest of the world not be affected by it.

Travel and hospitality are intertwined. When we start travelling again, we will need hotels and restaurants in order to experience different cultures. Even if we travel out of our cities and towns just to go to the seaside or for a walk in the mountains, we'll still need hotels and restaurants. A few years ago, I travelled with some friends to Zanskar in the Himalayas and we pitched our tent near a mountain stream. It sounds idyllic but it was terribly cold. It was



therefore wonderful to move on and enjoy the comfort and amenities of a hotel in Kargil on the way to Srinagar.

How I would love, once the Covid crisis is

over, to travel again through Suru Valley to Zanskar and stay in that same hotel.

The writer is a London-based author.

## Postponing the inevitable in Afghanistan



MAHIR ALI

In recent years, as the negotiations phase in the 21st-century variant of the Great Game has gathered pace, every cliché in the diplomatic play-book has been trotted out to illustrate its sporadic progress.

There have been multiple windows of opportunity, open doors, seats at the table, options on the table — and inevitably some dealings under the table. 'Between the devil and the deep blue sea' doesn't figure all that frequently in official statements, but it pretty much sums up

the choices Afghanistan has faced for the past 40 years.

Among the latest options is a draft 'peace agreement secretly proposed by the Biden administration, but much commented on since it was leaked last week. Some officials in Kabul have poured scorn on the US wish list — which is hardly surprising, given it effectively consigns the Ashraf Ghani administration to oblivion. The Taliban have been more reticent in their response so far, saying they are studying the document.

The entity that the US and its allies dislodged from power nearly 20

years ago is being offered substantial representation in every tier of an interim government. A constituent assembly is envisaged, with elections to be held once it has completed its task. There are motherhood statements about education, intellectual freedom and women's rights.

As golden-throated philosopher Freddie Mercury once wondered: "Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?"

For many years now, the biggest fear among some Afghans has revolved around their nation's prospects once the foreign military forces exited. That apprehension

highlights the crux of Afghanistan's abiding tragedy: since the late 1970s, its fortunes have largely been determined by outsiders. Of course, more broadly, that has been the case for centuries.

The tyranny of geography is an immutable fact, but what's particularly remarkable is the extent to which Afghanistan has resisted being swallowed up by neighbouring empires. Only time will tell whether that rugged exceptionalism serves it well in this century.

When the US invaded in collaboration with the Northern Alliance in 2001, in the wake of the 9/11, the Taliban chose to melt away, reinforcing the impression of a Western-led cake-walk into Kabul. Once the botched effort to track down Osama bin Laden failed, the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld administration saw little reason to expend too much energy or too many resources on Afghanistan. Its attention shifted to Iraq.

Perhaps the Taliban realised even back then that they had time on their side — apart from sanctuaries in Pakistan, where bin Laden also found refuge. Over the years they steadily re-established their clout across the countryside. The US and its allies poured in tens of thousands of troops, and tens of thousands of people — mainly Afghans — have been killed since then. Both sides have committed innumerable war crimes that will likely go uninvestigated and unpunished.

And where are we today? The debate is over the exit of the remaining 2,500 US troops in Afghanistan by May 1. Actually, the figure is closer to 3,500, according to the New York Times (which notes that the Pentagon routinely understates troop numbers). Then there are the 8,000

or so 'contractors' — unofficial military personnel, in effect — plus smaller contingents from the usual Western allies, which wouldn't stay behind once the Americans pack up.

Joe Biden is under considerable pressure to postpone the pullout. Should he do so, as seems likely, the Taliban would have an excuse to renege on their part of the Doha bargain — whereby they have resisted the temptation to attack foreign forces. Beyond that, the violence has not significantly diminished in the past year. Apart from other atrocities, targeted killings of women in particular occur with brutal regularity. The Taliban deny responsibility, but no one else claims it.

It's reasonable to assume that the security situation would deteriorate in the immediate aftermath of a Western troop withdrawal, with uncertain consequences. The alternative, however, is also fairly dire. What could a continued foreign presence achieve that has not already been attempted in the past two decades, with all too few worthy results?

Will a planned flurry of diplomatic activity — including talks in Turkey between Kabul representatives and the Taliban, and UN-sponsored conference of foreign ministers from Russia, China, the US, Iran, India and Pakistan tentatively scheduled for next week — achieve very much? Some commitments may be made, but what will they be worth?

The latest US plan is informally being referred to as a moonshot. But the original moonshot was backed by science. This one is riding on unsubstantiated hope. The Americans will only be postponing the inevitable if they linger. A 'dignified departure' won't be an option down the track, just as 'peace with honour' proved elusive in Vietnam.

Dawn/ANN.

NO 28857

### 100 YEARS AGO

#### OCCASIONAL NOTE

The news sent by our London Correspondent in regard to the trade depression in England shows that the position may be described without exaggeration as an "economic crisis." There is some ground for congratulation in the fact that the winter has been passed with less distress than might have been apprehended. The exorbitant price of coal is reducing many iron works to the necessity of closing, as they cannot produce under eighteen shillings sterling a ton, while Belgian iron can be imported at nine shillings. The cost of coal is kept up by the high wages which the miners have demanded, and which, apparently, cannot be maintained without bringing about a widespread paralysis of industry. There is evidence of the growth of a reasonable spirit on the part of the workers which is a hopeful sign. The fact that no industry can pay more than it can afford, either in wages or profits, without coming to ruin, is sometimes a hard lesson to learn, but it is a simple economic law which intelligent workers can understand, and which the British working-classes are now learning by experience. It has been the fashion to talk about the "means of production" as though these grew by nature instead of being, as they are, the result of individual enterprise only to be maintained in existence so long as they can be run at a profit by skilled management.

#### NEWS ITEMS

#### EUROPEAN INTERESTS IN INDIA

Madras, Mar 17  
At the annual meeting of the Madras Trade Association Mr. MacDougall, the Chairman said: We Europeans, though a small community, owing to what our race has done for the country in the past, carry an influence out of all proportion to our numbers. We ought to work hand in hand with our brethren if the new reforms are to be successful. It is impossible for us to drift along as we have drifted in the past, content to leave officials to govern the country. We have now to come out in the open and see that India becomes what she has long been called, the finest jewel in the British Crown. Referring to the labour unrest he said that at present many of the demands of labour are economically impossible.

#### USE OF INDIAN TROOPS OVERSEAS

Delhi, Mar 17  
Prior to the war Indian troops were employed overseas at the expense of His Majesty's Government, on garrison duty at Hong Kong, in North China, at Singapore, in Ceylon and the Persian Gulf. Indian troops have also been in other parts of the world. The Hon. Member must of course, be aware that there has been a very considerable enlargement of this practice during the great war, when hundreds of thousands of Indian troops fought for the Empire in practically every theatre of the war. Since the great war considerable numbers of Indian troops have been employed in Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia. These troops are being repatriated as rapidly as circumstances permit, but considerable numbers of Indian troops are still employed in the areas mentioned.

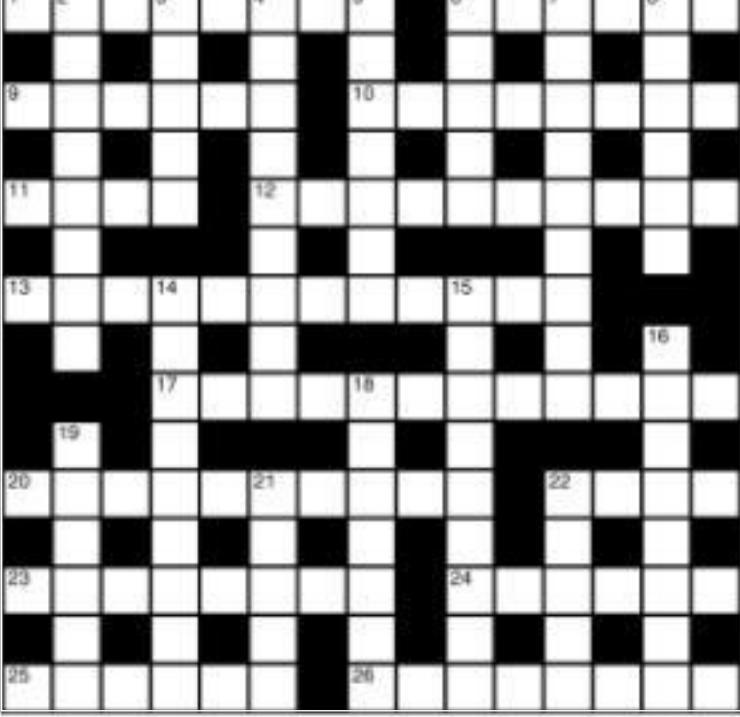
#### GERMAN DISARMAMENT BILL

A Berlin message states that the differences between German States were evident in the Reichstag today when Dr. von Simons, speaking on a Bill for prohibiting universities' and veterans' rifle sporting clubs and kindred organisations from concerning themselves in military matters with a view to the carrying out of Articles 177 and 178 of the Treaty of Versailles, said that whatever Germany thought of the application of the Sanctions she was not relieved of the obligation to disarm. He failed to understand Bavaria's exaggerated excitement as she was not concerned directly in the Sanctions. He was attempting to reach an understanding with Bavaria, but emphasised that Germany was bound hand and foot by the Treaty, and could not break the bonds by telling the Entente that they had violated it.

