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CPI(M) betting on young blood in Bengal for reversal of fortunes
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Myanmar bloodshed absolutely outrageous, says Joe Biden
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NEARBY



Pandarpur bypoll: NCP, BJP announce names

MUMBAI
The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) on Monday announced Bhagirath Bhalke, son of former MLA late Bharat Bhalke, as its candidate for the Pandarpur Assembly bypoll on April 17. The BJP declared the candidature of Samadhan Awatade. NCP State president Jayant Patil said that the party had decided to field Mr. Bhalke after party president Sharad Pawar approved the name.

WEST ▶ PAGE 3

EDUCATION PLUS ▶ PAGE 2

Maharashtra records nearly 32,000 fresh COVID-19 cases

Mumbai reports new high of 5,890 cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Maharashtra reported another big spike of 31,643 COVID-19 cases on Monday, as its active case tally climbed to 3,36,584. As many as 20,854 patients were discharged in the last 24 hours during which 1.37 lakh samples were tested. The State's recovery rate has dipped to 85.71%.

A high fatality spike of 102 deaths pushed the total death toll to 54,283. While the total case tally has reached 27,45,518, the cumulative recoveries stand at 23,53,307. "Of a total of 1,94,95,189 laboratory samples tested thus far, 27,45,518 (with the case positivity rising to 14.08%) have returned positive with over 1.37 lakh samples being tested in the last 24 hours," said State Surveillance Officer Dr. Pradeep Awate, adding that the State's case fatality rate had dipped to 1.98%.

5,000 cases in Pune
Pune district reported 5,000 new cases to take its total case tally to 5,21,427. As per State Health Department figures, three deaths were reported as the total death toll rose to 8,283. As per district authorities, the active case tally has surged past 59,000 and the toll has gone beyond 9,850 with 31 deaths.

Alarmed at the district's relentless case spike, the Pune civic authorities have requisitioned 80% of the

India registers 53,250 new cases

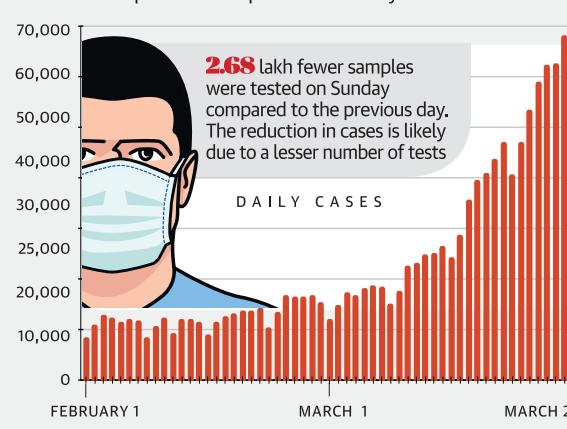
Death toll touches 242 in 24 hours; Maharashtra records 102 more deaths

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Following a five-month high of 68,020 new cases and 291 deaths on Sunday, the number of cases and deaths recorded on Monday fell to 53,250 and 242, largely due to a reduced number of tests. A total of 9.13 lakh samples were tested on Sunday (compared to 11.81 lakh on Saturday), for whom results were made available by the State Health Departments on Monday. Data for Monday was as of 10.06 p.m.

The Health Ministry noted that eight states – Maharashtra, Karnataka, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh – contributed to 84.5% of the new cases on

Less tests, fewer cases | As of 8.45 p.m. on Monday, India recorded 50,666 new COVID-19 cases, a slight decrease compared to the previous few days



Sunday. These cases furthered the second wave of infections in the country that began in the middle of Fe-

bruary 2021 and has shown no signs of easing as yet. Maharashtra registered 40,414 and 31,643 new cases

and 108 and 102 deaths on Sunday and Monday respectively. Punjab registered 69 and 59 deaths, the second highest among the States. The cumulative case load increased to 1,20,92,460, with active cases going up to 5,35,502 and recoveries reaching 1,13,89,993.

The total registered death toll is now 1,62,123. India has the third highest case load in the world (behind the U.S. and Brazil) and the fourth highest registered death toll (behind the U.S., Brazil and Mexico).

According to the Ministry, over 6.05 crore vaccine doses have been administered.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGE 8



Strict vigil: Police personnel enforce night curfew at a checkpoint at Girgaum chowpatty in Mumbai. ▶ VIVEK BENDRE

Mufti denied passport after 'adverse' CID report

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

Former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister and Peoples Democratic Party president Mehbooba Mufti has been denied a passport after an "adverse" report by the CID of the J&K police.

The J&K High Court dismissed the plea of Ms. Mufti, who had sought expedition of the process to issue her a

passport. "I am of the considered view that no direction can be issued by this court for issuance of passport in favour of the petitioner. The scope of this court in the matter of grant or otherwise of passport in favour of an individual is very limited," judge Ali Mohammad Magrey said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6



Sharad Pawar to undergo surgery

STAFF REPORTER
MUMBAI

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) president Sharad Pawar will undergo surgery at Breach Candy Hospital in south Mumbai on Wednesday after being diagnosed with a gall bladder issue. He underwent a check-up at the hospital after complaining of abdominal pain on Sunday evening.

"Our party president Sharad Pawar saheb was feeling a little uneasy due to pain in his abdomen last evening and was therefore taken to Breach Candy Hospital for a check-up. Upon diagnosis, it came to light that he has a problem in his gall bladder," NCP leader and State Minister Nawab Malik said on Monday. "He will be admitted to the hospital on March 31 and an endoscopy and surgery will be performed. Hence, all his programmes stand cancelled until further notice," he added.

Mr. Malik said the NCP chief is on blood thinning medication which is now being stopped due to the issue. Several top leaders such as Shiv Sena chief and Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, Maharashtra Navnirman Sena president Raj Thackeray, and Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis wished him a speedy recovery.

Mr. Pawar was set to travel to West Bengal to campaign in support of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's party, the All India Trinamool Congress.

Will oppose lockdown in State: BJP

'Move counterproductive when economy is picking the pieces'

STAFF REPORTER
PUNE

A day after Maharashtra's highest single-day tally of over 40,000 COVID-19 cases prompted Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray to direct the authorities to prepare for a possible lockdown, the Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) made it clear that it would strongly oppose such a move.

Speaking in Pune on Monday, BJP State president Chandrakant Patil said that a stringent lockdown would be calamitous for the lakhs eking out a precarious existence in the State's unorganized sector.

"Lockdown is not an option at this stage. We [the BJP] are going to oppose such a move with all our

might. And not only us, but ordinary traders and labourers will vehemently oppose it. You can take whatever steps you may wish to check the spread of the contagion, but those living a hand-to-mouth existence will fight this measure tooth and nail," Mr. Patil said.

Such a move would be counterproductive at a time

when the State's beleaguered economy was picking the pieces, the BJP leader reiterated. While precautionary curbs were in order, a stringent lockdown was out of the question. "And if the government is bent on imposing one, it must make provisions to give a minimum monthly stipend of ₹5,000 per labourer working in the unorganized sector. Only if the State government can deposit this amount directly to their bank accounts, should it think of urging labourers to sit at home," said the MLA of Kothrud in Pune.

With the State reporting an average of 30,000 cases a day for the last 10 days, its active case tally had soared past the 3.30 lakh mark.

Breaking free



Clearing the jam: A tugboat moves cargo ship Ever Given, which was stuck in the Suez Canal, Egypt, on Monday. The ship blocked the key trade route for nearly a week. ▶ AP (REPORT ON PAGE 9)

Only 5.4% of houses under PMAY-G completed this year

Flagship scheme has reached just 55% of its target

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Less than 6% of houses sanctioned under the Centre's flagship rural housing scheme in 2020-21 have reached completion so far this year, with COVID-19 stalling progress, the Rural Development Ministry told a Parliamentary Standing Committee last month.

However, some States, such as Odisha and Jharkhand, used the scheme to provide employment oppor-

tunities for migrant workers, who returned to their villages during the crisis.

With a little over a year left to achieve its goal of 'Housing for All', the Prad-

han Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) has only completed 55% of its construction target.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

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Chandrakant Patil

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■ SHAHNAAZ KHAN

A teacher's role today, goes much beyond just disseminating knowledge. It is about nurturing young learners to be resilient, adaptive, innovative, empathetic and critical thinkers; all of which they need, to be successful in a fast evolving world. As teachers, it is our collective responsibility that we open their minds to not just 'what was', but to 'what can be' and 'what is my role in it'. The bubbles created by social media, and magnified by the pandemic, are mirrors to what an extremely polarised world may look like.

Creating classrooms where multiple perspectives are debated and discussed critically and reflectively is imperative towards nurturing 21st century global citizens. However, the question is how ready or equipped are we, to foster this environment? We need to introspect at every level and reflect on our teaching pedagogy. Our own learning process gives us an opportunity to implement methodologies to help the classrooms evolve as healthy spaces to collaborate, and express and respect different voices.

The Social Sciences provide an excellent space to engage in such discussions. The subject is able to unravel normative bin-

The Social Sciences can be an umbrella under which students can explore their lived experience and realities, not just in subject silos but as a cohesive whole

aries, while traversing in the grey zones of right and wrong. The teacher as facilitator of debates and discussions is pivotal to contextualise the text and provide conceptual clarity.

Understanding as reflection

This is the first step to untangle complex narratives and events. What is my stand on an issue, and why have I chosen said stand? Before understanding what makes others take conflicting perspectives, learners need to engage with what makes them hold on to theirs. Any issue of relevance to the learner can be picked up here – from the Partition to the on-

going farmer protests. Before debates and discussions with others, reflection provides learners with the opportunity to consolidate and comprehend their thoughts.

Developing a thinking classroom

Visible thinking routines are effective to get students to share how they feel and reflect, as well as give teachers a sense of the learning. Try to develop independent thinkers by nurturing a culture of creative thinking and encouraging students to have a voice in the classroom. Adopt a concept-based curriculum, a 21st century need in academics to develop inde-

pendent thinkers. This is a research-backed approach to teaching thinking dispositions, and has provided educators with a tool kit to develop a culture of thinking in the classroom. Students should be encouraged to discuss their stand on an issue from multiple stakeholder perspectives, which can show that different people have different connections to the same thing that influence their stand.

Debate as discussion

It is a valuable skill to be able to both debate your 'opponent' and discuss your points of view. The Social Sciences as a curriculum are effective in provid-

ing a space where the learners engage with the human experience and condition as a laboratory in itself. The Socratic Method – using questions to probe values, principles and student beliefs – is a great tool to encourage classroom discourse. Inquiry, rather than facts and topics, drives the discussion. What is the value for a student in 21st century India in learning about the French Revolution? By conceptually unpeeling concepts and context, we understand governance as a system, change as a constant, and state legitimacy as a relationship. So, the student is able to relate these to democracy, dissent, and revolutions as they

see around them.

Contexts and connections

The Social Sciences can be that umbrella under which students can explore their lived experience and realities, not just in subject silos but as a cohesive whole. Learning more about ourselves and the world around can be enlivened by aligning it with other domains, and even using their concepts, knowledge and skills. The school, therefore, needs to evolve towards concept-based

learning to give student voice priority, among other reforms. Connecting the threads of learning, debate and discussion can foster creative thinking beyond traditional Social Science topics.

Including such practices routinely in Social Science classrooms is possible for offline, online or hybrid learning. It is especially crucial given the effect the pandemic has had on education to keep students engaged and informed. Navigating critical issues of our times can seem daunting but, with careful thought and preparation, the teacher can nurture thought leaders and change makers of tomorrow, who are willing to engage with multiple ideas, identities and ideologies.

The writer is the Political Science teacher at Shiv Nadar School, NOIDA.

SAVE THE DATE

NITK Surathkal Department of Civil Engineering Research Associateship 2021

NIT Karnataka, Surathkal, invites applications for the project "Impounding of river floodwaters along Dakshina Kannada Coast: A sustainable strategy for water resource development".

ELIGIBILITY: Open to candidates below 35 years with a Ph.D. in Geotechnical Engineering with a B.E./B.Tech in Civil Engineering and an M.E./M.Tech; experience in GIS or Experimental Geotechnics; and GATE qualification.

PRIZE: Up to ₹36,000 per month plus HRA

DEADLINE: April 3

APPLICATION: Online
b4s.in/edge/KRA4

College Board India Scholars Programme

College Board, in association with Global Higher Education Alliance Institutions, offers financial support to students in Classes 11 and 12 taking admission in Indian universities, based on the SAT.

ELIGIBILITY: For SAT fee discount, the applicant must be an Indian resident with an annual family income less than ₹10 lakh. For a full college tuition scholarship, the applicant's family income should be below ₹4 lakh p.a. The student must have SAT Exam performance of minimum 1350 out of 1600 and an offer of admission from the Global Higher Education Alliance institution.

PRIZES: Up to 90% waiver for SAT examination and complete tuition fee waiver.

DEADLINE: April 5

APPLICATION: Online
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IIIT Delhi SIRe Post Doctoral Fellowships

IIIT Delhi, invites applications exclusively for research purposes for a maximum of three years.

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Courtesy: buddy4study.com



interventions have been used as implementation channels. For students who don't have Internet access, interactive worksheets have been developed. The activities in the curriculum have been re-imagined for a more independent context, to enable learners to experience them without any facilitation from the teachers. It has also opened up more opportunities for integrating real-life learning. For example, now, students can work on situations that are real for them and their immediate contexts, such as family and neighbourhood.

Anyone who is interested in conducting an entrepreneurial mindset programme can write to contact@udhyam.org for a copy of the curriculum, which is open-source.

PERSONALITY



Competition, a catalyst?

Contend not with others but with yourself

■ SUNITA GANDHI

India's education system has been designed around merits and cut-off lists, and a student's future depends on his/her performance. The pressure that surrounds schools and colleges, even at a nascent age, is healthy and beneficial only to an extent. When it begins to affect their morale and confidence, it can lead to stress and depression.

Is it required?

Educators disagree on the need for competition. One hypothesis asserts that, since competition is a part of each culture, education must reflect that and help students get used to it. Another theory sees competition as a malevolent component that must be eliminated. This conflict tends to confuse children who attempt to compete wholeheartedly while making it look as if they're not doing so.