#### ASSISTANCE FOR UNEMPLOYED

General Croft, in the Commons, urged that all State departments should be instructed to order only British goods as long as there was unemployment in Britain. Mr. Lloyd George said that the general instructions were already enforced to give preference to products of the Empire in Government contracts. It was impossible to lay down the universal rule as certain foreign products had to be purchased, but the Government fully sympathised with the general tenor of the question. A suggestion was made that the interests of the taxpayer might be served by purchasing foreign goods. The Premier expressed the opinion that the interests of the taxpayer would be considered by seeing that the workers got employment instead of unemployment benefit.

#### CROSSWORD

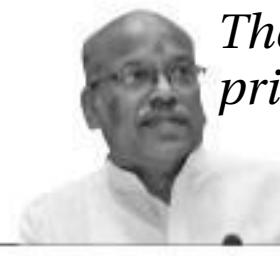


YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION									
MANNERS	ACROBAT								
I A N E	I L I A U								
SODIT	DELIVERER								
C I O	A E E D K								
AIRGUITAR	RHONE								
S R E	O L Y								
THEBARD	NODDIES								
A G	E N								
PORTEND	BOGDOWN								
H T	U L R U								
ASHEN	ONEHANDED								
S L A D	S D A I								
EVILDOERS	I AMBS								
I N A N	E N O T								
NIGELLA	DOGENDS								

ACROSS									
1	Unite about taking on doctor's scheme (8)								
6	Some dishonest leaders lie comfortably (6)								
9	Passage in melody containing new line (6)								
10	Give one better way to level playing field (8)								
11	Unsettling observer briefly admits "I'm not sure" (4)								
12	Vessel containing giant bats in saline solution (10)								
13	Eastern climatology wrongly linked to origins of elements in books? (12)								
17	Did demonstrative act let guide cast off? (12)								
20	Running through article stored in								

device (10)	briefly dividing England (7)
22	Emperor's refusal to admit head of state (4)
23	Find way of announcing scandal involving labourer? (8)
24	Refer to popular verse and contents of funny stories (6)
25	Nothing is not all bad (6)
26	Fuel talk on-line after first name comes out (8)
DOWN	
2	Narcotics Anonymous practise overcoming worry and disgust (8)
3	City-backed career related to liquidity? (5)
4	Strike over daring targets for clubs (4,5)
5	Resounding sound of vocal group

6



*There is no plan currently under consideration to bail out private telecom operators that are under financial loss*

SANJAY DHOTRE  
MINISTER OF STATE FOR COMMUNICATIONS

## THUMBNAILS

**Vehicle recall penalty:** Automobile majors will have to shell out up to Rs 1 crore as penalty in case of mandatory recall orders by the government for defects in manufacturing from 1 April 2021, ministry of road transport and highways said on Wednesday. The ministry has issued rules for mandatory recall of defective vehicles by manufacturers. "It is notified that, where minimum number of complaints for particular category of vehicle against total sales of model is received on vehicle recall portal, mandatory recall is initiated," the ministry said. The notification mentions fines ranging from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 1 crore on the basis of number of vehicles and types of vehicles.

**SBI Cards shares:** CA Rover Holdings on Wednesday divested 4.25 per cent stake in SBI Cards and Payment Services Ltd for Rs 3,943 crore through an open market transaction. According to the bulk deal data available on the BSE, four crore shares of SBI Cards were offloaded by CA Rover Holdings at an average price of Rs 985.98 apiece. This translates to a deal value of Rs 3,943.92 crore. CA Rover Holdings is a subsidiary of Carlyle Group.

**PNB subsidiary:** State-run Punjab National Bank (PNB) has set up a wholly-owned subsidiary to manage its credit card business, the bank said on Wednesday. A wholly-owned subsidiary of the bank namely PNB Cards & Services Ltd has been incorporated on 16 March 2021, by the Registrar of Companies, Delhi, it said in a regulatory filing.

**Haier customer service:** Home appliances and consumer electronics maker Haier has unveiled its new customer service initiative that is now available on WhatsApp Messenger. Through this service, Haier aims to conduct customer surveys through WhatsApp to improve the service experience, according to a Press release from the company.

**TTK Prestige:** TTK Prestige has launched Magic Dry Iron PDI 06. It is equipped with one-of-its-kind Greblon Non Sticky Coating which ensures smoother gliding on clothes, the company said. The product retails for Rs 1,495 and is available for purchase at Prestige Xclusive stores and leading dealers, it added.

**Chinese Investor's exit:** Chinese Venture Capital firm Shunwei Capital has exited Bombinate Technologies, the parent company of Koo, after existing investors and a clutch of prominent individuals bought out its minority stake, the company said in a statement on Wednesday. Shunwei Capital had held a little over nine per cent in Bombinate Technologies, according to the company.

A parliamentary panel has suggested to the department of commerce to take appropriate measures to check further deterioration in exports and crucial imports for preventing more disruptions in the supply chains.

A report by the department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce said the committee is perturbed to note the "precipitous" decline in both exports and imports in 2020 which is to the tune of around \$50 billion and around \$150 billion respectively.

The sluggish growth in exports before the occur-

# Bank NPAs likely to increase in first half of this yr: Survey

Nearly 68 per cent bankers expect NPA levels to be above 10 per cent in the first half of 2021

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI, 17 MARCH

## HIGH-RISK SECTORS

**A**sset quality of banks, which saw some improvement in the second half of 2020, is likely to worsen during the first six months of 2021, according to a survey. The findings are part of the 12th round of bankers' survey carried out by Ficci-IBA between July and December 2020.

The survey was conducted on 20 banks, including public sector, private sector and foreign banks, representing about 59 per cent of the banking industry, as classified by asset size.

In the current round of the survey, half of the respondent bankers reported a decline in NPAs during the second half of 2020. About 78 per cent of participating state-run banks have cited a reduction in NPA levels.

"However, in terms of outlook, nearly 68 per cent of respondent bankers expect the NPA levels to be above 10 per cent in the first half of 2021,"

the survey showed.

Close to 37 per cent of respondents expect NPA levels to be upwards of 12 per cent.

The Reserve Bank of India's Financial Stability Report, released in January this year, showed that gross non-performing assets (NPAs) of banks may rise to 13.5 per cent by September 2021, under the baseline stress scenario.

Some of the high NPA risk

► Some of the high NPA risk sectors identified by majority of respondent bankers include tourism and hospitality, MSME, aviation and restaurants.

► Around 55 per cent of respondents believe NPAs to rise substantially in the tourism and hospitality sector.

► Another high NPA risk sector is the MSME sector, with 84 per cent respondents expecting an increase in NPAs in this sector.

► Close to 89 per cent respondents also expect the restaurant sector to see an increase in non-performing assets.



sectors identified by majority of respondent bankers in the current round of survey include tourism and hospitality, MSME, aviation and restaurants, the survey showed.

Around 55 per cent of respondents believe NPAs to rise substantially in the tourism and hospitality sector, while another 45 per cent reported that NPAs are likely to increase moderately in this sector.

Another high NPA risk sector reported in the current round of survey is the MSME sector, with 84 per cent respondents expecting an increase in NPAs in this sector.

Close to 89 per cent respondents also expect the restaurant sector to see an increase in NPAs, though only 26 per cent expect NPAs to increase substantially in securities issued by NBFCs/ MFIs, the survey showed.

The survey revealed that there was a significant increase in the requests for one-time restructuring for MSMEs, announced by the RBI in August last year.

"An overwhelming 85 per cent of the respondent banks have cited an increase in requests for restructuring of advances as against 39 per cent in the last round," it said.

The long-term credit demand has been growing for sectors such as infrastructure, pharmaceuticals and food processing, the findings showed.

"Particularly for the pharma sector, 45 per cent of the respondents have indicated an increase in long-term loans in the current round of survey as against 29 per cent in the previous round," it showed.

Over half of the respondents indicated that they did not avail funds under on-tap targeted long-term repo operations (TLTRO) while about 33 per cent said that TLTRO funds were deployed completely in securities issued by NBFCs/ MFIs, the survey showed.

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## Govt forms expert panel for startup seed fund

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

The government has constituted an expert advisory committee which will be responsible for the overall execution and monitoring of the Startup India Seed Fund Scheme.

According to an office memorandum of the department for promotion of industry and internal trade (DPIIT), the committee will evaluate and select incubators for allotment of funds under the scheme, monitor progress and take all necessary measures for efficient utilisation of funds towards fulfilment of objectives of the scheme.

DPIIT had in February notified the operational guidelines to provide financial assistance to startups for proof of concept, prototype development, product trials, market

entry and commercialisation.

The committee, it said, would be chaired by H K Mittal from the department of science and technology.

The other representatives would include members from DPIIT, department of biotechnology, science and technology, electronics and IT, Niti Aayog, and expert members from startup ecosystem.

Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS) has been approved for the period of next four years starting from 2021-22.

It will be implemented with effect from 1 April 2021. Rs 945 crore corpus will be divided over the next four years for providing seed funding to eligible startups through eligible incubators across India. The scheme is expected to support about 3,600 startups.

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has directed to initiate liquidation process of leading integrated edible oil company KS Oils Ltd and set aside an NCLT order passed against it. Terming it "unfortunate", the appellate tribunal observed that even after the lapse of 981 days and repeated compliance by the resolution professional to initiate the liquidation process, the NCLT had not considered it.

A two-member NCLAT Bench, headed by acting chairperson Justice B L Bhat, allowed the appeal filed by the resolution professional (RP), saying fitness of situation allows to initiate liquidation of the corporate debtor KS Oils.

The appeal is allowed and the impugned order dated 1 January 2021, passed by

the adjudicating authority (NCLT), is set aside and at the same time the order for initiation for liquidation of the corporate debtor Ms. K.S.Oils Ltd is also allowed. The corporate debtor - KS Oils - shall liquidate in the manner laid down in Chapter-III of the Code," it said.

Earlier, on 1 January 2021, the Indore Bench of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) had dismissed the application filed by the RP of the debt-ridden company to initiate liquidation against KS Oils after it could not attract a buyer within the permissible time frame.

The NCLT had rejected the RP's plea, after 981 days from the date of offing, terming it as not maintainable and being infructuous.

This was challenged by RP Kuldeep Verma before the NCLAT.

According to RP, NCLT

A two-member NCLAT Bench, headed by acting chairperson Justice B L Bhat, allowed the appeal filed by the resolution professional (RP), saying fitness of situation allows to initiate liquidation of the corporate debtor KS Oils.

after commencing 31 hearings over its application to initiate liquidation from 11 May 2018, to 1 January 2021, dismissed it despite the mandatory 270 days for completing insolvency had lapsed.

The insolvency resolution process was initiated against K S Oils by NCLT on 21 July 2017, over the plea filed by Srei, a financial creditor. Srei itself had submitted a resolution plan but was rejected by a vote of 71.34 per cent.

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According to RP, NCLT

After the conclusion of 270 days on 16 April 2018 without a resolution plan approved by the CoC, the RP filed an application to consider passing of orders for liqui-

dation. However, NCLT asked RP to consider addendum III (revised plans) dated 4 May 2018 submitted by Srei and for placing before the CoC.

This was again rejected by the CoC with 76.50 per cent votes. In subsequent hearings, NCLT asked to consider five addendums filed by Srei, which were rejected by the committee of creditors.

Leading bank SBI, one of the CoC member, on behalf of joint lenders forum who collectively holds 76.53 per cent in the basic objective of resolution in a time-bound manner and if NCLT takes such a considerable time it will defeat a very purpose of the Code.

"Section 12 of the Code has already laid down a period of 330 days on the outer side, although it is directory in nature. This also suggests that the need for giving multiple opportunities to the sole resolution applicant is not warranted to defeat the very purpose of the Act," it said.

India resumed domestic passenger flights on 25 May last year after a gap of two months due to the coronavirus pandemic. Indian airlines are allowed to operate a maximum of 80 per cent of their pre-Covid-19 domestic flights.

The DGCA data mentioned that in February, IndiGo had the best on-time performance of 94 per cent at four metro airports - Bengaluru, Delhi, Hyderabad and Mumbai.

"The passenger load factor in the month of Feb 2021 has shown an increasing trend compared to previous month, primarily due to beginning of tourist season," the DGCA said.

Air India, GoAir, Vistara and AirAsia India carried 9.16 lakh, 5.81 lakh, 5.4 lakh and 5.21 lakh passengers, respec-

tively, in February, it showed.

The occupancy rate or load factor of the six major Indian airlines was between 67.9 per cent and 78.9 per cent in February, it stated.

"The occupancy rate at SpiceJet was 78.9 per cent in February, the regulator noted.

Meanwhile, the occupancy

rates for IndiGo, Vistara, GoAir, Air India and AirAsia India were 74.4 per cent, 73.7 per cent, 76.5



The statement maliciously attacked China's foreign policy, seriously interfered in China's internal affairs and tried to harm China's interests

CHINESE FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKESPERSON ZHAO LIJIAN  
PROTESTING A JOINT STATEMENT MADE BY THE USA AND JAPAN ON HUMAN RIGHTS

The Statesman  
NEW DELHI, THURSDAY 18 MARCH 2021

09

# Peace with Pakistan will give India access to central Asia: Khan

India has said the onus is on Pakistan to create an environment free of terror and hostility

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
ISLAMABAD, 17 MARCH

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday said India will be benefitted economically by having peace with his country as it will enable New Delhi to directly access the resource-rich Central Asia region through Pakistani territory.

Delivering the inaugural address at the launch of the two-day Islamabad Security Dialogue, Khan also said that his government after coming to power in 2018 did everything for better ties with India and it was for India to reciprocate.

India will have to take the first step. Unless they do so, we cannot do much, he said.



Prime Minister Imran Khan addresses the first ever session of the Islamabad Security Dialogue.

AGENCIES

India last month said that it desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan in an environment free of terror, hostility and violence.

India has said the onus is on Pakistan to create an environment free of terror and hostility. India has also told Pakistan that "talks and terror" cannot go together and has asked

Islamabad to take demonstrable steps against terror groups responsible for launching various attacks on India.

Khan discussed Pakistan's vision of comprehensive national security, built on the pillars of traditional and non-traditional security, including his vision for economic prosperity and human welfare.

Khan dwelt at length on the issue of peace in the region, including peace between Pakistan and India, saying "the unresolved Kashmir issue was the biggest hurdle between the two countries."

If India gives the Kashmiris their right under the UN (resolutions), it will be greatly beneficial for Pakistan as well as for India, he said and added, India can access Central Asia after peace. Khan said that having a direct route to the Central Asian region will economically benefit India. Central Asia is rich in oil and gas.

Central Asia generally includes five resource-rich countries like Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

## Imran Khan govt incapable of running country: Pak SC

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE  
ISLAMABAD, 16 MARCH

Chief Justice.

The apex court was informed that the decision regarding the census had not been taken by the Council of Common Interests (CCI). "Why hasn't the Council of Common Interests met in two months," Justice Isa asked, expressing his anger.

Hearing the local bodies case, a two-judge bench, headed by Justice Qazi Faez Isa and comprising Justice Sardar Tariq, expressing annoyance over the issuance of an ordinance on delimitation of constituencies by the Punjab government, referred the matter to the

"The government is incapable either of running the country or taking decisions," he added.

## Oli calls for CPN-UML's parliamentary meet as rift widens in party

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
KATHMANDU, 17 MARCH

Nepal Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli has called for a parliamentary party meeting of the ruling CPN-UML on Thursday as the rift between the two warring factions of the party widened with the rival group convening the national gathering of cadres despite warning of disciplinary action against those attending it, according to media reports.

The meeting will take place at Baluwatar, the official residence of the Prime Minister, who is also the Chairperson of the party, Bishal Bhattachari, party's chief whip, was quoted as saying by myRepubli-



ca newspaper.

"All the party leaders who won elections with the symbol Sun' have been invited to the meeting," Bhattachari said.

The call for the meeting came as the Communist Party of Nepal-UML's rival faction led by Madhav Kumar Nepal and Jhala Nath Khanal went ahead with the two-day national gathering of the party's leaders and cadres that began

on Wednesday. Yogesh Bhattachari, a key leader belonging to the rival faction, said that at least 2,000 leaders and cadres of the party are expected to join in the national gathering being organised at the Sanepa-based Heritage Garden in Lalitpur, the report said.

Party's senior leader Madhav Nepal is expected to present a political report on the widening rift in the party and his faction's strategy for the coming days, it said.

The Oli-led faction had threatened to take disciplinary action against those who will attend the event organised by the Nepal-Khanal faction on Wednesday and Thursday.

## Protesters in Myanmar fight back amidst violent crackdown

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
YANGON, 17 MARCH



Protesters in Myanmar fired slingshots and threw Molotov cocktails toward lines of security forces after apparently coming under fire Wednesday, a rare incidence of anti-coup demonstrators fighting back against a relentlessly violent crackdown.

The growing resistance comes after one organization said that more than 200 people have been killed since the 1 February takeover.

At least two people were shot dead during protests Wednesday in northwestern Myanmar, according to press and social media posts that included photos of the victims.

Protests against the coup

carry on in the face of the violence, including lining up placards as stand-ins for themselves or coconuts painted with the words Spring Revolution.

But on Wednesday, after security forces apparently shot at them in the country's largest city of Yangon, demonstrators initially fled but then crept back to hunker down behind sandbag barricades.

Some hurled firebombs, while others took aim with slingshots though the forces were too far away to be hit. Pope Francis appealed for an end to the bloodshed on Wednesday.

Demonstrators have come up with innovative ways to

## ECP issues notice to PTI on foreign funding

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE  
ISLAMABAD, 17 MARCH

to the documents.

The lawyer argued that access to PTI documents is a right of the petitioner in light of Article 5(4) of the Political Parties Order, 2002 and Section 203(5) of the Election Act, 2017, Geo tv reported.

By keeping the documents secret, the ECP scrutiny committee is violating the terms of reference of scrutiny that clearly demands scrutiny in the presence of both parties, the petitioner's lawyer said.

This follows a complaint by petitioner Akbar S. Babar against the scrutiny committee's decision to keep PTI documents secret.

The decision was taken by a three-member bench headed by ECP member from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa retired Justice Ishaq Qaiser after hearing Babar's complaint on Tuesday, Dawn reported.

Babar's lawyer, Ahmad Hassan Shah, challenged the scrutiny committee's decision and invoked the Right to Information Act to seek access

to the documents. Shah regretted that other than writing a letter to the SBP to seek PTI accounts, there has been no investigation into the credible evidence provided regarding illegal funding from across the globe.

## US sanctions 24 Chinese, Hong Kong officials

HONG KONG, 17 MARCH

The United States sanctioned an additional 24 Chinese and Hong Kong officials over Beijing's ongoing crackdown on political freedoms in the semi-autonomous city, including a decision to overhaul Hong Kong's electoral system.

The sanctions announced Tuesday in Washington were introduced under the Hong Kong Autonomy Act and list people who are deemed to contribute to the failure of China in meeting its obligations under Hong Kong's mini-constitution.

Last June, Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law on the city following months of anti-government protests, and Hong Kong authorities have arrested most of the prominent pro-democracy supporters and outspoken critics.