Another issue is rewards. Whether it is getting good grades during school/college or incentives and increments at the workplace, the idea seems to prioritise success rather than effort. Among the youth, this also tends to affect their impression of their peers.

This is not to deny the importance of competition.

UPSKILLING

Fostering future entrepreneurs

Coping with challenges of the future require the right skill-sets and that involves developing entrepreneurial mindset early, says Mekin Maheshwari of the Udyam Learning Foundation

■ MADHUMITHA SRINIVASAN

Today, as the focus of education shifts from academic learning to skill-building, developing an entrepreneurial mindset makes students job-ready and helps them address the challenges of the future. This is what the Udyam Learning Foundation (ULF) has been working towards, through its programmes, Udyam Shiksha (for students) and Udyam Vyapar (for micro-entrepreneurs).

Launched in 2017, Udyam Shiksha works on education reforms, co-created with state governments, to enable learning-by-doing. Focused on education modules that are more connected with real-world aspects while increasing learner autonomy among students, it has collaborated with the governments of Delhi, Haryana, Assam, Kerala, Maharashtra, and Karnataka. The Entrepreneurship Mindset Curriculum (EMC), designed specifically for students from Classes 9 to 12, is currently being implemented across 1,024 schools, in Delhi.

By diverting our energy away from competing with others, to competition with ourselves, we will discover we are still contending with our companions and that we will head towards our goals together in the best possible facets of the programme.

Need for entrepreneurship

Humanity is staring at complex social and environmental problems that require us to be more

empathetic, experimental, and collaborative. When entrepreneurial mindsets and skills are built, students are equipped to solve challenges.

Being entrepreneurial adds significant value to every student, irrespective of whether they go on to be a scientist, teacher, doctor, or business leader. Entrepreneurial people are able to solve more problems, operate with higher grit, try new things, and continuously understand and improve themselves. These mindsets, and the 21st-century skills that students learn, are what employers seek.

Building agency

Students learn various skills and mindsets through a set of structured activities and reflection questions. One of the mindsets is to develop self-awareness, and this is done in a fun and engaging manner to enable them to understand



Skill-building: Customers interacting with students at a business fair. (Left) Mekin Maheshwari.

themselves and each other.

Every week, on one day, they take a break from teacher-facilitated activities and anchor a student-driven process in which they practise building communication skills through debates and Just-A-Minute talks. Interactions with other professionals and entrepreneurs also help them explore different

careers.

Then there are field projects, where students apply their learnings by running a small venture to create value in any domain that aligns with their strengths and purpose. Every learner receives seed money between ₹5,000 and ₹10,000 to run their own business for six weeks, and 91% is returned at the

end of the course. The shift in learners' attitudes towards risk-taking, collective problem-solving, and self-belief can be seen in this level.

During the pandemic

This past year, the focus has been to continue the engagement with the learners. Hence, social media and online

The shift in learners' attitudes towards risk-taking, collective problem-solving, and self-belief can be seen in this level.

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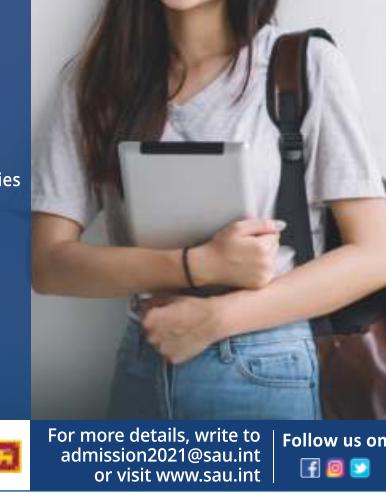
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MUMBAI THE HINDU | TUESDAY, MARCH 30, 2021

WEATHER WATCH

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Forecast for Tuesday: Heavy/very heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Thunderstorm with lightning/gusty winds likely at isolated places over sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim and Kerala

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	... 35.4	20.2	—	Kozhikode	... 34.8	26.6	—
Ahmedabad	... 40.8	23.5	—	Kurnool	... 40.6	26.5	—
Aizawl	... 29.2	14.1	—	Lucknow	... 39.0	20.7	—
Allahabad	... 41.4	20.4	—	Madurai	... 37.6	26.1	—
Bengaluru	... 34.8	21.7	—	Mangaluru	... 36.3	26.1	—
Bhopal	... 41.0	19.2	—	Mumbai	... 34.6	24.8	—
Bhubaneswar	... 40.5	25.3	—	Mysuru	... 35.0	18.8	—
Chandigarh	... 35.0	23.8	—	New Delhi	... 40.1	20.6	—
Chennai	... 36.2	26.5	—	Patna	... 37.6	20.4	—
Coimbatore	... 37.3	24.8	—	Pond Blair	... 33.0	26.5	—
Dehradun	... 34.8	18.7	—	Puducherry	... 33.4	25.0	—
Gangtok	... 17.6	12.6	—	Pune	... 40.1	20.3	—
Goa	... 33.9	27.4	—	Raipur	... 41.4	23.4	—
Guwahati	... 34.8	17.4	—	Ranchi	... 37.2	20.0	—
Hubballi	... 36.0	23.0	—	Shillong	... 24.1	14.3	—
Hyderabad	... 39.3	22.7	—	Shimla	... 30.5	16.9	—
Imphal	... 31.4	13.7	—	Srinagar	... 1.6	22.4	10.4
Jaipur	... 40.2	26.2	—	Thiruvananthapuram	... 34.0	25.2	—
Kochi	... 6.2	32.6	23.0	Tiruchi	... 38.4	26.6	—
Kohima	... 27.0	12.4	—	Vijayawada	... 36.7	24.2	—
Kolkata	... 32.5	26.1	—	Visakhapatnam	... 32.8	26.6	—

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

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Chennai	—	23	59	26	47	■■■■
Delhi	14	39	33	336	223	■■■■■
Hyderabad	5	43	23	133	130	■■■■■
Kolkata	16	22	27	96	111	■■■■■
Lucknow	7	67	46	320	288	■■■■■
Mumbai	55	12	37	185	140	■■■■■
Visakhapatnam	9	56	61	108	139	■■■■■

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■■ Moderate ■■■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)
SO₂: Sulfur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO_x: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

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Parties play mind games in Assam over first phase tally

Congress calls BJP advertisement a 'sign of nervousness'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The heavy polling in the first phase of election in Assam has triggered a psychological warfare among political parties ahead of the next two phases, on April 1 and April 6.

Hours after all prominent newspapers in Assam carried advertisements claiming that the BJP would win all the 47 seats that went to the poll on Saturday, All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) Badruddin Ajmal, an ally of the Congress, tweeted that the Congress-led alliance would win 30 seats.

"I am very happy to hear from my friends in upper Assam that the Congress led

CThe idea of the advertisement is to tell the voters that we will win all the seats in phase I, so don't waste your vote in the subsequent phases. It's a sign of desperation

A CONGRESS STRATEGIST

#Mahajot has swept the first phase. The lowest figure I am hearing from anyone is 30 seats. AIUDF looks forward to supporting a Congress Chief Minister after May 2," Mr Ajmal tweeted.

In the 2016 Assembly election, the BJP had swept the Upper Assam region and the North Bank areas, winning most of the seats. The BJP alliance had won 41 of the phase I seats, while the Congress only managed six.

Claiming that the newspaper advertisements were a sign of "nervousness" in the BJP camp, a senior Congress leader told *The Hindu* that even Union Home Minister Amit Shah conceded 10 seats to the Opposition as he put the BJP figure at 37.

"The idea of the advertisement is to tell the voters that we will win all the seats in phase I, so don't waste your vote in the subsequent phases. It's a sign of desperation," a Congress strategist said.

While the Congress-led Mahajot (grand alliance) is

hoping to make a fight on many of the 39 seats in phase II, covering the Barak Valley, parts of lower Assam such as Nalbari and Rangiya, central Assam seats of Naogaon, Hojai, Jamunamukh and the hill district seats of Haflong and Dipu, the 40 seats in the last phase are be-

lieved to be a stronghold of the Mahajot.

The Muslim community is a determining factor in many of the seats in the last phase and is overwhelmingly supporting the grand alliance. "Our alliance will sweep the seats in Barak Valley where Bengali Hindus are domi-

nant, score big in Bodoland region and win all the urban seats. The Congress will find out the reality on May 2," said a top BJP leader.

'Singur, Nandigram conspirators throwing muck at each other'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

land acquisition catapulted Ms. Banerjee to power in the State in 2011.

BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari responded to Ms. Banerjee remarks, saying she should read her own book on Nandigram as her views now were contrary to what she had written then.

In a statement issued by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Mr. Bhattacharjee said that Left Front

government believed in the political and economic idea that "agriculture was our foundation, and industry was our future".

"But, unfortunately, during the regime of the present government, we have suffered setbacks in agriculture and rights of the working classes in the State," Mr. Bhattacharjee added.

Bengal in the last 10 years," he said. Mr. Bhattacharjee

raised the issue of corruption, syndicates and extortion, and said they had made life difficult for the people of the State.

The veteran Communist leader said that the Left parties, along with the Congress and the ISF, had come up with the Samyukt Morcha, which alone could bring the State out of the darkness. He appealed to the people to vote for the Samyukt Morcha in the interest of the people so that a new government could be formed.

"The new government will assure democracy, communal harmony and rights of the working classes in the State," Mr. Bhattacharjee added.

No roof over head



Harsh reality of life: Pavement dwellers sit on a structure in front of a wall painted as part of the Congress' campaign for the Assembly polls, in Kolkata on Monday. ■PTI

NCP, BJP announce candidates for Pandharpur Assembly by-election

Sena denies meeting between Sharad Pawar and Amit Shah

STAFF REPORTER
MUMBAI

The stage is set for the first direct electoral battle for a Maharashtra Assembly seat between the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) and the Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) on Monday announced Bhagirath Bhalke, son of former MLA late Bharat Bhalke, as its candidate for the Pandharpur Assembly bypoll to be conducted on April 17. The BJP declared the candidature of Samadhan Awa-

ta. NCP State president Jayant Patil said that the party had decided to field Mr. Bhalke after party president Sharad Pawar approved the name. Bharat Bhalke, NCP MLA from Pandharpur, succumbed to COVID-19 two months ago leading to the by-election.

After announcing the name of Mr. Bhalke, Mr. Patil took a dig at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the statement about joining satyagraha for Bangladesh and being arrested. "We must trust our Prime Minister. The trust would increase manifold if we could get information about when he was arrested during the Bangladesh liberation movement and in which police station or jail was he kept," he said.

The Pandharpur bypoll will be the first test of the tripartite MVA against the BJP. The NCP has sought support from its two other partners – the Shiv Sena and the Congress – to ensure victory.

The announcement of candidates' names comes in the backdrop of a rumoured meeting between Mr. Pawar and Mr. Shah neither in Ahmedabad nor anywhere else. We should stop the rumours as they will result in nothing."

The Sena, however, ridiculed the reports of the meeting. Joining chorus with the NCP, Sena Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut said, "A few things need to be clarified at the right time. I can assure you that there was no secret meeting between Mr. Pawar and Mr. Shah neither in Ahmedabad nor anywhere else. We should stop the rumours as they will result in nothing."

The girl later revealed about the abuse that she had been facing at her home since January this year. The girl who is at a children's home in Sanpada, also told the police that she had seen her father sexually abusing her elder sister aged 14.

Man accused of rape by second daughter

He was arrested on March 24 for molesting the youngest of his three daughters

RAINA ASSAINAR
NAVI MUMBAI

The NRI Coastal police have booked a 48-year-old man for the second time in a week, after his second daughter accused him of a conspiracy to allow police to enter Nandigram on March 14, 2007. Fourteen villagers were killed in the police firing and subsequent violence in Nandigram. The violent movement against

ice custody till March 30 in the first case, will again be arrested in the second case after March 30. He has been arrested under Sections of the Indian Penal Code and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act.

to do so.

Around 12 years ago, the victims had lost their mother after which they lived with their father and elder brother who now works and stays in Thane. According to the police, the man had started abusing the 14-year-old from last year. He used to ask his eldest daughter aged 17 and the youngest to go out for buying something and would rape the second daughter. The youngest one had seen him abusing the second daughter at night as well after everyone slept.

Custody till March 30
The accused who is in pol-

ice custody till March 30 in the first case, will again be arrested in the second case after March 30. He has been arrested under Sections of the Indian Penal Code and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act.

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5 ultras killed in anti-Naxal operation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
GADCHIROLI

Five Naxals, including two women cadres, who all were carrying a collective reward of ₹43 lakh on their heads, were killed on Monday morning in an operation conducted by C-60 commandos in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district, a senior police officer said.

A cache of arms and ammunition, including an AK-47 rifle, a 12-bore rifle, a 303 rifle, an 8 mm rifle, and some electronic items, was recovered from the spot located in Khobramenda for-

est area.

Police suspect that at least four to five ultras were injured in the exchange of fire.

Gadchiroli SP Ankit Goyal told reporters that C-60 commandos had received the information that Naxals were gathering in a large number in Tipagarh forest area against the backdrop of 'Naxal week' being observed with the possibility of a planned ambush.

The Gadchiroli police's C-60 commandos conducted the operation on Monday morning in Khobramenda forest area where they were

attacked by 40 to 50 ultras. The exchange of fire lasted for two to two-and-a-half hours in which five Naxals were killed," he said.

A release issued by the office of the SP in Gadchiroli identified one of the slain Naxals as Rushi Raoji alias Bhaskar Hichami(46) of North Gadchiroli division carrying a bounty of ₹25 lakh on his head.

He had a total of 155 offences registered against him, including 41 cases of murder, 78 encounters with police, and other offences, it said.