Among the 24 officials sanctioned by the US are Wang Chen, a member of the Chinese Communist Party's elite 25-member Politburo, as well as Tam Yiu-chung, the Hong Kong delegate to the Chinese parliament's standing committee, which drafted the national security law.

Several officers from Hong Kong's National Security Division were also sanctioned, including Li Kwai-wah, a senior superintendent, as well as Edwina Lau, a deputy commissioner of the Hong Kong police force and the head of the NSD.

## Bangladesh hospital fire leaves three Covid patients dead

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE  
DHAKA, 17 MARCH

A major fire on Wednesday morning in Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) here has left three Covid-19 patients dead, said DMCH Director Nazmul Haque.

Haque told IANS that the victims were being treated at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of the hospital, when the fire broke out.

"Rest of the 11 patients of the ICU unit-2, dedicated to Covid-19 patients, have also been evacuated from the ICU following the fire outbreak. They were later shifted to the burn unit and ICU of the old

building," Haque added. The fire broke out at around 8 a.m., causing dense smoke inside the ICU unit-2 of DMCH, the state owned biggest hospital of the country. Three patients who were in life support in ICU, died during shifting to CCU of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital's.

The fire is said to have apparently exploded from a machine besides bed 12 of the ICU, but the fire officials are yet to ascertain the cause behind the blaze. Three units of firefighters doused the fire at around 8.55 a.m., said Quamrul Hasan, Duty Officer at Fire Service.

It has been more than two years since nuclear talks stalled, and some experts say

## Top US officials weigh North Korea options in talks in Seoul

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SEOUL, 17 MARCH

Fresh off a stop in Tokyo, President Joe Biden's top diplomat and defense chief travelled to South Korea on Wednesday, a day after North Korea made sure it had their attention by warning the United States to refrain from causing a stink amid deadlocked nuclear negotiations.

How to get North Korea to return to talks will be a major focus when Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin meet South Korean officials this week.

It has been more than two years since nuclear talks stalled, and some experts say

the United States and its allies should settle for a deal that would freeze North Korea's nuclear program in return for relaxing sanctions and possibly leave Pyongyang's already manufactured nuclear weapons in place.

A plane carrying Austin

landed at a US air base near Seoul. Blinken was to arrive later Wednesday. In Seoul, they will meet their South Korean counterparts for separate talks Wednesday and a joint two plus two meeting Thursday, the first such contact between the two coun-

tries in five years.

South Korea is the second leg of their regional tour aimed at boosting America's Asian alliances to better deal with growing challenges from China and North Korea. While in Tokyo on Tuesday, they joined forces with Japanese officials to criticise China's coercion and aggression and reaffirm their commitment to ridding North Korea of all its nuclear bombs.

US-led diplomacy on that last topic has been in limbo since a February 2019 summit between President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un collapsed over disputes on US-led sanctions. Kim has since threatened to enlarge his nuclear

arsenal in protest of what he called US hostility.

On Tuesday, Kim's sister and a senior official in her own right, Kim Yo Jong, slammed the United States over its ongoing regular military drills with South Korea, which North Korea sees as an invasion rehearsal. "We take this opportunity to warn the new US administration," Kim Yo Jong said. If it wants to sleep in peace for coming four years, it had better refrain from causing a stink at its first step. Some experts say Kim Yo Jong's statement is a pressure tactic and that Pyongyang may try to further raise animosities with weapons tests to boost its leverage in future negotiations with Washington.

### LEISURE

#### 10 MINUTE CROSSWORD



**CROSS**  
1 Gasp (4)  
4 Flexible pipe (4)  
8 Cereal plant (6)  
9 Wanness (6)  
10 Glowing with heat (12)  
12 Wind in loops (4)  
13 Wild goat (4)  
17 Recollection (12)  
19 Concluding part (6)  
20 Great flood (6)  
22 Repose (4)  
23 Cipher (4)

**DOWN**  
2 The whole of (3)  
3 Tiresome (6)  
4 Occur (6)  
5 Choice (9)  
6 Gambling place (6)  
7 Urban area (4)  
11 Foster the growth of (9)  
14 Come out (6)  
15 Assimilate (6)  
16 Sour (6)  
18 Way out (4)  
21 Cover (3)

**SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD**

ACROSS  
16 Enigma, 18 Reserves, 19 El (Fretelle), 22 Spanner, 23 Opera, 24 Dry, 25 Schism, 28 New Year's  
DOWN  
2 Ounce, 3 Gale, 13 Currency, 15 Discard, 17 Hearts, 20 Ideas, 21 Cash.  
By arrangement with The Independent  
Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required

paper . thestatesman.com

#### BEETLE BAILEY/Mort Walker



#### RED EYE/Bill Yates & Mel Casson



#### DADDY DAZE/John Kovaleski



#### NEED TO KNOW

##### HOSPITALS

2258622, 22585007

##### RAILWAY INQUIRY

General Inquiry 139

##### ROADWAYS INQUIRY

Toll Free Nos. 1800125151

##### FLIGHT INQUIRY

AIR INDIA Flight Inquiry and Reservation 18001801407

##### SCRABBLE BRAND

23868836, 238685181

##### YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION BY JUDD

24 83 95 51 253

##### PAIR SCORE 165-175

FOUR RACK TOTAL TIME LIMIT: 20 MIN

##### JUDD'S TOTAL

253

##### SCRABBLE®

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*The status of democracy depends fundamentally on the empowerment of women, whose exclusion from decision-making is a marker of a flawed democracy*

US VICE PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS

DURING HER FIRST ADDRESS TO THE UNITED NATIONS AS THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE USA.

## WEATHER

CITY	MAX(°C)	MIN(°C)
SINGAPORE	29	26 R
HONG KONG	33	29 H
TOKYO	09	07 R
LONDON	09	06 H
DUBAI	25	30 S
SAN FRANCISCO	07	05 H
NEW YORK	05	03 H
MOSCOW	01	-04 H

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

## THUMBNAILS



Philadelphia Phillies fan Tony Pernicale arrives at BayCare Park for a spring training baseball game in Clearwater.

**Iran fire festival :** Mishaps during an annual fire festival in Iran have left at least 10 people dead and hundreds more injured around the country, state TV reported Wednesday. Many of the deaths and injuries occurred during the production and preparation of firecrackers, according to reports.

**Migrants hospitalized:** Emergency services in Spain's Canary Islands said that 10 people suffering from hypothermia have been hospitalized after a migrant boat was rescued. A total of 52 sub-Saharan migrants were found onboard the vessel in Gran Canaria island on Tuesday.

**Virtual St Patrick's Day:** A largely virtual St. Patrick's Day is planned for New York City on Wednesday, one year after the annual parade celebrating Irish heritage became one of the city's first coronavirus casualties.

**NASA: Mars may be hiding most of its missing' water underground**

WASHINGTON, 17 MARCH

Vast amounts of ancient water may have been trapped beneath the surface of Mars, according to a NASA-funded study which challenges the current theory that the Red Planet's water escaped into space.

Evidence found on the surface of Mars suggests that abundant water flowed across Mars billions of years ago, forming pools, lakes, and deep oceans, and where did all that water go has been a matter of investigation.

The new study, published in the journal *Science*, shows that a significant portion of Mars' water -- between 30 and 99 percent -- is trapped within minerals in the planet's crust.

The researchers from California Institute of Technology and NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) found that around four billion years ago, Mars was home to enough water to have covered the whole planet in an ocean about 100 to 1,500 metres deep. However, a billion years later the planet was as dry as it is today. Previously, scientists seeking to explain what happened to the flowing water on Mars had suggested that it escaped into space due to Mars' low gravity.

Though some water did indeed leave Mars this way, it now appears that such an escape cannot account for most of the water loss, the researchers said.

The study proposes that a combination of two mechanisms -- the trapping of water in minerals in the planet's crust and the loss of water to the atmosphere -- can explain the observed deuterium-to-hydrogen signal within the Martian atmosphere. Mars, however, is mostly tectonically inactive, and so the "drying" of the surface, once it occurs, is permanent, according to the researchers.

# 8 dead in Atlanta massage parlour shootings

Police have detained a 21-year-old man; killing raises fears of another hate crime against Asian Americans as many victims are of Asian descent

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
ATLANTA, 17 MARCH

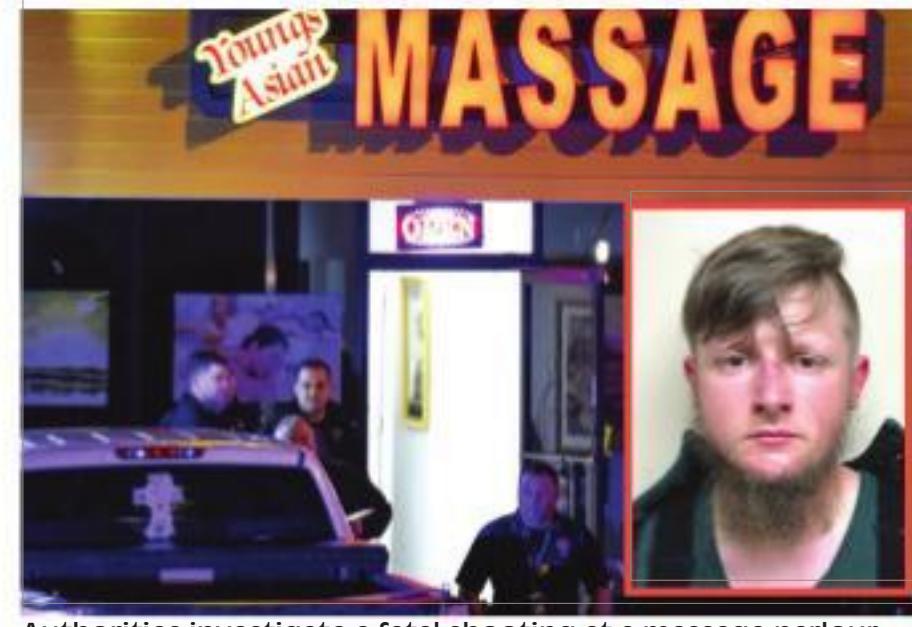
A series of shootings over nearly an hour at three Atlanta-area massage parlours left eight people dead and raised fears that the attack was yet another hate crime against Asian Americans.