Peaceful start

Despite a fierce contest, the first phase of the polls was spared of major violence

The first phase of polling in West Bengal and Assam on Saturday witnessed an impressive turnout. In some constituencies, the turnout was well above 80%. In Assam, 47 Assembly constituencies, and in West Bengal, 30 constituencies went to the polls, with turnouts of 79.97% and 84.63%, respectively. In 2016, the ruling Trinamool Congress won 26 of the 30 seats in West Bengal in the tribal regions of Jangalmahal. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP made significant inroads into the region. In Assam, the ruling BJP won 35 of the 47 seats in 2016, where tribal communities employed in tea estates shifted from the Congress to the BJP in large numbers. The BJP is pulling out all the stops to retain power in Assam and wrest it in West Bengal for the first time. The fierce nature of the contest in West Bengal is far too evident, but still there was no major violence in the first phase. The BJP has complained of violence by the TMC, while the latter has complained of partisanship by the Election Commission. Union Home Minister Amit Shah has claimed that the BJP is set to win 26 of the 30 seats in West Bengal and 37 of the 47 seats in Assam. The TMC has ridiculed the claim. In Assam, the Congress has claimed to have made major gains in the first phase. The claims and counterclaims can only be read as signalling for supporters and rivals alike by each side, but there are certain trends that are notable as the campaign for the second phase on April 1 peaks. Elections are being held in eight phases in West Bengal and three phases in Assam.

The BJP in Assam is not as defensive as the TMC is in West Bengal. The shenanigans of its leaders have resulted in an unmistakable anti-incumbency against the TMC, which has been in power for 10 years now. The party is trying to recover lost ground with new promises and by riding on the personal popularity that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee continues to command. Though it has no leader of any consequence in the State, and its campaign is being spearheaded by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Mr. Shah, the BJP hopes to harvest anti-TMC sentiments and win power. The BJP has not announced a chief ministerial candidate in West Bengal; and in Assam, the paradox is that its machinery is dependent more on the powerful minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma, than Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal. Mr. Modi's visit to Bangladesh in the midst of the election has triggered communal tensions there. The Hindu minority in Bangladesh is coming under attack by Islamists, and the ripple effects of this will be felt in the next phase in both States. The danger of communal polarisation is ever-present, but it might be too much to expect the BJP and the TMC to keep the campaign free of hateful rhetoric in the phases ahead. The Election Commission might need to step in.

Beating the best

India tried out new players and new methods against England in limited-overs cricket

India's thrill-a-minute seven-run victory over England in the third and final ODI in Pune on Sunday completed a clean sweep for the home nation across formats. It's an achievement India should be proud of, for England, despite losing the Tests comprehensively (1-3), proved that it was a formidable limited-overs side, as reflected in its status as the world's top-ranked outfit in both ODIs and T20Is and in the fact that both series required deciders. England is the reigning ICC Men's World champion, and had lost just one of its last 14 bilateral ODI series and none of its last six in T20Is. But India triumphed, thanks to some smart play at crunch moments, made possible by an astonishing array of made-to-order cricketers. The wicket-taking exploits of Shardul Thakur (eight in T20Is and seven in ODIs to top the lists), successful debuts for Ishan Kishan and Suryakumar Yadav in T20Is, and Prasidh Krishna and Krunal Pandya in ODIs, and Hardik Pandya's full-fledged return to bowling duties were big positives. Bhuvneshwar Kumar's dream comeback from injury was a huge plus. The 31-year-old's economy rate of 6.38 across 18 overs in five T20Is was the best for any bowler. More astounding was his rate of 4.65 across 29 overs in three ODIs, where five of the six innings played saw scores in excess of 315.

The limited-overs leg also provided India the opportunity to try and adopt a different approach in white-ball cricket, ahead of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup at home later this year. It started with skipper Virat Kohli wanting to play "baggage-free" cricket, perhaps alluding to India's formulaic style that had prioritised crafty build-ups, slow reveals and end-over flourishes over the current-era template of power-hitting from start to finish. The setting was just about right; played across just two venues – Ahmedabad (T20Is) and Pune (ODIs) – pitch and conditions, two of cricket's biggest variables, were all but taken out of the equation. The roles that Ishan and Suryakumar – part of the Mumbai Indians set-up which epitomises the all-out attacking approach – played in the T20I series win cannot be understated. The relentless hitting from Rishabh Pant and Hardik in the ODI series-decider, despite India having lost four of the best batsmen before the half-way stage, was indicative of similar thinking. This is a method England has patented, through the likes of Jonny Bairstow, Jason Roy and Jos Buttler. If Ben Stokes' stunning 52-ball 99 coming in at No.3 in the second ODI was its acme, Sam Curran's gallant 95 not out at No.8 in the final match was most typical of this attitude. For India's heroes, the impending Indian Premier League, and a few bilateral series which are set to follow, will provide enough chances to fine-tune these skills.

Polarisation in times of dispossession

It is democratic struggle within Sri Lanka, rather than advocacy in Geneva, that will put an end to this dangerous trajectory



AHILAN KADIRGAMAR

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva has passed another resolution on Sri Lanka, as wartime accountability continues to haunt the state for over a decade. Sri Lanka's prospects in Geneva swing according to geopolitical interests at any given time – reflecting a vote this time with 22 in favour, 11 against and 14 abstaining. Yet, Sri Lanka could not have tried harder to shoot itself in the foot by repressing minorities domestically and actively alienating external powers.

In 2015, a resolution was co-sponsored by Sri Lanka and unanimously adopted with overwhelming international support. Indeed, Sri Lanka in the following years was even considered an exception by some for its attempts at reconciliation when the world at large was getting increasingly polarised, as Brexit and the rise of Donald Trump would show us. However, instead of building on that experience, the Rajapaksa government withdrew from that resolution, soon after rising to power, in a show of unilateral arrogance.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's increasing economic dependence on China has offended India and many Western countries, with the latter pushing for greater scrutiny of the deteriorating human rights situation. The Tamil and Muslim minorities have also turned to Geneva as the space to engage the government has shrunk with growing authoritarian rule. As geopolitical rivalries exacerbate external relations, what will come of the recent moves in Geneva for the long-suf-

ferring people, and particularly the minority communities under constant attack by the state and its majoritarian allies?

Mounting Islamophobia The tremendous physical destruction, economic setbacks and the abominable loss of human life and suffering of Tamils during the protracted war have not got the necessary reckoning within the country. Rather, the nationalists across the ethnic divide play with heightened rhetoric of "war heroes" and "war victims" as sound bites for international consumption. Year after year, in the lead up to and during the sessions in Geneva, the Sinhala and Tamil nationalists either claim to save war heroes from international prosecution or find justice for war victims.

Replaying the rhetoric of the war and its legacy has been paralleled by mounting Islamophobic attacks over the last decade. The Easter terror attacks in April 2019 by an Islamist radical group and the backlash that followed, including violent attacks on Muslims, culminated in the election of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in November that year. While the minorities voted overwhelmingly against Mr. Rajapaksa, a tremendous swing in the Sinhala constituencies ensured his thumping victory. During the parliamentary elections in August 2020, the minorities were subdued as fear had eclipsed the communities, and the minority vote was fragmented, with some even supporting coalition partners of the majoritarian regime. The rulers consolidated further power by passing the 20th Amendment, with a comfortable two-thirds in Parliament, and giving unfettered powers to the executive.

The regime's show of force soon after was apparent in blatantly discriminatory measures such as the forced cremation of COVID-19 vic-



times, which was a blow to Muslims' burial rights. However, heaping power has not translated to clear or coherent policymaking as evident from the government's thoughtless economic policies, the awful dilly-dallying before permitting burials of pandemic victims and more recently with the burqa ban proposal. The all-powerful government may have the numbers in the legislature but stands exposed for its instability and weakness.

Economic woes

Underneath the heightened rhetoric in Sri Lanka about Geneva in recent weeks is a devastating economic crisis that has been ravaging the everyday lives of the people. Sri Lanka's woes are a consequence of liberalising trade and capital flows over four decades ago. Its dependence on imports, and looming external debt payments, both without adequate foreign earnings, have pushed the economy over the cliff into a depression. Keeping Sri Lanka at boiling point, particularly with talk of external and internal enemies, has been one strategy to deflect the people's attention from their economic distress. Those in power forget how the citizenry has time and again galvanised resistance when bread and butter concerns hit the roof. Furthermore, time is ticking, where the country is for the first time in danger of defaulting on its external debt, even as the grandstanding chauvinist ideologues in government are in denial.

In this context, with escalating attacks on the land rights of minorities, an unprecedented protest march from Pottuvil in the south-east to Polihandy in the north mobilised sections of the minorities in early February. The Tamil nationalist mobilisation was joined by Muslim communities in the east, and drew support from up-country Tamils centred in the plantations. This six-day-long march amidst the COVID-19 situation reflected the desperation of the minority communities.

The organisation of the march and its conclusion have triggered questions about its inclusivity and the attempts by hard-line Tamil diaspora groups to hijack it. But it has also compelled many to reflect on how and why minorities should forge an alliance. Furthermore, can such an alliance include sections of the Sinhala community to redirect the country on a plural and democratic path? Or will this initiative also end as mere theatrics for consumption in Geneva?

Tragic history

Sri Lanka's tragic political history is in many ways a consequence of the failures of its political elite, and their rank opportunism and nationalist world view. They could have negotiated a solution long before Sri Lanka got embroiled in armed conflict. International engagement and solutions have only aggravated national crisis from the time of the Indian Peace Keeping debacle in the late 1980s to the failed Norwegian peace process of mid-2000s that eventually led to the cataclysmic end of the war in 2009. Moreover, the golden opportunity soon after the war to address the ethnic problem was squandered by the Rajapaksa regime due to its hubris, and eventually paid with regime change in 2015. The current Rajapaksa leadership and its core base are again polarising Sri Lanka, undermining

possibilities for a plural and democratic future for the country.

In this context, India's vote at the Council was closely watched, given New Delhi's frustration with Colombo, particularly after it reneged on the East Container Terminal project at the Colombo Port, and the impending Tamil Nadu elections. India abstaining on the resolution was considered a betrayal by the narrow Tamil nationalist lobby, whose nonsensical campaign seeks to move Sri Lanka's justice question from Geneva to the International Criminal Court. Nevertheless, India in its oral intervention did insist that Provincial Council elections should be held and openly expressed its "support to the Tamils of Sri Lanka for equality, justice, dignity and peace." Sadly, India under the Modi regime can neither claim to be a beacon of devolution as it undermines the powers of its own States nor does it have the credibility to call out Sri Lanka on Muslim rights, given its own despicable attacks on Muslims.

The resolution has been forthright in highlighting the ongoing human rights abuses and places the spotlight on the state of democracy in Sri Lanka. With the economy in free fall, protests by indebted women, disgruntled farmers, and citizens aghast at the government's destructive environment policy are beginning to question their rulers. Such resistance, from both working people and the minorities whom the regime repeatedly scapegoats, is invaluable in the face of authoritarian repression pregnant with fascist tendencies. It is democratic struggle within Sri Lanka, rather than advocacy in Geneva, that will put an end to this dangerous trajectory of polarisation and dispossession.

Ahilan Kadirkamar is a political economist and Senior Lecturer, University of Jaffna

What could be driving Mumbai's COVID surge?

The extent to which new variants are circulating, and reinfections occurring, needs to be investigated urgently



MURAD BANAJI

Mumbai has recently seen a sharp rise in COVID-19 cases, recording on average 5,500 new cases every day over the past week. The weekly total is, by far, the highest the city has ever seen. What does the data tell us about this surge?

First, cases have shot up, doubling every week or so. Such speeds were last seen in April 2020. Housing societies were hit first, but the surge rapidly spread to the slums too, where we know that for each infection found, many more are missed. Although the slums are still generating a minority of cases, active infections could well be at the same level as in housing societies, if not higher.

The past week has seen a welcome rise in tests. While daily tests are higher than ever before, testing is struggling to keep pace with the rise in infections. Over the past week, test positivity (the ratio of cases to tests) averaged about 13%, a value not seen since October 2020. If we correct for the fact that rapid tests are less sensitive than RT-PCR tests, this number would

be higher.

Not at herd immunity

What makes the current situation remarkable is that it comes when so many people have already had the disease. Seroprevalence surveys provide estimates of how many people have developed antibodies to SARS-CoV-2, the virus which causes COVID-19. Mumbai's surveys, taken together with case and fatality data, suggest that at least half the population – quite likely more – has been infected at some point.

In theory, people who have already had the disease should act as a buffer, slowing down spread. This assumes, crucially, that after infection they become immune to the disease. The theory is simple: if half the population is immune, then one infected person typically infects only half the number they otherwise would. If a sufficient fraction of the population is immune, outbreaks naturally die out – at this point the population has reached 'herd immunity'.

Clearly Mumbai is not at herd immunity, but some level of immunity should still slow new outbreaks. And here comes the catch: Mumbai's current outbreak has grown more rapidly than basic calculations would suggest possible. It is not the absolute numbers, but rather the rate of increase which seems at odds with the theory. So,



what could explain the rapid increase?

Possible explanations

First, simple arguments about immunity ignore the crucial fact that people interact with each other in networks, and not 'randomly'. This means that spread can be uneven: some pockets of the city may have remained relatively unscathed earlier and vulnerable to rapid surges. It was widely expected that if the city returned to normality too quickly, there would be a rise in infections.

Uneven spread and opening up had a clear role in driving the city's second surge and are likely playing some part in this one. However, in contrast with the second surge, recent ward-level data show quickly rising cases across the city's wards. Something more is happening this time round.

This brings us to more speculative questions. Could it be that a SARS-CoV-2 variant which is more

transmissible – which spreads from person to person more easily – is circulating in the city? In this case, a relatively small fraction of susceptible people could drive rapid growth, helping explain the rapid rise.

Also, could the city be seeing a significant number of reinfections? This might occur if immunity acquired through infection wanes over time or can be bypassed by a so-called 'immune escape' variant.

The high prevalence of the so-called 'U.K. variant' in Punjab (<http://bitly.ws/coMQ>), and the presence of a novel variant with a double mutation in Maharashtra (<http://bitly.ws/coMU>), indicate that we should not ignore the possibility of variants playing a part in Mumbai's new surge. Hopefully increased genome sequencing will soon shed more light on their role in Mumbai.

Will the death toll rise?