Police arrested a 21-year-old Georgia man and said the motive wasn't immediately known, though many of the victims were women of Asian descent.

The attacks began Tuesday evening, when five people were shot at Youngs Asian Massage Parlor in Acworth, about 50 kilometers north of Atlanta. Cherokee County Sheriff's Office spokesman Capt. Jay Baker said. Two people died at the scene, and three were taken to a hospital where two died, Baker said.

About an hour later, police responding to a call about a robbery found three women dead from apparent gunshot wounds at Gold Spa near Atlanta's Buckhead area, where tattoo parlors and strip clubs are just blocks away from mansions and skyscrapers in one of the last ungentrified holdouts in that part of the city. While there, the officers learned of a call reporting shots fired at another spa across the street, Aromatherapy Spa, and found another woman apparently shot dead.

"It appears that they may



Authorities investigate a fatal shooting at a massage parlour, late Tuesday, in Acworth, Ga. Officials say 21-year-old Robert Aaron Long (inset), of Woodstock, Georgia, has been captured hours after multiple people were killed in shootings at three Atlanta-area massage parlors.

be Asian," Atlanta Police Chief Rodney Bryant said.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said President Joe Biden has been briefed on the "horrible shootings" and administration officials have been in contact with the mayor's office and the FBI. Surveillance video recorded a man pulling up to the Acworth business about 10 minutes before the attack there, authorities said. The same car was spotted outside the Atlanta businesses. A manhunt was launched, and Robert Aaron Long, of Woodstock, was taken into custody in Crisp County, about 240 kilometers south of Atlanta, Baker said.

Video evidence "suggests it is extremely likely our suspect is the same as Cherokee

County's, who is in custody," Atlanta police said in a statement. Little is known about Long, and authorities haven't specified charges.

South Korea's Foreign Ministry said in statement Wednesday that its diplomats in Atlanta have confirmed with police that four of the victims who died were women of Korean descent. The ministry said its Consulate General in Atlanta is trying to confirm the nationality of the women.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, mentioned the killings during an opening statement.

"We are horrified by this violence which has no place in America or anywhere," he said, noting that four of the women were believed to be of

Korean descent. The killings came amid a recent wave of attacks against Asian Americans that coincided with the spread of the coronavirus across the United States.

"Our entire family is praying for the victims of these horrific acts of violence," Gov. Brian Kemp said Tuesday evening on Twitter. FBI spokesman Kevin Rowson said the agency was assisting Atlanta and Cherokee County authorities in the investigation.

Crisp County Sheriff Billy Hancock said in a video posted on Facebook that his deputies and state troopers were notified Tuesday night that a murder suspect out of north Georgia was headed toward their county. Deputies and troopers set up along the interstate and "made contact with the suspect," he said.

Several Hollywood celebrities, including Steven Yeun, Mindy Kaling, Simu Liu, and Lulu Wang, have condemned the shootings in two massage parlours in Atlanta and one in the suburbs, left eight people dead, many of them women of Asian descent. Yeun, who this week became the first Asian American to be nominated for a best actor Oscar for his performance in "Minari", shared a message from Asians for Mental Health collective on his Instagram Stories.

The post appealed to fellow community members to "turn off your phones and turn inward toward those you love."

White supremacist propaganda reached alarming levels across the U.S. in 2020, according to a new report that the Anti-Defamation League provided to The Associated Press.

There were 5,125 cases of racist, anti-Semitic, anti-LGBTQ and other hateful messages spread through physical flyers, stickers, banners and posters, according to Wednesday's report. That's nearly double the 2,724 instances reported in 2019.

Online propaganda is much harder to quantify, and it's likely those cases reached into the millions, the anti-hate organization said.

The ADL, which was founded more than a century ago, said that last year marked the highest level of white supremacist propaganda seen in at least a decade. Its report comes as federal authorities investigate and prosecute those who stormed the U.S. Capitol in January, some of whom are accused of having ties to or expressing support for hate groups and antigovernment militias. As we try to understand

cause of their pain, grievances or loss," Picciolini told the AP.

"The current uncertainty caused by the pandemic, job loss, a heated election, protest over extrajudicial police killings of Black Americans, and a national reckoning sparked by our country's long tradition of racism has created a perfect storm in which to recruit Americans who are fearful of change and progress." Propaganda, often distributed with the intention of garnering media and online attention, helps white supremacists normalize their messaging and bolster recruitment efforts, the ADL said in its report. Language used in the propaganda is frequently veiled with a patriotic slant, making it seem benign to an untrained eye.

But some flyers, stickers and posters are explicitly racist and anti-Semitic. One piece of propaganda disseminated by the New Jersey European Heritage Association included the words "Black Lives Matter," a derisive reference to the Black Lives Matter movement, along with cherry-picked crime statistics about attacks on white victims by Black assailants.

## White supremacist propaganda surged in 2020, report says

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
NEW YORK, 17 MARCH

**The propaganda appeared in every state except Hawaii. The highest levels were seen in Texas, Washington, California, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, Virginia and Pennsylvania, according to the report.**

and put in perspective the past four years, we will always have these bookends of Charlottesville and Capitol Hill," group CEO Jonathan Greenblatt said.

"The reality is there's a lot of things that happened in between those moments that set the stage," he said.

Christian Picciolini, a former far-right extremist who founded the deradicalization group Free Radicals Project, said the surge in propaganda tracks with white supremacist and extremist recruiters seeing crises as periods of opportunity.

"They use the uncertainty and fear caused by crisis to win over new recruits to their 'us vs. them' narrative, painting the 'other' as the

## US: Putin approved operations to help Trump against Biden



ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON, 17 MARCH

Russian President Vladimir Putin authorised influence operations to help Donald Trump in last November's presidential election, according to a declassified intelligence assessment that found broad efforts by the Kremlin and Iran to shape the outcome of the race but ultimately no evidence that any foreign actor changed votes or otherwise disrupted the voting process.

The report released Tuesday from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence represents the most detailed assessment of the array of foreign threats to the 2020 election.

These included efforts by Iran to undermine confidence in the vote and harm Trump's reelection prospects as well as Moscow operations that relied on Trump's allies to smear Joe Biden, the eventual winner.

Nine jurors had been seated through Tuesday, including five who are white, one who is multiracial, two who are Black and one who is Hispanic.

The jurors include six men and three women and range in age from their 20s to their 50s. Fourteen people, including two alternates, are needed.

Chauvin is charged with murder and manslaughter in the May 25 death of Floyd Floyd's death, set off weeks of sometimes violent protests across the country and led to a national reckoning on racial justice.

The report is the latest official affirmation of the integrity of the election, even as Trump supporters continue to make false claims of interference, from foreign or domestic actors, and refuse to accept Biden's victory.

Multiple courts and even Trump's own Justice Department refuted claims of wide-

spread fraud. The document makes clear that even while Trump has cried foul about the legitimacy of the election, intelligence officials believe Russia sought to influence people close to Trump as a way to tip the election in his favour.

The report, rejected by Russia as unsubstantiated, wades into the politically charged task of ferreting out which foreign adversaries supported which candidates during the 2020 election, an issue that dominated headlines last year.

Trump, whose 2016 campaign benefited from hacking by Russian intelligence officers and a covert social media effort, seized on an intelligence assessment from August that said China preferred a Biden presidency - even though the same assessment also said Russia was working to boost Trump's own candidacy by discrediting Biden.

Tuesday's report, however, says China ultimately did not interfere on either side and considered but did not deploy" influence operations intended to affect the outcome. U.S. officials say they believe Beijing prioritised a stable relationship with the U.S. and did not consider either election outcome as advantageous enough for it to risk the blowback that would ensue if it got caught with interfering.

### DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE



A Syrian boy who sells flowers on the street, watches protesters burn tires to block a main road during a protest against the increase in prices of consumer goods and the crash of the local currency, in Beirut. ■ AP

## Boris Johnson to get AstraZeneca jab



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
LONDON, 17 MARCH

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Wednesday indicated that the best safety endorsement he can think of for the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine is to confirm that he would be receiving the jab as he now qualifies under an expanded vaccination drive.

As the National Health Service (NHS) marked the 100th day of its vaccination programme by expanding it to over 50s, the 56-year-old UK PM used the timing to reiterate the safety message after some countries suspended the use of the Oxford/AstraZeneca jabs amid some concerns.

Earlier, Health Secretary Matt Hancock had joined a chorus of UK ministerial and

expert voices to reiterate the safety of the AstraZeneca vaccines against Covid. We keep the effects of these vaccines under review all the time and we know that the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine is saving lives in the UK right now so if you get the call, get the jab," said Hancock.

Meanwhile, the UK variant of the novel coronavirus spread rapidly in care homes in England in a span of two weeks between November and December last year, reflecting its spread across the country, according to a new study which calls for advanced surveillance systems to monitor the evolving virus.