In terms of mortality, Mumbai has already suffered badly. There have been 11,661 recorded COVID-19 deaths in the city so far (as of March 29). But data from the municipal corporation shows an even greater toll: the city saw a huge 24% increase in all-cause mortality in 2020, namely about 22,000 more deaths than expected from the previous five years' data.

So, it is some relief that daily re-

corded COVID-19 deaths in the city remain well below values during previous waves. On the other hand, we expect delays between infections rising and deaths rising. On average, daily deaths have risen from around five at the beginning of March to around 13 today, and judging from a sharp and continuing increase in hospitalisations further rises are likely.

The hope is that mitigation and prior immunity, augmented by vaccination targeted at those most at risk of severe disease, could together reduce deaths during this wave. But counting on this when infection is spreading like wildfire would be dangerous.

In summary, it seems likely that multiple factors, including uneven spread and opening up of the city, are playing a part in Mumbai's latest COVID-19 surge. The extent to which new variants are circulating, and reinfections occurring, needs to be investigated urgently.

It goes without saying that Mumbai-dwellers need to be extra careful at the moment – with an emphasis on masking up and avoiding unnecessary crowds and indoor gatherings. This surge still has a long way to go.

Murad Banaji, Senior Lecturer in Mathematics at the Department of Design Engineering and Maths at Middlesex University, London, has an interest in disease modelling

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

The Myanmar military
It is shocking that India chose to attend the Armed Forces Day parade in Myanmar ("India attends Myanmar army parade", March 29). The military there, which overthrew the democratically elected government, has killed hundreds of civilians and lacks legitimacy. Many people in Myanmar are fleeing the country. The Rohingya too fled because of persecution by the military. Against this background, it behoves India to uphold democratic traditions and basic human rights. This could have been avoided.
M.P. MURALIDHARAN, Bangalore

Selective restrictions
The government seems to be selective in its efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19. Educational institutions are closed, people are advised to stay at home during Holi, but election rallies are held. There seems to be no physical distancing at these rallies and few wear masks. While institutions and festival gatherings can give rise to COVID-19 clusters, what's the guarantee that rallies won't?
KUSHBOO VED, Ujjain

No transparency
The Reserve Bank of India and the Election Commission have

expressed reservations about the electoral bonds scheme, but it is unlikely that there will be any review of the scheme because the ruling party has gained the most from it ("Opacity rules", March 29). Only the Supreme Court can remedy this, but it has again declined to stay the scheme. This is unfortunate for our democracy.
S.S. PAUL, Chakdaha, Nadia

Counter Islamophobia
The writer has rightly proposed that the laity should introspect and challenge theocratic exceptionalism to counter Islamophobia ("An antidote

to Islamophobia, within and beyond", March 29). Resentment towards any faith arises only from fear of disorder and threats to peaceful coexistence in the face of radical assertions of religiosity. The tragedy of human conflicts has been the passive role of the silent majority that either remains indifferent or is cowered into submission by the radical minority. Deference to theological imperatives will undermine the fundamentals of secular citizenship.
V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN, Thiruvananthapuram

Why should Muslim scholars in India apologise for and condemn activities

that take place in other countries? Does the writer genuinely believe that the problems faced by India's Muslims will be solved if the clergy apologises for atrocities that take place in faraway places like Turkey? That the lynchings and active discrimination here will stop? If the anti-Muslim sentiment is rising in India, it is the result of a deliberate and sustained campaign of fake news and institutionalised hatred. This tendency to put the onus of avoiding violence on Muslims is a form of victim blaming and takes attention away from the fact that they have been preyed on by Islamophobic forces that alienate and

To read more letters online, scan the QR code
actively attack them.
ZAYAN ASIF, Mahe
Revisiting laws
This is not the first time that an old issue is being resurrected ("The needless resurrection of a buried issue", March 29). Several decisions of the Supreme Court are challenged through petitions. This might be a sensitive issue, but there's nothing wrong in the court simply issuing notice and seeking a response.
DUGGARAJU SRINIVASA RAO, Vijayawada
MORE LETTERS ONLINE: www.thehindu.com/opinion/letters/



Indian history and distorted narratives

The latest policy document on undergraduate education presents an incomplete and ill-judged view



ANUBHUTI MAURYA



The LOCF depicts the Hindu and Muslim societies as discrete entities in the past, furthering the notion that they existed as separate nations. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

The University Grants Commission (UGC) document on Learning Outcomes-based Curriculum Framework (LOCF), 2021 for undergraduate education in history begins with the declaration: "History, as we all know, is a vital source to obtain knowledge about a nation's soul". The document seeks to create a student body that will compete globally and be aware of its glorious past – one that will reclaim its history as it takes its rightful place in the new global order. It argues that a "new narrative" about the nation needs to emerge through a dialogue between the past and the present.

The document is a policy directive to mould undergraduate history education to these ends. However, a critical examination of the curriculum reveals that it falls short of its own stated goals.

The idea of Bharat

The LOCF makes an argument for inculcating "national pride". The first paper of the course is titled the 'idea of Bharat' and seeks to study the "primitive life and cultural status of the people of ancient India". The five units of the course cover the concept of Bharatvarsha; Indian knowledge traditions, art and culture; dharma, philosophy and 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'; science, environment and medical sciences; and Indian economic traditions.

The course sits separate from the paper on ancient India (from the earliest time to 550 CE) while exploring ancient philosophical, cultural and material traditions under the umbrella of the term Bharat.

The course presents Bharatvarsha as an "eternal" concept, as an originary moment of the nation that lies in its ancient past. If one places this course within the entirety of the curriculum framework, it appears as a period untouched by invasions – be it Kushan or Sunga people of the early historical period, Timur and Babur of the medieval times, or the British in the modern period. It suggests an

origin to the nation that is in a pristine ancient past.

In this schema, Bharat is an exclusionary concept with little space for land and people south of the Vindhya, or from the east and the northeast. Further, it communicates no sense that this nation has a history as Bharat, Hindustan, or India, that as a nation it was crafted into being through the struggle of its people. Instead, it reads the nation into a deep past and renders it into a narrative stuck in the stasis of an autochthonous origin. Across the curriculum, changes in history are mapped through the rise and fall of empires, kings and royal dynasties and acts of violence and movement of armies. There is a preoccupation with violence as a motive force of change, whether it is through the examination of the Aryan invasions or the invasions by Timur and Babur.

The curriculum cleaves closely to the categories and modes of history-writing effectively utilised by colonial historians. Terms like the 'Aryan Age', 'Hindu society', and 'Muslim rulers' were deployed in colonial historiography to delineate periods as well as causation in Indian history. These were used to pose a contrast between the secular, modern Europe and the backward 'oriental' states, with their irrational adherence to religion. By bringing these terms back into use, the curriculum undoes the work of generations of historians to challenge colonial frames of history-writing and foreground socioeconomic and political processes.

The paper on medieval and early modern India (History of India, 1206-1707) best demonstrates the ideology of the LOCF. It treats the "Hindu society" and the "Muslim society" as discrete entities in the medieval past, replicating the understanding that these communities existed as separate nations, an understanding that last had relevance in the run-up to the partition of India.

Further, it presents a history of only north India. In contrast, existing history syllabi currently followed in universities across India have been studying the processes of sociocultural, economic and political changes in different regions like Odisha, the peninsular India, and the Rajputana, Gujarat, Malwa, Bengal regions, among others. But this latest curriculum framework ignores the rich work in regional history and introduces some regions in the syllabus simply as political formations.

Pedagogical issues

Inherent in the LOCF is a pedagogical critique of current forms of history education. It forcefully argues that young minds are not "empty vessels" to be filled with "static narratives". Young minds, it claims, must be participants in knowledge production. This would make history an attractive area of study. However, the pedagogy suggested in the course outlines and recommended readings would achieve just the opposite.

The introduction of primary material in the classroom – parts of historical texts, archaeological artefacts, coins, visits to monuments and museums – bring the subject alive for students. Engagement with these allows students to parse historical analysis and make their own judgments. However, the readings prescribed in

the curriculum do not contain a single reference to primary archives for history-writing. Further, the suggested readings are devoid of some of the most important works in different areas of history-writing. Readings in history, or any academic discipline for that matter, are central to building the discipline. We look at older writings and follow the evolution of historiographical understanding through critiques and the new questions posed. To develop critical thinking, students must be encouraged to read divergent opinions and engage with different ideological hues of historians. A curriculum framework that does not encourage this only provides faulty foundations for disciplinary education.

This curriculum framework, quite egregiously, omits some of the finest writings in Indian history. Instead, a bulk of suggested readings span from the 1900s to, at best, 1980s, with a heavy dependence on the work of Indologists. The omissions seem deliberate and ideologically motivated.

Most importantly, rather than enabling students to critically engage with diverse schools of historiography and reaching their own conclusions, it seeks to curtail the resource base available to them.

What are the challenges facing a young student in the 21st century? Climate disaster, democracy, freedom of speech and movement, equity in rights and social justice are issues that must be considered. This curriculum, with its colonial underpinnings, is inadequate in preparing students of the 21st century. New modes of thinking about Big Data, digital mapping and visualisations, critical study of the environment, health and society are all missing from this curriculum.

Seen in its entirety, the LOCF is determined to project into the past majoritarian and divisive conceptions of contemporary Indian politics. It is limited and narrow in its understanding of processes of historical change, out of touch with the current state of research in the discipline of history, and dated in its pedagogy. In 2021, this curriculum framework seeks to make history education a space for passive rote-learning of ideas that had their heyday in 1921.

Anubhuti Maurya teaches history at the Shiv Nadar University. Views are personal.

Bengal's 'paribartan' politics

Fierce competition between major players in the State has stirred up political shifts and an ugly campaign



SUDIPTA DATTA

Ideological and political lines are being dizzyingly crossed in West Bengal in the midst of a gruelling eight-phase Assembly election. The Trinamool Congress, which has been at the helm for 10 years, is battling both deep anti-incumbency and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which snuffed power in the State after the 2019 Lok Sabha election and has thrown all its might into the fray. The tactics being used by all – competitive populism, engineering defections, polarisation, carrot-and-threat policy, personal attacks, hyper-nationalism and Bengali pride – have turned the election into an ugly campaign from which Bengal will not emerge unscathed.

In 2011, the Trinamool came to power with the slogan of 'paribartan' (change). In 2021, the BJP is pledging 'asal paribartan', or 'real change'. The party says if voted to power, it will announce the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act at its first Cabinet meeting. Silent about CAA in Assam, the BJP came under pressure in Bengal from the Matua, Hindu migrants from Bangladesh, who live mostly in the North 24 Parganas and Nadia districts, and can influence outcomes of 30-35 Assembly seats.

But will the Matuas agree to the provisions of the CAA which require an applicant for citizenship to disclose that he/she has been an illegal immigrant? There are whispers of discontent in the community. The Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool government had passed a resolution against the CAA; the BJP has not specified how it plans to go about implementing the law. There is unease among the Muslim community in the State too, which forms almost 27% of the population. A year ago, the State BJP leadership had said there are one crore Bangladeshi-Muslims in Bengal and that the party was serious about driving them out.

Fickle loyalties

The Trinamool and BJP manifestos are competitive and similar. Both are "doling" out a bonanza, says Prof. Samir Das, who teaches Political Science at Calcutta University. Among other things, the BJP has promised 33% reservation for women in government jobs, free education for girls from kindergarten to postgraduation levels, free public transport for women, and an increase in widow pension from ₹1,000 to ₹3,000, to counter

Ms. Banerjee's successful welfare schemes for girls and women.

The electorate watched helplessly as politicians hopped from party A to party B. Some jumped ship voluntarily from the Trinamool to the BJP, which won 18 out of 42 seats in the 2019 Lok Sabha election and saw its vote share increase from 4% in the 2011 Assembly election to over 40%. Others, after being denied a ticket, changed colour, throwing questions of beliefs to the wind.

Towards the end of the Left Front regime, senior CPI(M) leaders would rue in private about not being able to control "local corruption" and "lumpen elements". Riding on the wave of two violent anti-land acquisition movements at Nandigram and Singur, the Trinamool Congress stormed into power in 2011, ending three decades of Left rule. Even then, it was evident that the Trinamool, lacking in both ideology and organisation, had broken into Left and Congress ranks to increase its numbers.

Cut to 2021, in one of the most polarised elections in the State, the pattern is chillingly familiar. A "lateral shift" has been taking place both at the ground and leadership levels. Mukul Roy, once a right-hand man to Ms. Banerjee, and Suvenu Adhikari, one of the most well-known faces in the Trinamool, are now with the BJP.

Bengal is redefining the horse-trading phrase 'ayya ram gaya ram' of the 1960s, when an MLA from Haryana changed his party thrice in a day, which eventually led to the anti-defection law of 1985. But the law has not been able to stop such switchovers.

What are voters to make of all this? In his speeches, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has attacked the Trinamool leadership for corruption and promoting family politics. The BJP has found it difficult to pick candidates from within its ranks, putting a question mark on its bench strength. If 30-35 of the candidates announced by the BJP are from its bitter rival Trinamool, what is changing?

The BJP has picked up the Trinamool poll slogan *Khela hobe* (game on) and raised a victory cry even before the election is over with *Khela shesh* (game over). The Left appears to have done a course correction, fielding young, feisty leaders like Meenakshi Mukherjee (Nandigram) and Aishe Ghosh (Jamuria) and using digital media with catchy songs and memes to reach out to the young. But the tie-up with Furfura cleric Abas Siddique has raised eyebrows, with many fearing it may be counter-productive.

Overall, the campaign has been highly aggressive, and the viciousness ensures that whoever wins, democracy is the loser.

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Diversity and inclusivity

IIM Bangalore's policies offer key insights into providing equitable opportunities to all

RISHIKESHA T. KRISHNAN

India has a diverse population. Unfortunately, certain social structures have prevented thousands of individuals from realising their potential, and the country from benefiting from their skills and talent. The government has tried to remedy this situation through constitutional and statutory provisions for reservation quotas, but as organisations the world over have realised, such efforts to enhance equity and diversity need to be matched by a steely resolve to facilitate genuine inclusion.