WHO official calls blood

clots 'very rare': A top World Health Organisation expert on vaccines says people should feel reassured that even if health authorities turn up a link between blood clots and the AstraZeneca vaccine, such cases are very rare.

Dr Kate O'Brien, who heads WHO's department of immunizations and vaccines, said the UN health agency and the European Medicines Agency are trying to investigate the possibility of a link between blood clots and the AstraZeneca shots.

The potential side effect has prompted some countries - mostly in Europe - to temporarily suspend use of the AstraZeneca vaccine.

WHO official calls blood

clots 'very rare': A top World Health Organisation expert on vaccines says people should feel reassured that even if health authorities turn up a link between blood clots and the AstraZeneca vaccine, such cases are very rare.

It has put President Joe Biden in a difficult spot, blasted by Republicans for what they view as encouragement to illegal border crossers and by some Democrats over the prolonged detention of minors. It's also a challenge to his effort to overhaul the broader Trump policies that sought to curtail both legal and illegal immigration.

I can say quite clearly: Don't come over, Biden said in an interview with ABC News that aired Wednesday.

The number of migrants attempting to cross the bor-

der is at the highest level since March 2019, with Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas warning that it is on pace to hit a 20-year peak.

The situation at the southwest border is difficult, Mayorkas conceded Tuesday in his most extensive remarks to date on the subject. We are working around the clock to manage it and we will continue to do so. That is our job.

The number of children crossing themselves, mostly from Central America, appears to be surging in particular in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. The Border Patrol took in 280 there alone on Monday.

The total of 561 unaccompa-

nioned minors from Mon-

day offers a snapshot of how quickly conditions have changed along the border. That was up 60% from the daily average in February, one of the officials said. In May 2019, during the last surge, the one-day peak was 370 teens and children. Children and teens crossing by themselves rose 60% from this January to more than 9,400 in February, according to the most recent statistics released publicly by US Customs and Border Protection.

The Health and Human Services Department plans to open shelter facilities at Mof-

fett Federal Airfield near San Francisco and in Pecos, Texas, to handle the flow. It is also looking to expand a facility in Donna, Texas, in the Rio Grande Valley, to hold 2,000.

Also, the Dallas Convention

Centre is scheduled to begin holding children as early as

Wednesday with plans to accommodate up to 3,000.

Another makeshift holding

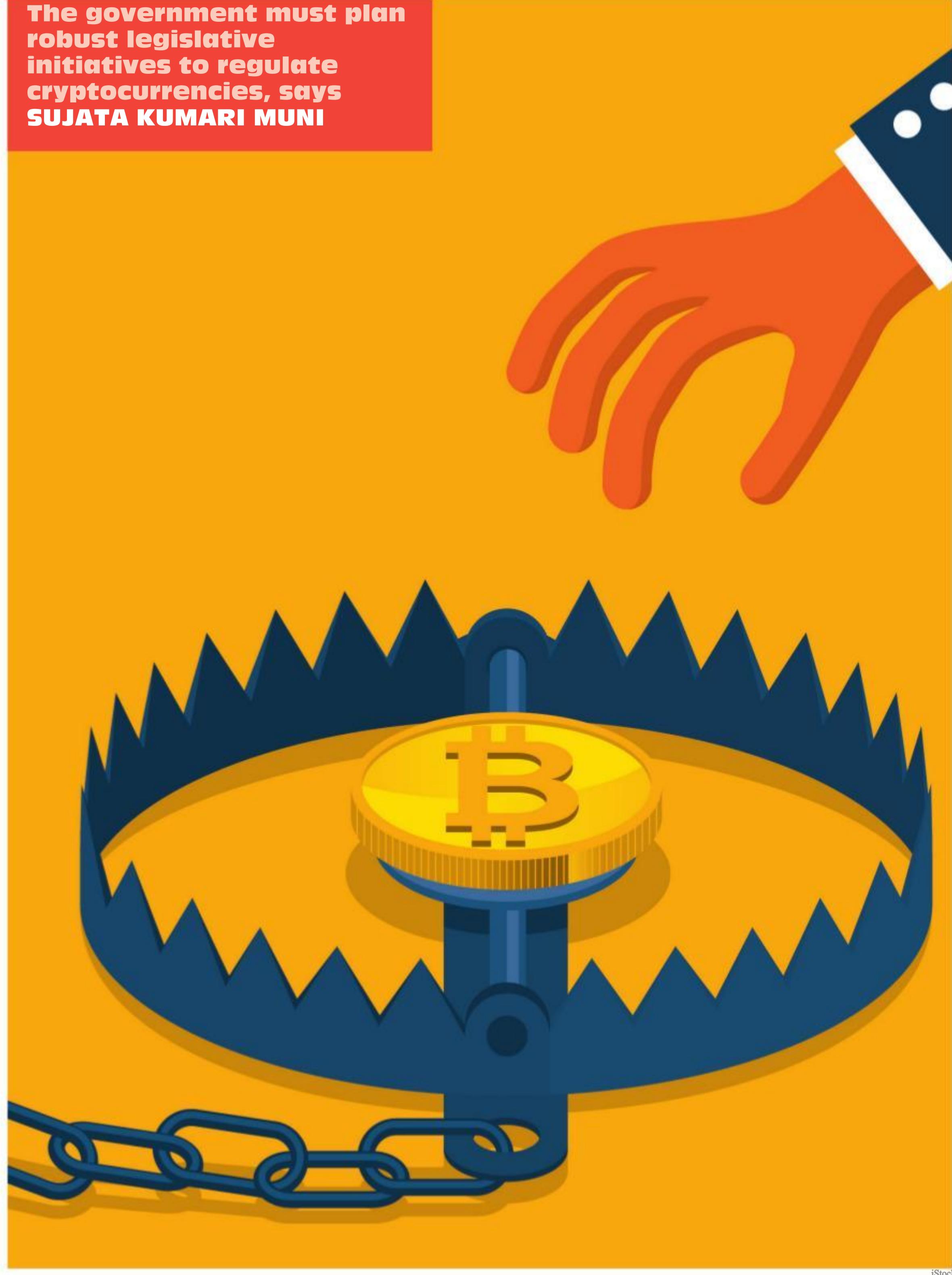
centre in Midland, Texas, that opened last weekend for 700

children had 485 on Monday.

Some of the increase in adults is due to people

# Regulation better than ban

**The government must plan robust legislative initiatives to regulate cryptocurrencies, says SUJATA KUMARI MUNI**



Cryptocurrency is a digital financial asset, for which ownership and transfer of ownership are guaranteed not by a bank or a trusted third party but by a cryptographic decentralised technology known as blockchain. It uses encryption techniques to generate, exchange and transfer the units of currency. Such fund transfers are not verified by any bank or government authority. These digital currencies are not considered to be legal tender even though they are capable of being used as a medium of exchange akin to money. Due to their anonymity i.e., lack of a traditional government or bank-backed system to regulate use, cryptocurrencies create opportunities for illegal activities like money laundering, terror funding and so on.

The bankruptcy of large investment banks during the subprime crisis (2008) led to the loss of public confidence in government currency. Against this backdrop, the idea of virtual currency emerged. In 2009, the first cryptocurrency i.e., Bitcoin was executed between the Bitcoin founder(s) 'Satoshi Nakamoto' and cryptographer Hal Finney. This is one of the most extensively used cryptocurrency. There are also other cryptocurrencies like Litecoin, Ethereum and Ripple.

The expansive growth of cryptocurrency is primarily attributable to the fact that over the last few years it has become ubiquitous, prompting more national and regional authorities to grapple with its regulation. Cryptocurrency is legal in Canada, Mexico, United States, Japan, Germany, South Africa, etc., whereas it is illegal in Algeria, Macedonia, Nepal, etc. In India, there is no regulation for allowing or prohibiting the buying or selling of cryptocurrencies. Even terms like crypto asset or cryptocurrency are not clearly and specifically defined under any law prevalent in India. Hence, they fall outside the direct regulatory ambit of RBI or the Securities and Exchange Board of India.

Since 2013, warnings have been issued by the RBI regarding the potential risks of using cryptocurrency as a means of legal payment due to its volatile nature and the fact that most of the crypto exchanges are unregulated rendering unavailability of legal recourse to citizens in the event of loss or fraud. Considering the legal, regulatory, operational and other security related risks associated with these currencies, the RBI in 2018, issued a circular directing banks and financial institutions regulated by RBI (i) not to deal in virtual currencies nor to provide services for facilitating any person or entity in dealing with or settling virtual currencies and (ii) to exit the relationship with such persons or entities, if they were already providing such services to them. Subsequently, in 2019, the Inter-ministerial Committee had released a report recommending an outright ban on cryptocurrencies along with criminal penalties.

The constitutional validity of the said RBI circular was challenged before the Supreme Court. The Apex Court through its judgement in *Internet and Mobile Association of India vs. Reserve Bank of India /WPC(C) No. 373/2018* struck down the circular, lifting RBI's restrictions on crypto exchanges stating that its regulatory action was 'disproportionate'. Hence, banks are no longer prohibited from facilitating virtual currency transactions subject to existing due diligence norms. The Apex Court took the view that since there is no legislation prohibiting the use of virtual currencies, the

complete ban does curtail the right to trade, sell and invest in crypto currencies which violates Article 19(1)(g) of the Constitution.