The experience at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIMB) with respect to students with disability is instructive in this regard. The institute admitted students with disabilities even before the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 was introduced. But it soon realised that there is much more to inclusivity.

In a push towards greater inclusivity, in 2009, with generous support from Mphasis, IIMB set up a dedicated Office of Disability Services to act as a nodal support point for students with disability, in an effort to study the individual needs of each student and provide the required accommodations proactively.

Modified approach

Inclusivity also means rethinking the conventional notions of fairness in examinations. Giving a student with serious visual impairment an examination paper based on graphs is an unfair evaluation of her understanding of the fundamental concepts an institute may wish to impart. To that extent, sensitisation workshops with faculty (now a regular feature) have changed the approach to the entire evaluation process.

The IIMB's efforts have been recognised by the prestigious NCPEPD-Mphasis Universal Design Award for pioneering work in promoting accessibility and universal design and ensuring a life of equality and dignity for students with disabilities.

But apart from just disability, the institute is committed to all forms of diversity and inclusivity – IIM Banga-

lore has a good record in both complying with government-mandated admission quotas for SC, ST, and OBC candidates to the flagship two-year postgraduate programme in management leading to an MBA degree, and in facilitating the placement of all graduates in good roles.

Other dimensions

Today, IIMB is applying the same integrated approach that it followed for students with disability to other dimensions of diversity. One such challenge – the recruitment of faculty within certain categories – was identified in recent reports of *The Hindu*. To this effect, the institute is balancing the address of two laws – the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act 2019 and the Indian Institutes of Management Act, 2017. The latter recognises IIMs as Institutions of National Importance which must aspire for global standards.

While the institute has been successful in hiring four excellent faculty members from the SC and ST categories over the last year, there is a serious shortage of qualified candidates from reserved categories in certain areas and disciplines, which impedes hiring efforts. While an obvious step is to focus on the admission of high-potential students from reserved categories to doctoral programmes, alumni discussions reveal that doctoral studies are often not the first preference for students of merit from these communities. Their priority is to rapidly ascend the ladder of economic stability, for which a reliable pathway is the MBA degree.

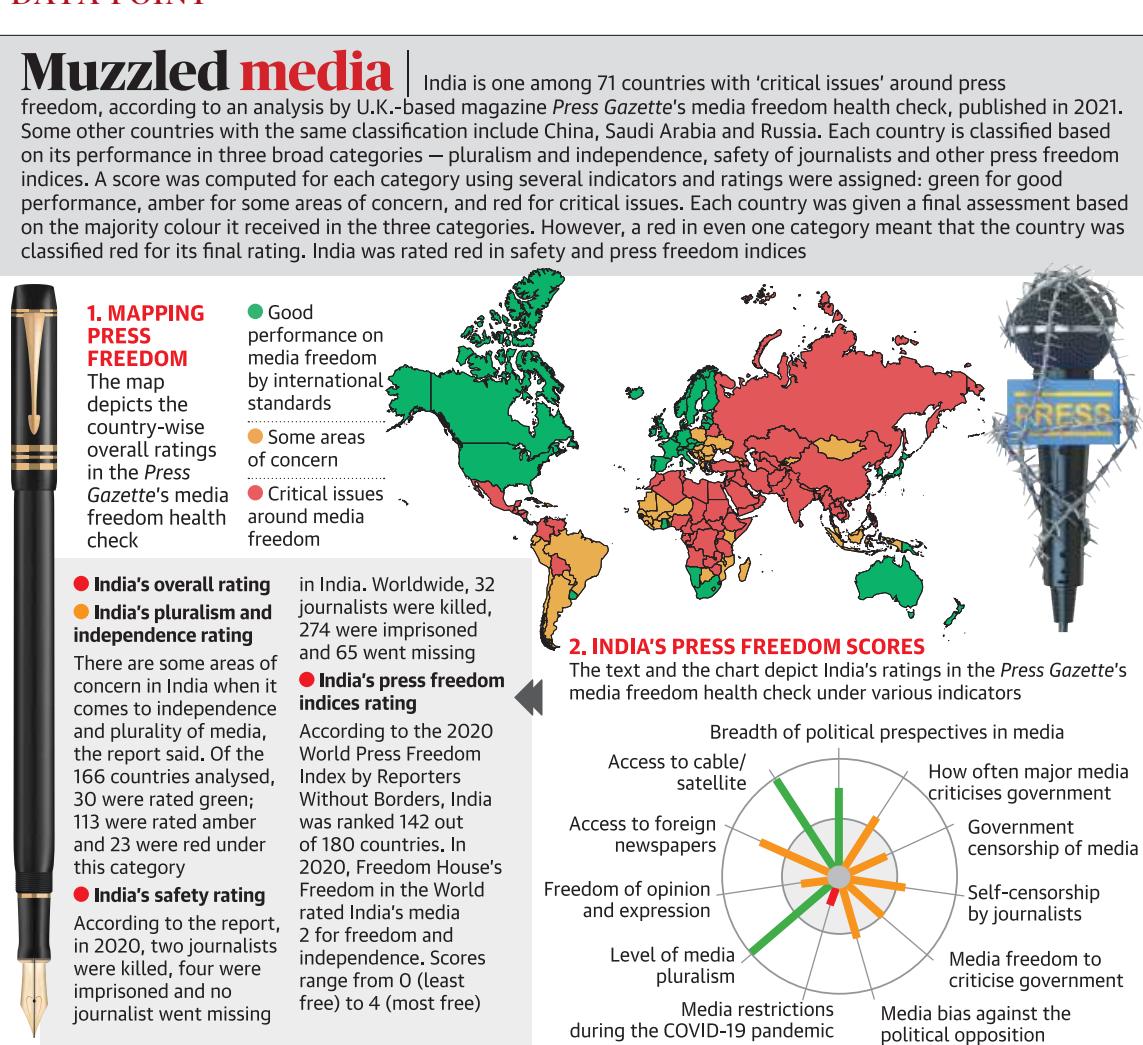
Given this insight, IIMB launched the N.S. Ramaswamy Pre-doctoral Programme in 2019. This internally-funded academic and mentoring initiative selects around 10 candidates from under-privileged categories every year and helps them prepare for admission to doctoral studies.

As a globally-ranked institution committed to excellence in management and entrepreneurship, IIMB continues to strive for a multi-dimensional and integrated approach to diversity and inclusion.

The author is the Director of IIM Bangalore



DATA POINT



The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 30, 1971

Fighting in Dacca

Sheikh Mujibur Rehman's Liberation Army to-day [March 29] all but took over the capital city of Dacca after five days of bloody fighting in East Pakistan, according to Free Bangla Radio. Fighting was on to-night [March 29] for the airport and cantonment areas of the city after the Dacca radio station once again went back into the hands of Sheikh's men, the radio claimed. Bangla Desh freedom-fighters were to-day in complete control of two of the three Army cantonments in the land, the radio said. These were identified as the Jessor and Comilla cantonments. Both had been seized from the Pakistani Army, it said. For the first time to-day, Martial Law authorities, now under a new administrator, Lt. Gen. Irshad Ali Khan, dropped paratroopers at several places to capture five other transmitters operated by the Bangla Radio, reports said. Fighting unparalleled in its bitterness and savage brutality was to-night [March 29] raging in Dacca, according to reliable reports reaching Shillong. In a last ditch bid to stem the tide of nationalism the West Pakistani forces pressed into service sabre jets, tanks and heavy artillery against the ill-equipped liberation army. Bitter fighting was also going on in Khulna, Sylhet and Rangpur.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 30, 1921

Cochin administration
(From an editorial)

Cochin is a small State, dense with men, short of resources, but full of ambition. The means of development hardly keep pace with the State's eagerness for it and administrative reports have often to record something like a sliding scale of self-satisfaction. Mr. Vijayaraghavachariar commenced his term of Diwanship with ebullient hopes of rapid and large achievement and, full with meliorist dreams, he sketched out a programme. He now admits disillusion. He concludes the annual report of 1995 M. E. with an apologetic confession that "with the very best will in the world it is not always possible to translate intentions into action as quickly as one would wish". He therefore claims nothing more than that a "tremendous endeavour has been made to execute the programme sketched out in my first Administration report". In view of the recent disturbances at Trichur, which needed external forces to control, one is tempted to scrutinise, before all, the protection departments of the State administration.

FROM PAGE ONE

India registers 53,250 new cases

Those vaccinated include 81,56,997 healthcare workers, who have taken the first dose, and 51,78,065 who have taken the second dose. A total of 89,12,113 frontline workers (FLWs) have also taken the first dose and

36,92,136 FLWs have taken the second dose. Besides, 67,31,223 beneficiaries aged above 45 with comorbidities and 2,78,59,901 persons above 60 have also been administered the first dose.

(With PTI inputs)

Only 5.4% of houses under PMAY-G finished this year

However, money has been sanctioned for almost 85% of beneficiaries.

Of the 2.28 crore houses to be built for the rural poor under the Yojana, less than 1.27 crore had been completed by January 28, 2021, according to the Committee's report presented to the Lok Sabha earlier this month. Another 61 lakh are under construction.

The PMAY-G was launched in April 2016 and aims to provide a pucca house with basic amenities to all rural families who are homeless or living in kucha or dilapidated houses by the end of March 2022.

According to data provided by the Ministry in 2019, it takes an average of 114 days to construct a house under the scheme. However, the advent of the pandemic caused long delays at every stage.

Implementation was "affected at the ground level due to unavailability of construction materials, labour, delay in inspection of stages of house construction etc," the Ministry told the Committee. Although the nationwide lockdown in March 2020 brought work to a complete standstill, the Ministry issued an advisory to all States to start house construction activities from April 20, 2020, while adhering to safety protocols such as mask wearing and distancing.

"Front loading of work of

construction of PMAY-G houses and engagement of migrant workers in house construction activities in the rural areas was done. The initiative helped in creation of jobs for migrant workers involved in masonry and labour work in the rural sector and thereby ensuring regular income to the workers during COVID-19 crisis," the Ministry said.

Going by the Ministry's data, some States which are the source of large migrant worker populations took advantage of their extra work force. Odisha completed construction of 10.5% of its 2020-21 target and began work on at least 85% of those for which money was sanctioned this year. Jharkhand completed 7.25% of the target and started work on more than 91% of houses sanctioned this year.

A number of other States such as Assam, Chhattisgarh and Karnataka did not see completed construction of even a single house sanctioned during the year.

Nationwide, the Ministry's target was to sanction 63 lakh houses this year. Only 34 lakh were actually sanctioned, and only 1.9 lakh of those had reached completion at the end of January. Almost 19 lakh houses reached the lintel level while six lakh reached the later stages of construction with roofs ready to be added, the data presented to the Committee showed.

Mufti denied passport after 'adverse' CID report

The court "can only direct the authorities concerned to expeditiously consider the case of an individual in the light of the mandate of the scheme of law governing the subject," he said.

Earlier in the day, the Passport Officer, Srinagar, submitted to the High Court that the ADGP, CID, J&K, has categorised Ms. Mufti's application as "not recommended passport case".

"As per norms, clear Police Verification Report (PVR) is mandatory [for issuance of a passport]. The PVR received from the ADGP, CID, does not favour issuance of passport and [was] returned as 'not recommended for passport case'."

"In view of the CID report, your case was found to attract refusal under the

provision Section 6(2) (c) of the Passport Act, 1967," the officer's submission reads.

Ms. Mufti had applied for a fresh passport on December 11, 2020. She has now been asked to appeal before the Joint Secretary (PSP) and the Chief Passport Officer, Ministry of External Affairs, Patiala House, New Delhi, within 30 days "in case of any grievance against the decision".

Reacting to the decision, Ms. Mufti, in a tweet, said, "[The] Passport Office refused to issue my passport based on CID's report citing it as detrimental to the security of India". This is the level of normalcy achieved in Kashmir since August 2019 that an ex-Chief Minister holding a passport is a threat to the sovereignty of a mighty nation."

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"In view of the CID report, your case was found to attract refusal under the

protocol for testing, tracing and treat-

ment was being strengthened. Karnataka on Monday reported 2,792 new cases and 16 fatalities.

For the fourth day, Andhra Pradesh reported close to 1,000 cases. It also reported five deaths, the highest

single-day toll in four months. On Monday, 997 infections were reported.

One death each occurred

from Medchal Malkajgiri, 34 from Rangareddy, and 24 from Sangareddy. Two patients died.

Kerala reported 1,549 new cases on Monday, from 37,377 samples. The test positivity rate was 4.14%. The toll rose with 11 more deaths. Kozhikode reported four deaths, Thiruvananthapuram two, Pathanamthitta, Idukki, Ernakulam, Malappuram and Kannur one death each. Kannur district reported the maximum of 249 cases and Ernakulam 184. Two people from South Africa who reached Kerala tested positive.

Among Karnataka's 16 deaths, Bengaluru Urban 9, Gadag 3, Mysuru 2 and Bidar and Mandya with one each.

(With inputs from Hyderabad, Thiruvananthapuram and Vijayawada bureaus)

from Anantapur, Chittoor, Kurnool, Nellore and Visakhapatnam districts.

Chittoor reported the highest single-day tally of 181 infections. Patients in ICUs across hospitals in Telangana shot up by 100% in about two weeks. Many requests for plasma from recovered persons were received.

From March 1 to 14 this year, around 340 to 375 patients were admitted in ICUs of government and private hospitals everyday. On March 28, however, 767 patients were admitted to ICUs.

Telangana recorded 403 cases on Sunday with 33,930 samples tested. Over the past two weeks, about 60,000 samples were tested daily, but the number dropped over weekends. The 403 new cases included 146 from Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation region, 40

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In West Bengal, CPI(M) bets on fresh blood for reversal of political fortunes

Nothing more than a 'publicity stunt', say Trinamool and BJP; political observers term it 'future planning'

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

Pritha Tah was 19 years old when her father Pradip Tah, a former MLA of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), was killed allegedly by Trinamool Congress activists in 2012. At 28, Ms. Tah, a leader of the Students Federation of India, is contesting the Assembly election in West Bengal from Bardhaman Dakshin as the Samyukta Morcha-supported CPI(M) candidate.

"The death of my father and others in political violence is a result of nexus of criminals and politicians. Never before has Bengal witnessed a political regime when criminals would kill with such impunity," Ms.

Tah says as she campaigns in 33 wards, primarily urban areas that make up the Bardhaman Dakshin Assembly seat.

New meaning'

Srijan Bhattacharya was 13 years old when Singur was on the boil and at 27, the SFI leader is the CPI(M) candidate from the constituency, trying to give a new meaning to the 'industry versus agriculture' debate. "In Singur, it was never about agriculture vs industry, it was about industry that can be built on the success of agriculture," Mr. Bhattacharya often reflects in his campaign.

Minakshi Mukherjee, the 33-year-old State president

of the Democratic Youth Federation of India, who has generated attention in Nandigram, was also 19 when violence erupted in Nandigram. By raising the issue of livelihood and jobs, Ms. Mukherjee has made an impact on a constituency which is witnessing a clash between political titans, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari.

There are at least more than half a dozen CPI(M) candidates in their 20s and 30s in the poll fray in West Bengal who have given the campaign a fresh lease of life.

Aishe Ghosh, 26, sitting president of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students



New approach: CPI (M) candidate Aishe Ghosh, 26, campaigning in Jamurai. ■ SUBHAM DUTTA

Union, is contesting from Jamuria in Paschim Bardhaman.

"I am the daughter of Paschim Bardhaman. My father worked in the collieries. I want to stay here and work for the people of Jamuria, that is what I am telling the people here," she says.

While Ms. Ghosh, who came to prominence after sustain-

ing injuries in the attack on the JNU campus in January 2020, talks against the privatisation of Coal India and other PSUs, Dipsita Dhar, another CPI(M) candidate from Bally and former JNUSU leader in Howrah, is also making the right noises.

Hindus and Muslims all feel hungry in the same manner. Hunger does not

distinguish between communities," Ms. Dhar, 27, says.

There are a number of other young candidates who have got seats - DYFI State secretary Sayandip Mitra is contesting from Kamarhati in North 24 Parganas; SFI State president Pratikur Rehman from Diamond Harbour; Saptarshi Deb (former Minister Gautam Deb's son) from Rajarhat Newtown and Shatarup Ghosh from Kasba in Kolkata.

While the young leaders are aware of the responsibility on their shoulders, some say they were not aware that they would have to contest the election till their names were announced.

Image change

CPI(M) leader and Polit Bureau member Mohd. Salim says the decision to field

young candidates was a conscious one as the critics of the party were referring to it as an "old age home."

Mr. Salim adds that new crop of leaders comes up every few years for the CPI(M) from universities and colleges.

The CPI(M) leadership maintains that along with the young faces, the party has fielded senior leaders such as Kanti Ganguly and Ashok Bhattacharya, who will content from Raidighi and Siliguri respectively. CPI (M) Legislature Party leader Sujan Chakraborty will contest from Jadavpur, while Mr. Salim will content from the Chanditala.

The Trinamool Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party leadership have dismissed the move, calling it nothing more than a "publicity stunt".

They say these young candidates would not be able to win any seats.

Paradigm shift

Political observers feel that fielding candidates in their 20s and 30s is part of the future planning of the Left parties, particularly the CPI(M).

"The new candidates have brought a paradigm shift in the way the Left, particularly the CPI(M), is campaigning with the people. This initiative, where the party has done away not only with old faces, but also old means of mass connect and allowing the new candidates and new forms of public outreach will pay dividends to the party in future," says Biswanath Chakraborty, professor of political science at Rabindra Bharati University.

Battle for Nandigram turns personal

Mamata blames BJP's Suvendu for her injury

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

As the battle for Nandigram reaches fever pitch, the attacks levelled by leaders of both the Trinamool Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party have turned personal. The constituency is going to the polls on April 1.

Trinamool chief and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who held an eight-kilometre roadshow in Nandigram on a wheelchair on Monday, blamed BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari for the attack that left her injured.

"The (attack) could not have happened without his involvement. Not a single person from Nandigram was involved - all were outsiders," Ms. Banerjee said. She was injured on March 10 while campaigning in Nandigram, which has forced her to use a wheelchair.

'Wrong person'

Addressing the gathering after the roadshow from Reypara Khudiram More to Thakur Chowk, Ms. Banerjee said she had put her trust in the wrong person.

"I am to be blamed. I nurtured a cobra, fed it milk. Now it is out to bite me," she said. Without naming Mr. Adhikari, Ms. Banerjee said she had made him a Minister and given portfolios, including irrigation, environment and forests and transport.

"What did I not give you," she asked.

She also alleged that the BJP was attempting to incite communal riots in Nandigram, and that outsiders in police uniform were waiting



Tight contest: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee addressing an election campaign in Nandigram on Monday. ■ PTI

in the constituency to create trouble on polling day.

However, Ms. Banerjee also exuded confidence and said the people of Nandigram were strong enough to resist any attempt to loot votes.

Former Trinamool leader and BJP candidate for Nandigram, Suvendu Adhikari, alleged that Ms. Banerjee only visited Nandigram during elections.

In a tit-for-tat campaign, while the Chief Minister addressed four public meetings, Mr. Adhikari went one up with five meetings.

Old wounds exposed

At a public meeting on Sunday, Ms. Banerjee had ac-

cused both Mr. Adhikari and his father (Sisir Adhikari) of allowing the police to enter Nandigram in 2007.

She had accused the duo of allowing "police wearing slippers" to enter the village. 14 villagers were killed in police firing and subsequent violence when the police opened fire at farmers protesting against land acquisition on March 14, 2007.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) had reacted strongly to these developments with Ms. Banerjee accusing her former colleagues of helping the police. The CPI(M) leadership said the conspiracy relating to Nandigram violence has been exposed.

The pain & wounds of her family will haunt Mamata Didi for long, Bengal will

Death of elderly woman after assault sparks row

BJP blames Trinamool for attack in Feb.

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

Politics has erupted over the death of an 82-year-old woman in the Nimta area of West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district, with the BJP leadership alleging that assault by Trinamool Congress supporters resulted in her death.

The woman, Shova Majumdar, and her son, Gopal, were allegedly assaulted by Trinamool supporters on February 27 in the North Dum Dum area, under the Nimta police station jurisdiction. Photographs of the elderly woman with injuries on her face had led to furore on social media.

She was admitted to hospital a few days ago.

Mr. Majumdar had said his mother was assaulted by Trinamool goons but refused to identify those behind the attack.

BJP workers on Monday staged a protest in front of the Nimta police station and burnt tyres on M.B. Road.

Shah tweets

Through the day, senior BJP leaders, including Union Home Minister Amit Shah, raised the issue and targeted the Trinamool over the incident. "Anguished over the demise of Bengal's daughter Shova Majumdar ji, who was brutally beaten by Trinamool goons," Mr. Shah tweeted.

"The pain & wounds of her family will haunt Mamata Didi for long, Bengal will

fight for a violence-free tomorrow, Bengal will fight for a safer state for our sisters & mothers," he added.

BJP president J.P. Nadda also took to social media and said "her sacrifice will be remembered forever. She was also mother of Bengal, daughter of Bengal. The BJP always fights for security of mothers and daughters".

Adding to the controversy, the death certificate of Ms. Majumdar was signed by BJP candidate Archana Majumdar, who is also a medical practitioner.

Trinamool counters

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee responded to the incident and the BJP's allegations by saying that any death is unfortunate.

However, she added that while the Home Minister is pointing at incidents in West Bengal, he has "put a leucoplast [band aid] when incidents happen in Uttar Pradesh's Hathras". Senior Trinamool leaders also questioned the narrative spread by the BJP.

"The death of Shova Majumdar is a tragedy. What is totally unfortunate though is the Home Min peddling a narrative when the incident is under investigation. He heads a Police Force & multiple Central Agencies. Shouldn't he show some respect to the investigative process of India?" Trinamool leader and Rajya Sabha MP Derek O'Brien said on social media.

Bombay High Court mulls special masks for disabled

Plea calls for transparency in use and collection of fines



A vendor selling gloves and face masks in Vijayawada. Photo is for representational purpose.

SONAM SAIGAL
MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court recently remarked that with the coronavirus pandemic here to stay, how will those with hearing and speech disability be recognised with their masks.

On March 24, a division bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice G.S. Kulikarni was hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) petition filed by Lokshahivadi Balasabha Sarode Smriti Prabodhan Upakram in Pune through advocate Ajinkya Udane. The petition said since wearing masks had been made mandatory and fines were being imposed on those violating the order, "the PIL requests for a uniformity of fines, accountability and transparency in the use of such collected funds".

The petitioners also sought that the government provide masks free of cost to those who cannot afford to buy them and said, "the huge amounts collected by [way of fines] shall be utilised in providing stickers for the deaf and mute people on their masks so to help them in better communication and identification".

Advocate Asim Sarode also appearing for the NGO informed the court that various authorities like the police, municipal corporation, nagar parishad and even solid waste management committees are collecting fines ranging from ₹100 to ₹1,000 and crores of rupees have been collected in the form of fines. He urged the bench to pass a direction for all government authorities to submit before

the court the total amount collected as fines.

He said when the authorities impose fines on people for not wearing masks at public places they should also immediately provide them with masks. Citing the seminal book *Everybody loves good drought* by renowned journalist P. Sainath, Mr. Sarode said the government seems to be exploiting the pandemic situation to mint money. The court then remarked, "The pandemic is here to stay. We have completely forgotten that there should be some special mask for these persons. How would you otherwise recognise them?"

The court directed the State government to file its reply in the plea and posted the matter to be heard next week.

U.S. opposes Rana plea to delay extradition process

Request has no merit, Assistant U.S. State Attorney tells court

VIIJITA SINGH

NEW DELHI

The U.S. government has opposed yet another plea by Tahawwur Rana, key accused in the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack, to file additional reply in a U.S. court that would delay the extradition proceedings slated to begin on April 22.

Rana is wanted by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in the 2008 terror attack case that claimed 166 lives, including six Americans.

Rana, who was lodged in a U.S. prison, was released in June last year after an Illinois court commuted his jail sentence (scheduled to get over in September 2021) after he tested positive for COVID-19.

Los Angles prison
Following his release he was provisionally arrested by the federal police in the wake of the pending extradition re-

quest from India and is currently lodged in a Los Angeles prison. Assistant U.S. State Attorney John J. Lulejian submitted before a court in Los Angeles that "Rana's assertion that he needs a sur-reply (additional reply) is without merit".

"Rana already had the opportunity to address, and did address, Article 6 in his opposition brief. Indeed, Rana's belief that the United States "put the issue in play"

HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE DEPARTMENT ENGINEERING WING

(Office of the Engineer-in-Chief, Arogya Soudha, 3rd floor, Leprosy Hospital Premises, 1st Cross, Magadi Road, Bengaluru-560023 Telephone No.080-29557023 E-mail:cekhssdrp@gmail.com & cekhssdrp-hfw@karnataka.gov.in)

No: HFWD/EW/EIC/TA-3/AE-6/Bng Central College-TND/2020-21/4187 Date:26.03.2021

TENDER NOTIFICATION

The Engineer-in-Chief, HFWD, Engineering Wing, Bengaluru invites tender from eligible Class-I contractors and above registered in KPWD in two tender document system in e-procurement for the following work.

Sl. No	Description of work	Approximate Tender value (Rs.lakhs)	Stipulated period for Completion (including monsoon)
1	Redevelopment of Bengaluru Central University campus at Bengaluru	12000.00	24 Months

Calendar of Events: (1) Last date for receipt of tenders : 28.04.2021 upto 16.00 hrs. (2) Date of Opening of Tenders (Technical Bids): 30.04.2021 at 16.00 hrs.

The tender details can be downloaded from the e-Procurement platform. Tenders shall be submitted electronically at www.eproc.karnataka.gov.in and Earnest Money Deposit and Tender Processing Fee shall also be paid electronically. Interested eligible contractors shall register on the e-Procurement platform to participate in this tender.

NOTE: 1. All the rights are reserved by the under signed for postponement or cancellation of entire tender process, rejection of bids / individual bid etc., without assigning any reason. 2. Henceforth, any changes in the schedule / contents will not be published through news papers and further changes will be updated only on e-procurement portal.

Sd/-
Engineer-in-Chief,
H&FWD, Engineering Wing,
Bengaluru.

SARDAR VALLABHBHAI PATEL
International School of Textiles & Management
Autonomous Institute, Ministry of Textiles, Government of India
1483, Avinashi Road, Pelemedu, Coimbatore - 641004 Ph : 0422 - 2571675, 2592205
Advt. No.: SVPSTM/Rec./2021/01 Date 17.03.2021

Applications are invited for the following posts on ad-hoc basis.

SI.No. Name of the Post Specialization No. of Post

1 Assistant Professor Textiles/Apparel

IN BRIEF



Ship crew tests positive for COVID-19 at Paradip

BHUBANESWAR

Fourteen crew members of a cargo ship, which was to transport coal from Paradip Port, have tested positive for COVID-19. The port authorities said the members of the ship have not had any interaction with the local population. "Of the 28 members, 14 were found to be infected with coronavirus. They were shifted to Bhubaneswar for treatment and quarantined. The rest of the crew were isolated in the ship," said Rajendra Panigrahi, a port doctor. Odisha reported 208 new COVID-19 cases and one death on Monday.

Western Odisha district of Nuapada reported the most cases at 36, followed by Khordha with 33.

U.K. variant not more contagious: study

Tests at the National Institute for Virology in Pune did not find a higher transmissibility

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

The UK variant (B.1.1.7) of the coronavirus did not appear to be more transmissible than the variant of the virus most common in India, according to a study by scientists at the National Institute of Virology, Pune.