The use of cryptocurrency as a means of payment is alien to Indian laws. The misconception that the operation of virtual currencies is difficult to regulate needs to be corrected and requires wider awareness. Technology that prompts efficient and flexible ways of working, communicating and transacting business is essential for survival in a global economy. In addition to the risks attached to the use of cryptocurrencies, it offers innumerable advantages such as lower transaction fees in comparison to credit cards and other payment gateways like Paytm, PayPal, etc.; easy access to international trade by removing trade barriers since it is easy to accept payments in different currencies; offers faster way to transfer funds and provides protection from inflation since it is more liquid in comparison to other modes of payment. These benefits show that a technology-driven shift to a new era advances scientific, social and economic progress even though it has some inevitable and inherent risks attached to it.

As cryptocurrency is in its nascent stage, the risks appear to outweigh the benefits. Cryptocurrency-friendly regulations are required to be put in place. Simply inducing penalties to counter the world view can produce counterintuitive results. Legislators and the Central Bank need to consider the relative effects of their actions on the economy. The aversive consequence of an absolute ban on crypto currency will pave the way for illicit trade as crypto-assets are available to anyone using the internet without the need for any intermediary. Disruptive technological innovation requires sophisticated solutions i.e., the consequent pain and hardship caused to the economy by such innovation can be eased by levying fees and taxes. Such new innovations can be allowed more time to react and the regulators are required to subserve public interest through emergent intervention as and when required. Further, such a ban will also result in loss of tax revenue on sale of crypto-assets i.e., both direct tax and GST. Hence it is imperative that legal remedies be devised to regulate the disruption caused by the technological innovation rather than its prohibition.

The crypto exchanges should not be reflexively dismissed merely because they trade in currency driven by technological evolution sans any authorisation by the RBI. Conversely the Government can roll out an official government-owned virtual currency managed by RBI or any other approved crypto exchange(s) and prescribe crypto exchange(s) where the currency can be traded. Such introduction would warrant amendments in some of the related statutes like Information Technology Act, 2000; the RBI Act, 1934; the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act, 1956; the Companies Act, 2013; the Securities and Exchange Board of India Act, 1992; the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999; the Consumer Protection Act, 1986; various Tax laws, etc. It is the mundane duty of the appropriate government to avoid hampering technological progress by shying away from framing robust regulation to guard the disruptive effects of new technological innovation.

The writer is an advocate practising in the Supreme Court of India.

## Criminal justice and systemic rot

**Misuse of Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code and Section 41 of the Criminal Procedure Code are central to the abuse of due process in the arrest of a standup comedian, argues SUNIL GARODIA**



When standup comedian Munawar Faruqui was arrested, moved a bail application at four levels and was finally released after much drama, the shortcomings of the Indian police and judicial system were on

full display. The case showed how the lower judiciary and the High Courts do not care about Supreme Court guidelines and the spirit of the law. It also showed how policemen fall head over heels to carry out the orders of their political masters while jail superin-

tendents choose to ignore (on the plea that they have not received a certified copy of the order, even in this digital age) Supreme Court orders and refuse to release undertrials even after the apex court grants them bail. In short, the case showed how the entire system is rot-

ting and how deep the rot is.

Faruqui was finally released a full 36 hours after the Supreme Court granted him bail and that too when the Court called the Indore Central Jail to inform the authorities there that they could read the order on the Supreme Court website, a simple thing that the jail superintendent should have done by himself.

Let us begin at the beginning. Munawar Faruqui and his "co-conspirators" in humour (Nalin Yadav, Edwin Anthony, Prakhar Vyas, Priyam Vyas and Sadakat Khan) should not have been arrested in the first place. They committed no crime that required their immediate incarceration. In fact, Faruqui's arrest was a howler as he did not even perform at the show where he is alleged to have cracked "jokes" to insult Hindu Gods.

Section 295A IPC, under which they were arrested, is a cognizable offence, which means that the police can register an FIR on a complaint lodged by any one and start an investigation even without the permission of a court. Since the offence is also non-bailable (which means bail cannot be granted at the police station level and the accused has to apply before a magistrate who may or may not grant bail) and non-compoundable, the police can invoke Section 41 of the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973 (CrPC) and arrest any accused person without a warrant.

But the Supreme Court has repeatedly warned police officers (more clearly in the Arnes Kumar vs State of Bihar judgment in 2014) not to make unnecessary arrests even in

cognizable and non-bailable cases if the punishment for the crime was less than seven years in jail. Under Sec 295A, if the crime is proved, the accused can only be sentenced to three years in jail. But police officers ignore this warning to be in the good books of their political masters.

What the Supreme Court said in Arnes Kumar was damning and quite telling in the instant case. The court said "we believe that no arrest should be made only because the offence is non-bailable and cognizable and therefore, lawful for the police officers to do so. The existence of the power to arrest is one thing, the justification for the exercise of it is quite another. Apart from power to arrest, the police officers must be able to justify the reasons thereof. No arrest can be made in a routine manner on a mere allegation of commission of an offence made against a person."

The Court further said that "Arrest brings humiliation, curtails freedom and casts scars forever. Law makers know it so also the police. There is a battle between the law makers and the police and it seems that police has not learnt its lesson; the lesson implicit and embodied in the CrPC. It has not

come out of its colonial image despite six decades of Independence, it is largely considered as a tool of harassment, oppression and surely not considered a friend of public. The need for caution in exercising the drastic power of arrest has been emphasized time and again by Courts but has not yielded desired result. Power to arrest greatly contributes to its arrogance so also the failure of the Magistracy to check it. Not only this, the power of arrest is one of the lucrative sources of police corruption. The attitude to arrest first and then proceed with the rest is despicable. It has become a handy tool to the police officers who lack sensitivity or act with oblique motive."

Yet, what happened next was even more worrying. As a matter of 'routine',

a magistrate and the sessions court both denied bail to them, despite the Arnes Kumar judgment (referred to above) having warned them against denying bail to such accused. The Madhya Pradesh High Court, while denying bail, said that the accused had prima facie violated Sec 295A of the IPC "under the garb of standup comedy". What did the judge mean by "garb of standup comedy"? Standup comedy is a profession where professional artists use jokes and satire, among other acts, to perform before a paid, live audience, although it is now being aired over all mediums such as radio, television and internet.

The judge perhaps was not aware of the Supreme Court order in Ministry of I&B, Government of India versus Cricket Association of Bengal where the apex court had widened the scope of the fundamental right of speech and expression by saying that "even otherwise, the viewers and persons interested in sports by way of education, information, record and entertainment have a right to such information, knowledge and entertainment." In the instant case, we can change sports to standup comedy.

Taken together, Section 295A of the IPC and Section 41 of the CrPC are intimidating and draconian tools in the hands of a pliant police force that thinks nothing of harassing ordinary citizens at the behest of their political masters. But the way magistrates in lower courts and even judges in High Courts ignore the directives of the Supreme Court is baffling. If the Supreme Court notice to the MP government on Faruqui's plea challenging the FIR against him leads to a judicial intervention in the misuse of the two sections then well and good. Otherwise, the Supreme Court must come out with water-tight guidelines to prevent the police from misusing them.

The writer is Editor-in-chief, www.indiacommentary.com

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

## JAIL TERM

Croatia's Supreme Court has confirmed a prison sentence for Dinamo Zagreb coach Zoran Mamic (*in photo, left*) for fraud, ahead of the club's Europa League tie with Tottenham Hotspur on Thursday, the Balkan nation's state television said. Mamic stepped down immediately.

## THUMBNAILS

**Torch relay:** Olympic organisers on Tuesday called on roadside spectators at the torch relay to wear mandatory masks and practise social distancing to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Relay staff must test negative for the coronavirus before being sent.

**Euro plan:** The postponed Euro 2020 will still take place in 12 cities across the continent despite the Covid-19 pandemic. A member of European football's governing body, the Uefa executive committee, said the organisational goal was to stick with the 12-city plan.

**Neymar out:** Paris St Germain was once again to be without the injured Neymar when facing Lille in the French Cup but manager Mauricio Pochettino hoped to have Angel Di Maria and Marquinhos available after their homes had been robbed last weekend.

**'God' returns:** Zlatan Ibrahimovic returned to the national team after nearly five years as Sweden announced the squad on Tuesday ahead of the Fifa 2022 World Cup qualifiers.

The 39-year-old confirmed his return on Twitter and wrote "The return of the God."

**Wenger's tip:** Arsene Wenger, Fifa's chief of global development, says the governing body should consider holding the World Cup and Euros every two years and that a review of the world calendar will consider compressed qualifiers and enforced breaks for players.

**Woods recovering:** Tiger Woods said on Tuesday he was back home and continuing his recovery after suffering severe leg injuries in a car accident last month. "Happy to report that I am back home continuing my recovery," the 45-year-old golf great said on Twitter.

**Miami Open:** Rafael Nadal withdrew from next week's start of the Miami Open on Tuesday, tweeting he needed to skip the event to prepare for the European clay-court campaign. Her shares the all-time record of 20 men's Grand Slam singles titles with Roger Federer.

**Olympic ticket:** Long-jumper M Sreesankar of Kerala on Tuesday booked his berth in this year's Olympics with a national record leap of 8.26 metres in the 24th National Federation Cup Senior Athletics Championships. Dutee Chand of Odisha suffered a rare defeat.

**Team India bags two gold in equestrian event:** The Indian team won two gold medals on the second day of the ITPF World Cup Qualifiers for Tent Pegging in Greater Noida. The Indian team won the gold medal in Team Sword competition with 111 points. Nepal won the silver with 98 points and the bronze medal was won by Pakistan with 89.5 points.

**Chikkarangappa leads:** Defending champion Chikkarangappa S of Bengaluru carded a sublime seven-under-65, the day's joint best score, to emerge as halfway leader with a total of nine-under-135 at the Delhi-NCR Open Golf Championship in Gurugram on Wednesday.