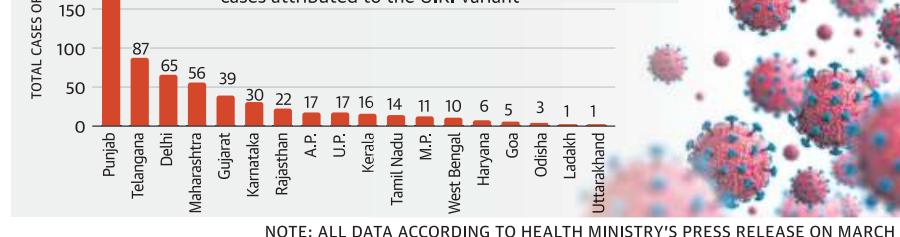
The study was based on tests on Syrian hamsters, a commonly employed laboratory animal, and is yet to be formally peer-reviewed.

B.1.1.7, the variant of the coronavirus has mutations that enable it to spread more readily among people and was linked to a sharp spike in cases in the United Kingdom last December. Some vaccine trials have also shown reduced efficacy in those affected with the variant.

India has registered 771 cases of the three variants of concern reported interna-

Variant of concern | As many as 336 COVID-19 cases of the U.K. variant have been recorded in Punjab, the highest in the country. With 87 such cases, Telangana is a distant second

Five States – Punjab, Telangana, Delhi, Maharashtra and Gujarat have accounted for nearly 80% of the cases attributed to the U.K. variant



NOTE: ALL DATA ACCORDING TO HEALTH MINISTRY'S PRESS RELEASE ON MARCH 24

tionally. Of these 736 have been from B.1.1.7.

Health authorities in Punjab said about 80% of the cases of recent tranche of coronavirus positive samples were of the B.1.1.7 variety and, therefore, were likely linked to the spurt in the State.

To establish how quickly the strain spread, NIV sci-

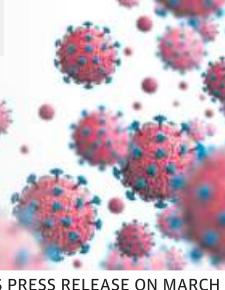
tists infected two groups of nine hamsters, with one group given the B.1.1.7 and the other the dominant SARS-CoV-2 strain in India. The latter is characterised by a mutation called D614G.

Small groups

The hamsters were further broken into smaller groups and compared with other

sets of hamsters to see if those inoculated with the variants spread their germs. This was done by housing the hamsters in close proximity in cages and analysing virus levels in the faeces.

To study the spread of viruses via 'fomites' (surfaces), viral particles on the surfaces that the hamsters had been in contact with such as



beddings, water nozzle, cage surfaces, were also evaluated.

"The day-wise comparison of the body weight loss and the viral shedding pattern in contact hamsters by both variants... did not show any statistical significance. Also the comparison of different routes of transmission by each variant... also did not show any statistical significance," the authors reported.

In an earlier study, the NIV scientists had reported that hamsters with the B.1.1.7 shed more virus particles as determined from measuring virus samples in their nasal fluids.

"The study demonstrated comparable transmission efficiency of both UK and D614G variants of SARS-CoV-2 in Syrian hamsters," the more recent study said.

32 students in Odisha college test positive

STAFF REPORTER
BHUBANESWAR

As many as 32 students and employees of a college in Bhawanipatna in Odisha tested positive for COVID-19 on Monday.

"After a person from the private college tested positive, we started contact tracing. As many as 32 students and employees have been found infected by the virus. The testing is going on," Chief District Medical Officer of Kalahandi Pratap Kumar Behera told *The Hindu* over phone.

Dr. Behera said one person in Kendriya Vidyalaya in Bhawanipatna also tested positive.



High alert: A patrol team of Assam Rifles near the Myanmar border in Mizoram. • DINAKAR PERI

Manipur against camps for those from Myanmar

Mizoram checking for illegal crossings

DINAKAR PERI
AIZAWL

Given the instances of Myanmar nationals trying to enter India through the border as a "fallout of the events taking place" there, the Manipur government has directed officials that the district administration or civil society organisations should not open any camps for food and shelter and those seeking refuge should be "politely turned away."

"In case of grievous injuries, medical attention may be provided on humanitarian considerations. People trying to enter, seek refuge should be politely turned away," M. Gyan Prakash, Special Secretary (Home), Manipur, said in a March 26 letter to Deputy Commissioners of Chandel, Tengnoupal, Kamjong and Ukhru.

Women have made a huge difference in increasing the recovery of narcotics and contraband as they have been able to check women carrying narcotics and contraband, an official on the ground said.

"I have completed four years of service. Earlier, I was deployed in Nagaland and Jammu and Kashmir, and took part in counter-insurgency operations," said riflewoman Jagriti.

Women soldiers
Riflewoman Jagriti, dressed in combat uniform and holding an AK-47, is among several women soldiers deployed with 3 Assam Rifles in Mizoram on the Myanmar border.

With increasing smuggling and illegal crossings along the border, Assam Rifles, the designated border guarding force here, is looking to increase the number of women riflemen in service.

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"I have completed four years of service. Earlier, I was deployed in Nagaland and Jammu and Kashmir, and took part in counter-insurgency operations," said riflewoman Jagriti.

BMC to release asymptomatic COVID-19 patients

Move will ensure space to those with serious symptoms; 1.5 lakh injections of Remdesivir to be procured

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI
As COVID-19 cases are rising rapidly in Mumbai, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Monday decided to discharge asymptomatic COVID-19 patients to vacate beds for patients with more serious symptoms.

The civic body has also decided to order 1.5 lakh injections of antiviral drug Remdesivir and other medical equipment to avoid potential shortage of medicines at hospitals, a senior official said. In its order, the BMC said no asymptomatic patient without comorbidities will be allotted a bed in any public or private hospital.

It described the "needy"

patient as the one with "mild or serious symptoms or a patient with comorbidities".

BMC Commissioner I.S. Chahal has empowered assistant commissioners to take decisions at the ward level and stressed activation of war rooms at the ward level for better management of available beds, ICU beds, ventilators among others, as per the order. Mr. Chahal said all admissions should be routed through the ward level war rooms to avoid chaos experienced during the first wave of coronavirus when several patients ran from the pillar to post to get a bed.

The civic chief also pointed out that direct admission in any COVID Care Centre or

private hospitals will not be permitted without intimation to the ward war room.

"No asymptomatic COVID-19 positive patient without any co-morbidities will be allotted COVID bed in any public/private hospital to ensure prompt availability of beds to the needy. Urgently discharge any asymptomatic COVID positive patients admitted to any COVID hospital to vacate the beds," he said.

Beds to be reserved

The order said 80% of total beds and 100% of ICU beds in private hospitals shall be reserved for allotment through the ward war rooms for COVID-19 patients.

"No direct admissions on

these reserved beds to be taken by hospitals," the order said. Mr. Chahal directed all hospitals in the city to charge patients as per the rates notified by the Maharashtra government. "All the bills will be audited by the municipal auditors," the commissioner said.

Mr. Chahal also directed officials to immediately assess the structural stability and fire audit of all COVID facilities. As on March 25, there are 8,466 non-ICU beds and 931 ICU beds being operationalised at the hospitals run by the government and the BMC, the order said.

A senior official said a sizeable number of new cases are being reported from

high-rise buildings. "We are worried due to the rising number of COVID-19 cases in the city. To treat positive patients, we need to buy as many 1.5 lakh vials of Remdesivir injection so that we can cover maximum patients. "We want to avoid any shortage of medicines by hospitals or treatment centres," said Suresh Kakani, additional municipal commissioner (health), BMC.

In a meeting held with Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday, principal secretary to State Health Department Dr. Pradeep Vyas had predicted a "tremendous stress" on the availability of beds, oxygen supply, and ventilators.

"After a person from the private college tested positive, we started contact tracing. As many as 32 students and employees have been found infected by the virus. The testing is going on," Chief District Medical Officer of Kalahandi Pratap Kumar Behera told *The Hindu* over phone.

Dr. Behera said one person in Kendriya Vidyalaya in Bhawanipatna also tested positive.

SC lays down timeline for accident information reports

They are to be sent by the police within 48 hours of accident

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has directed police stations to send accident information reports to Motor Accident Claims Tribunals and insurers within 48 hours of a road accident.

"The jurisdictional police station shall report the accident under Section 158(6) of the Motor Vehicle Act (Section 159 post 2019 amendment) to the tribunal and insurer within first 48 hours either over email or a dedicated website," the Supreme Court directed.

This is part of a set of eight directions issued by the court to prevent delays in disbursement of compensations to victims. These directions should be uniformly practised by the police, motor accident claims tribu-

nals and insurers across the country.

A Bench of Justices S.K. Kaul and R. Subhash Reddy ordered the Centre to launch a national online platform, which could be operated and accessed across the country for submission of accident reports, claims and responses to claims, etc. This would end the distress felt by victims

when accidents happened in places other than their native State.

The recent order came on a suggestion from Narasimha Vijayaraghavan and advocate Vipin Nair, who highlighted the independent online platforms already in existence in Tamil Nadu and Delhi for the purpose.

However, the court said every State having its own online system would hamper efficient adjudication of claims.

Additional Solicitor General Jayant Sud, for the Centre, said the government would discuss and report back to the court a deadline for the implementation of the national online platform.

The court scheduled a hearing on May 4 for passing further directions in this regard.

Playing it safe



Holi revelry: People wearing protective suits to prevent against the spread of COVID-19 celebrating Holi, the festival of colours, at a club in Kolkata on Monday. • AFP

Rare Marathi films make way to NFAI vaults

Tai Teleen (1953) and *Pavanakathcha Dhondi* (1966) were considered lost

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

In a major acquisition of vernacular cinema classics, the vaults of the city-based National Film Archive of India (NFAI) have added 89 film prints, a significant number of them from the 'Golden Age' of Marathi cinema.

The highlight of this collection is two rare Marathi films - the historical *Tai Teleen* (1953) and *Pavanakathcha Dhondi* (1966) which were considered to be hitherto lost, informed Prakash Magdum, Director, NFAI.

Tai Teleen, directed by K.P. Bhave, starred renowned artistes like Shanta Apte, Sudha Apte, Nalini Borkar and Zuzarrao Pawar, while

Pavanakathcha Dhondi, directed by Anant Thakur had bagged the 'Best Marathi Film' at the 1966 National Film awards. Thakur had earlier directed the Raj Kapoor starrer *Chori* in 1956 and this was his first film in Marathi," informed Mr. Magdum.

Siblings on screen
Pavanakathcha Dhondi was notable for being produced by Usha Mangeshkar and had starred renowned Marathi stars Jayashree Gadkar, along with brothers Chandrakant and Suryakant, who played on-screen brothers in a rare instance.

The film was based on the popular novel by eminent litterateur G.N. Dandekar and the music was

starring D. Malavankar and Vishnupant Jog was shot at the iconic Prabhav Studio in Pune. The prints, which are in the 16mm and 35mm format, also contain some important Hindi films. "The collection includes 23 black-and-white Hindi films, a number of which are aesthetically and culturally significant. These include *Shakti Samanta's Naughty Boy* (1962) with Kishore Kumar as the Hero, Mohan Kumar's *Aman* (1967), which features rare cameo appearances by Ghazal maestro Jagit Singh and philosopher Bertrand Russell. Other notable titles include *Guest House* (1959) by Ravindra Dave and *Taj Mahal* (1963) by M. Sadiq," said Mr. Magdum.

composed by Hridayanath Mangeshkar.

Another highlight of the collection is a famous Ram Gopal directed film, *Dev Pava* (1950). The film

expressed inability to pay, the official even agreed to take it in two instalments.

When Mr. Bhave

CBI books tax official for seeking bribe

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has booked a Superintendent of the Central Excise & Central Tax in Bengaluru for allegedly demanding money from a content provider for television serials to waive the tax on his earnings and the penalty.

The complainant, Jagdish Subray Bhave, who earns ₹5,000 to ₹15,000 per episode, alleged that Superintendent of Central Excise and Central Tax (Goods & Services Tax), Jitendra K. Dagur demanded ₹50,000 as bribe to waive ₹150,000 accrued as tax and penalty.

When Mr. Bhave

expressed inability to pay, the official even agreed to take it in two instalments.

There was a heated ex-

Pregnant woman without helmet made to walk

Policewoman now under suspension

STAFF REPORTER
BHUBANESWAR

A police inspector in Odisha's Mayurbhanj district was placed under suspension for making a pregnant woman walk 3 km in scorching heat for not wearing a helmet and the penalty.

Ship that blocked Suez Canal finally free

Ever Given headed toward the Great Bitter Lake for inspection; 367 vessels wait to pass via waterway

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SUEZ

Salvage teams on Monday freed a colossal container ship stuck for nearly a week in the Suez Canal, ending a crisis that had clogged one of the world's most vital waterways and halted billions of dollars a day in maritime commerce.

Helped by the high tide, a flotilla of tugboats wrenched the bulbous bow of the skyscraper-sized *M.V. Ever Given* from the canal's sandy bank, where it had been lodged since March 23.

The tugs blared their horns in jubilation as they guided the *Ever Given* through the water after days of futility that had captivated the world, drawing scrutiny and social media mockery.



Free passage: *Ever Given* floating in Suez Canal on Monday for the first time in almost a week. ■ REUTERS

The giant vessel headed toward the Great Bitter Lake, a wide stretch of water halfway between the north and south ends of the canal, where it will be inspected, said Evergreen Marine

Corp., a major Taiwan-based shipping company that operates the ship.

"We pulled it off!" said Peter Berdowski, CEO of Boskalis, the salvage firm hired to extract the *Ever Given*, in a

statement. "I am excited to announce that our team of experts, working in close collaboration with the Suez Canal Authority, successfully refloated the *Ever Given*... thereby making free passage through the Suez Canal possible again."

Buffeted by a sandstorm, the *Ever Given* had crashed into a bank of a single-lane stretch of the canal, about 6 km north of the southern entrance. That created a massive traffic jam that held up \$9 billion a day in global trade and strained supply chains already burdened by the coronavirus pandemic.

At least 367 vessels, carrying everything from crude oil to cattle, are backed up as they wait to traverse the canal. Dozens of others have

taken the long, alternate route around the Cape of Good Hope at Africa's southern tip – a 5,000-km detour that costs ships hundreds of thousands of dollars in fuel and other costs.