**IPL official partner:** The Indian Premier League Governing Council (IPL GC) today announced Upstox, one of India's leading and fastest-growing digital brokerage firms, as an official partner for IPL, which will begin on April 9th, 2021. This will be a multi-year partnership. Commenting on the partnership, "We are thrilled to partner with BCCI for IPL 2021, said Ravi Kumar, CEO Upstox."

## Now, must-win match for Indians

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
AHMEDABAD, 17 MARCH

India would aim to take the toss out of the equation and put up a much improved all-round show against England in their bid to level the series in the must-win fourth Twenty20 International here tomorrow. The win-the-toss-and-bowl ploy has been hit upon in the series, with the chasing team getting home rather comfortably.

However, India skipper Virat Kohli (*in photo*) has repeatedly stressed doing well - whether batting first or chasing - in the run-up to the Twenty20 World Cup at home later this year. In the two games they lost after batting first, India struggled in during powerplay, which impacted their totals despite one batsman - Shreyas Iyer, Virat Kohli - going on to make a significant contribution. KL Rahul has not been among the runs but Kohli has made it clear the Karnataka batsman and Rohit Sharma constitute India's preferred opening combination.

If you look at his stats in the last 2-3 years, they are probably better than anyone else's in T20s. He will continue to be one of our main batters along with Rohit at the top of the order. We don't have any concerns there," said Kohli.

The express pace of Mark Wood and Jofra Archer has also made life tough for the Indians in the first six overs. They have been able to extract disconcerting bounce from the surface. Going by what Kohli said after the third game, a third all-



rounder alongside Hardik Pandya and Washington Sundar can be drafted into the side, with the uncapped Rahul Tewatia and Axar Patel in the reckoning.

Last night, Kohli's 77-run knock ensured India had some runs to defend but the bowlers hardly troubled the opposition batsmen with Jos Buttler leaving the hosts humbled. Spinner Yuzvendra Chahal has leaked runs when India have set England a target. Hardik Pandya's return as a bowling all-rounder has been described as promising but he has yet to take a wicket. Bhuvneshwar Kumar has bowled economically in his comeback series but the team expect him to provide regu-

Match Starts at 7 pm.

lar breakthroughs with the new ball.

Off-spinner Washington Sundar has been the standout bowler for India with four wickets at 6.95. Despite India being 1-2 down, no major changes are expected in their playing 11. England will be buoyed by their emphatic win in the previous game. Jonny Bairstow, who had had a horror run in the two Tests he played against India, came up with a morale-boosting knock on Tuesday. England are waiting for the world's numbe

## KL is our best T20 batsman, says batting coach Rathour

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
AHMEDABAD, 17 MARCH

Three cheap dismissals can't change the fact that KL Rahul (*in photo*) is India's "best T20 batsman" and it won't be long that one shot or one innings will get him back to his best, batting coach Vikram Rathour said, promising support for the struggling opener.

Rahul got out without scoring in two of his last three innings while he managed just one run in the series-opener. A part of it could be attributed to no game times since the end of T20 series in Australia early December.

"Anybody can have a lean phase and KL has been our best batsman in T20 format. He is averaging 40 plus with a strike rate of 145 and 3 failures doesn't change the fact that he is the best batsman we have in this format," Rathour said after India lost the third T20 International on Tuesday.

"This is the time when we need to support him and I am absolutely sure he will come back out of the lean phase," the batting coach spoke in the same vein as Kohli did at the presentation ceremony.

However, Rathour did agree that rustiness could be a reason and all it would take is one good shot to get back into the groove. "I agree they do tend to get rusty when they are sitting out but only thing we can do is to provide them practice. They are having a lot of net sessions and even on middle (centre strips)," he said. "That's all they can do and we just hope that one innings or one shot and they will be back in form. People



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like KL Rahul." India have now lost two games batting first and according to the former Test opener the pitches on offer during the last three matches have been tricky. "It is a difficult surface to assess what will be a good score and the bounce makes it tricky when you start bat. The ball stops and we saw some variable bounce. So you can't assess how many runs will be a good score," Rathour said.



## Srikanth, Kashyap knocked out of men's singles in All England

BIRMINGHAM, 17 MARCH

India's ace shuttlers Kidambi Srikanth and Parupalli Kashyap suffered early exits in the prestigious All England Badminton Championships, losing their respective opening round men's singles matches here on Wednesday.

However, the Indian duo of Ashwini Ponnappa and N Sikki Reddy got the better of Thailand's Benyapa Aimsaard and Nuntakarn Aimsaard in straight games, 21-14, 21-12, in a women's doubles match that lasted 30 minutes. Seeded eight, Srikanth lost to Ireland's unseeded player Nguyen Nhat

11-21, 21-15, 12-21 on the opening day of the tournament.

His match lasted exactly an hour as the player from Ireland came back strongly after losing the second game against the Indian. Commonwealth Games gold medallist Kashyap went down in straight games to top seeded Japanese Kento Momota 13-21, 2-22 in 42 minutes.

Earlier All Indian badminton players have been cleared to compete at the All England Open Championships, starting Wednesday, after results of their second Covid RT-PCR test on Wednesday came negative. AGENCIES

## South Africa seal ODI series 4-1, give India plenty to think about ahead of World Cup

AGENCIES  
LUCKNOW, 17 MARCH

South Africa added salt to India's wounds by registering a five-wicket win over the hosts in the low-scoring fifth and final women's ODI to seal the series 4-1 here on Wednesday.

Mithali Raj played a captain's knock by hitting a well-crafted 79 not out but it was only enough to take India to 188 all out. South Africa then rode on Anneke Bosch (58) and Mignon du Preez's (57) half-centuries to chase down the target in 48.2 overs. The series marked India's return to international cricket after 12 months. They were naturally rusty to start with and by the end of the series, it seemed that they have a lot of work to do if they want to be title contenders for the World Cup early next year.

The batting needs more firepower and bowling concerns too need to be addressed as spinners, traditionally India's strength, struggled against South Africa. Coming back after a long break, the India players had only a handful of training sessions ahead of the series as they also had to undergo a mandatory one week quarantine. "Clearly, we do need some camps before series. We were

underprepared, coming from a gap. The batting unit tried to improve consistently match by match. Our spinners need to improve," said Mithali at the post-match presentation.

"Other than the result, it's been a good series for us. Exposure for the young players, and opportunity to those players looking for rhythm. Congratulations to South Africa for doing so well in our conditions," she added.

South Africa's chase got off to a disastrous start as the visitors lost their top three batters including skipper Sune Luus (10) for just 27 runs.

Du Preez (57) and Bosch (58) the stabilised South Africa's run chase with a 96-run partnership for the fourth wicket before Indian bowlers pulled things back, dismissing both the set batters in quick succession. At that stage South Africa

were 131 for five, still needing 58 runs in 13 overs for a win.

While Bosch's knock was laced with eight fours and came off 70 balls, du Preez was a tad slower as she took 10 balls for her innings and struck just four boundaries in the process.

Marizanne Kapp (36 not out) and Nadine de Klerk (19 not out), however, ensured there was no further hiccups as the duo shared an unbeaten 58 runs for the sixth wicket to guide South Africa home.

For India, left-arm spinner Rajeshwari Gayakwad picked up three wickets conceding just 13 runs off her 10 overs.

Earlier, Mithali steered India's innings after India lost three early wickets with the scoreboard reading 53 in the 13th over.

Together with Harmanpreet Kaur (30), who retired hurt due to an injury, Mithali shared

71 runs for the fourth wicket before the former left the ground in the 31st over.

India lost opener Priya Punia (18) early before India's star batswoman of the series Punam Raut (10) and Smriti Mandhana (18) departed in successive overs. Dayalan Hemalatha (2) and Sushma Verma (0) failed to provide the much-needed support to Mithali as the veteran Indian batter brought up her second fifty of the series and 55 overall in 78 balls in the 38th over. Jhulan Goswami (5) and Monica Patel (9) too did not trouble the scorers much as Mithali kept India's innings going single-handedly. Debutant Challuru Prathyusha (2) also failed to make a mark as India slumped to 176 for eight by the end of the 47th over. Mithali was left stranded at one hand as India kept on losing wickets at regular intervals and were bowled out in 49.3 overs. Medium pacer de Klerk was the pick of the bowlers for South Africa with figures of three for 35.

Brief scores: India 188 all out in 49.3 overs (Mithali Raj 79 not out; Nadine de Klerk 3/35, Tumi Sekhukhune 2/26) lost to South Africa 189/5 in 48.2 overs (Anneke Bosch 58, Mignon du Preez 57; Rajeshwari Gayakwad 3/13).

Contribute here; any time you are not out at the end and see your side home is a fantastic feeling." Morgan's influence on Buttler goes far deeper than empowering him to kick off the innings, though. He was one of the players who opened Buttler's eyes to the changing nature of limited-overs cricket, long before the two became team-mates and went on to win a World Cup together. On the occasion of Morgan's 100th T20 cap, the first England player to reach the feat, it was Buttler who made the presentation and offered an emotional speech.

Relaying the gist of his tribute, Buttler said: "He's been a pioneer for England's white-ball cricket - he was a pioneer as a player to start with and certainly as a captain and leader.

"He's always been someone

who has been ahead of the curve.

Him and Kevin Pietersen were

two guys that I always looked

to in the white-ball team as people

who could do it a bit differ-

ently and take the game forward. "He's taken England's white-ball cricket to places it's never been before and he's done it in a quite incredible way. He's a selfless guy but it's no mean achievement to reach 100 caps."

"Eoin is always clear with

every single player on what he

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