End to crisis

Egypt, which considers the canal a source of national pride and crucial revenue, already has lost over \$95 million in tolls, according to the data firm Refinitiv. Even as salvage work continued, President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi, who for days was silent about the crisis, praised Monday's events.

"Egyptians have succeeded in ending the crisis," he wrote on Facebook, "despite the massive technical complexity."

Myanmar bloodshed absolutely outrageous: Biden

At least 107 people were killed on Saturday, and another 13 on Sunday

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

YANGON

U.S. President Joe Biden led global condemnation of an "absolutely outrageous" crackdown by Myanmar's junta that killed more than 100 people over the weekend, as funerals were held Monday for the victims.

Soldiers and police have killed hundreds in a brutal campaign against mass anti-coup protests demanding a restoration of democracy and the release of detained civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The death toll from crack-



Joe Biden

downs since the February 1 coup has climbed to at least 459, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) monitoring group.

AAPP said a further 13 pe-

Protesters take to streets after deadliest weekend

YANGON

Protesters and mourners took to the streets of Myanmar on Monday after the deadliest weekend since the coup. At least 107 people, including seven children, were killed on Saturday, the UN said, as the regime staged a major show of might for Armed Forces Day – an annual parade showcasing military prowess. AFP

ople were killed on Sunday. Despite the weekend violence, protesters turned out at dawn in Kachin state, while students hit the streets in Monywa in the northwest and Mawlamyin city in Mon

state, according to local media.

Hundreds also paraded through the town of Plate, in Mandalay region, with banners saying: "The people will never be defeated".

Monday saw funerals for some of those killed over the weekend.

In Yangon, a one-year-old girl is recovering from surgery after being shot in the eye with a rubber bullet while playing near her house. Meanwhile, an estimated 3,000 people fled through the jungle to seek safety across the border in Thailand on Sunday evening following targeted aerial assaults in Karen state.

'Won't allow other countries to push for separation'

Gotabaya says country's sovereignty would not be betrayed

MEERA SRINIVASAN

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka will not allow other countries to achieve their geopolitical needs by introducing "separatism under the guise of power devolution" in the island nation, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said.

"The government does not wish to be associated with the power struggles in the Indian Ocean region by the global giants," Mr. Rajapaksa said, adding that the sovereignty of Sri Lanka would not be betrayed, a report in the state-run *Daily News* said on Monday.

Speaking at a 'Discussion with the Village' event in the southern Matara district on Saturday, he appeared to be responding to India's intervention at the UN Human Rights Council last week.

Although India abstained from voting, it supported the international community's call in the resolution for devolving political authority, holding of elections to provincial councils and implementation of the 13th Amendment that guarantees a measure of power devolution to the provinces.

Greater scrutiny

The Council adopted the resolution – with 22 countries backing it – that called for greater scrutiny of human rights in the country, including senior Ministers, for the abolition of the provincial council system and the 13th Amendment.



Gotabaya Rajapaksa

Less than a fortnight before the vote on the Sri Lanka resolution in Geneva, amid Colombo's hectic diplomatic outreach seeking support from members, Mr. Rajapaksa "instructed the relevant parties to take steps to expedite the provincial council elections by either withdrawing the Provincial Council Amendment Bill or rectifying its anomalies," a statement issued by the Presidential Media division said on March 13.

Provincial elections

According to local media reports, the holding of provincial council elections is likely to be discussed in Monday's [March 29] weekly Cabinet meeting.

After being elected President in November 2019, Mr. Rajapaksa stated that he would focus more on development rather than devolution. In an interview to *The Hindu* on November 30, 2019, during his first visit to New Delhi after assuming office, Mr. Rajapaksa said the previous push for "devolution, devolution, devolution" had not changed the situation in Sri Lanka.

"We will face the Geneva challenge without fear. We will never succumb to pressures. We are a free nation. We will not be a victim of big power rivalry in the Indian Ocean," the President said, a week after the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution.

The statement assumes significance in the wake of persisting calls from some within his government, including senior Ministers, for the abolition of the provincial council system and the 13th Amendment.

U.S. not yet ready to lift trade tariffs on China, says Tai

+ Duties aimed to remedy unbalanced, unfair trade situation

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden's new trade negotiator has said the United States is not yet ready to lift tariffs on Chinese imports, but could be open to talks with Beijing.

U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai, whose appointment was confirmed earlier this month, told *The Wall Street Journal* she understood the levies were hitting some American companies and consumers, but they can also protect

businesses.

In January 2020, then-president Donald Trump signed an accord between Beijing and Washington after a bruising trade battle that saw tariffs imposed by both sides.

"I have heard people say, 'Please just take these tariffs off,'" the 47-year-old Ms. Tai told the *WSJ* in an interview published on Sunday.

But the former trade lawyer – whose parents were born in China – warned that suddenly axing the levies

could harm the U.S. economy unless a policy reversal is "communicated in a way so that the actors in the economy can make adjustments."

She said it was essential for "companies, traders, manufacturers or their workers" to be able to plan for the future.

Ms. Tai told the *Journal* that while she recognised the tariffs were taking a toll on some U.S. businesses, they had been imposed "to remedy an unbalanced and unfair trade situation."

The comments from Beijing came in response to Pakistan President Arif Alvi last week describing China as the country's 'closest' friend, and in the wake of recent developments on the India-Pakistan front following the ceasefire agreement.

"China cherishes its all-

weather strategic partnership of cooperation with Pakistan," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said. "We are ready to take the 70th anniversary of our diplomatic ties as an opportunity to work together in the fight against COVID-19, carry forward our traditional friendship, deepen all-round cooperation, and build an even closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future for the new era."

Mr. Zhao noted that President Alvi "stressed in his speech that Pakistan will focus on development, and remain committed to peaceful coexistence with the outside world" and "called on world leaders, especially South Asian leaders, to discard hatred, prejudice and religious extremism, and jointly safeguard regional peace and prosperity."



Zhao Lijian

coexistence with the outside world" and "called on world leaders, especially South Asian leaders, to discard

China, he said, "supports Pakistan's foreign policy of peace and good-neighbourliness as well as its commitment to advancing the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan". "China is pleased with Pakistan's recent positive interactions with India," he said. "We are ready to work with Pakistan, and continue to inject positive energy into regional peace, stability and development."

Vaccine sought

In a telephone call last week, Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi

sought continued Chinese support in supplying vaccines for Pakistan. His counterpart Wang Yi said China would "continue to prioritise China's vaccine assistance and export" for the country.

"The friendship between China and Pakistan has stood the test of time, and the two countries carry forward the good tradition of helping each other in times of difficulty," Mr. Wang said, adding that "to demonstrate the ironclad friendship between the two countries, China has decided to provide Pakistan with another batch of vaccines".

WHO report says animals are likely source of COVID-19

It looked at four scenarios of the virus' entry into humans

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BEIJING

A joint WHO-China study on the origins of COVID-19 says that transmission of the virus from bats to humans through another animal is the most likely scenario and that a lab leak is "extremely unlikely," according to a draft copy obtained by The Associated Press.

The findings offer little new insight into how the virus first emerged. But it does provide more detail on the reasoning behind the researchers' conclusions. The team proposed further research in every area except the lab leak hypothesis.

WHO visit to Wuhan

The report, which is expected to be made public on Tuesday, is being closely watched since discovering the origins of the virus could help scientists prevent future pandemics – but it's also extremely sensitive since China bristles at any suggestion that it is to blame for the current one. Repeated delays in the report's release have raised questions about whether the Chinese side was trying to skew its conclusions.

The report is based largely



Vendors waiting for customers at a stall selling frozen meat and seafood in Beijing, in this file photo. ■ AFP

ly on a visit by a WHO team of international experts to Wuhan, the Chinese city where COVID-19 was first detected. The mission was never meant to identify the exact natural source of the virus, an endeavour that typically takes years. For instance, more than 40 years of study has still failed to pinpoint the exact species of bat that are the natural reservoir of Ebola.

In the draft, the researchers listed four scenarios in order of likelihood for the emergence of the new coronavirus. Topping the list was transmission from bats through another animal, which they said was likely very likely. They evaluated direct spread from bats to humans as likely, and said that spread to humans from the packaging of "cold-

chain" food products was possible but not likely.

That last possibility was previously dismissed by the WHO and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control

No Oscars in Hong Kong for first time since 1969

It won't be broadcast here next month

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

HONG KONG

The Oscars will not be shown in Hong Kong for the first time in more than half a century, its local broadcaster confirmed on Monday, as doubts remained over whether Hollywood's top awards will air in mainland China.

The ceremony has been broadcast in Hong Kong every year since 1969 by free-to-air TVB on its English language channel.

But no channel will carry next month's awards.

"It was purely a commercial decision that we decided not to pursue the Oscars this year," a TVB spokesperson said.

China's censor

The decision comes after Bloomberg News reported earlier this month that China's Communist Party propaganda department has ordered its state-controlled media to play down the awards and not show the ceremony live.

The cause is believed to be the nomination of *Do Not Split*, a short documentary on Hong Kong's pro-democracy protests, as well as the four nods for Chinese-born U.S. director Chloe Zhao for *Nomadland*.

State media have since run articles critical of the documentary while nationalists online have pounced on Ms. Zhao over comments she made years back that were perceived as being critical of China.

State broadcaster CCTV, which has aired previous Oscar ceremonies, has yet to confirm if it will show this year's event.

All media is strictly censored in mainland China.

Semi-autonomous Hong Kong maintains more freedoms under a model subbed "One country, two systems". But the atmosphere is changing quickly.

After huge and often violent democracy protests in 2019, Beijing has moved to stamp out opposition, including imposing a sweeping national security law on the city.

The pro-democracy opposition has been flattened, but the law has also seeped into the city's cultural scene.

In recent weeks, cinemas have pulled a protest documentary, a university cancelled a press photography exhibition while a soon-to-open contemporary art museum has said it will allow security officials to vet its collection.

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Visit www.etenders.kerala.gov.in & www.kseb.in Ref. PR/MC1/E282/E-Tender/2021			



Siddharth Mittal

Biocon ties with Brazil's Libbs for generic drugs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD

Biopharmaceutical major Biocon on Monday said wholly owned subsidiary Biocon Pharma has formed a partnership with Brazilian firm Libbs Farmaceutica to unveil generic drugs in Brazil, the world's sixth-most populous country.

As part of the out-licensing deal, the Biocon arm will be responsible for drug development and manufacturing, while Libbs will leverage its expertise and reach in Brazil to import, distribute and market, subject to approvals from the Brazilian health regulator ANVISA.

The partnership, which marks the entry of Biocon's generic formulations into Latin America, sought to build upon a successful association with Libbs that began in 2017 to introduce biosimilar Trastuzumab in Brazil, a release from Biocon said.

Biocon CEO and MD Siddharth Mittal said "Expanding our association with Libbs to our generic formulations will help us establish a firm footing in Latin America, starting with Brazil."

The partnership builds on Biocon's ability to forward integrate its portfolio of complex and differentiated APIs into finished dosages, said Abhijit Zutshi, commercial head-Global Generics.

T.N.'s capex push bolsters growth hopes

Revised estimates 8.7% higher than budgeted; 'surprising positive', says research firm Ind-Ra

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The higher-than-budgeted capital expenditure undertaken in Tamil Nadu over 2020-21, is a 'surprising' positive that will boost the State's medium-to-long-term growth prospects, India Ratings and Research has said in a report. Generally, State governments rein in capital expenditure when revenues are stressed.

Ahead of the assembly elections, the Tamil Nadu government presented a vote on account for FY22 and a full budget is expected to be presented by the newly elected government.

Revised estimates for capital expenditure this year are 8.72% higher than original Budget estimates and 58.65% higher than that incurred in 2019-20, Fitch Group-owned



Preparing for growth: State governments generally rein in capital expenditure when revenues are stressed. ■ G. MOORTHY

research firm Ind-Ra pointed out. "India Ratings (Ind-Ra) believes an increase in the capex would enhance the State's productive capacity and hence be supportive of medium- to-long-term growth prospects of the state economy," it said.

While Tamil Nadu (T.N.) is expected to record the high-

est fiscal deficit in this millennium as per the revised estimates for FY21 presented in the assembly, Ind-Ra has stressed that almost two-thirds of this slippage is driven by pandemic- and lockdown-induced revenue shortfalls without a commensurate reduction in revenue expenditure. This, it

said, was in line with trends in other States and at the national level.

"The fiscal deficit increased sharply to 5.4% of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) in FY21 against the budget estimate of 2.4% (from 3.2% in the previous year). A notable shortfall in revenue receipts compared with FY21 (BE) contributed nearly 66% of the slippage in fiscal deficit.

The revenue account, which was consistently in deficit since 2013-14, clocked a considerably higher deficit of 3.4% this year than the budgeted 0.5% of GSDP (from 1.9% a year earlier)," the Ind-Ra report noted.

The State has budgeted a revenue deficit of 1.9% of GSDP and a fiscal deficit of 3.9% of GSDP in 2021-22, but these numbers may change

after the formation of the next government.

'Lower share for State'

The report also flagged the marginally lower share of the divisible pool of taxes for the State affecting revenue flows, with shortfall in the State's own tax revenue accounting for nearly 40% of the fiscal deficit slippage, followed by State's share in central taxes which accounted for 16.63%

of the slippage.

"TN is one of the eight States which has a lower share in the divisible pool of central taxes as per the 15th Finance Commission (FC) award. The State's share in central taxes reduced to 4.08% in the 15th FC award period from 4.10% in the 14th FC award period of 2015-16 to 2019-20," it explained.

NINL draws multiple EoIs for privatisation

Transaction is now at second stage'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

The government has received multiple expressions of interest from bidders for privatisation of Neelachal Ispat Nigam Ltd. (NINL), DIPAM Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey said on Monday.

The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) had in January invited preliminary bids for the strategic sale of NINL. The last date for bid submission was March 29. "Multiple expressions of interest received for privatisation of Neelachal Ispat Nigam Ltd. (NINL)," Mr. Pandey tweeted.

The transaction has now moved ahead to the second stage, the DIPAM Secretary added. NINL is a joint venture of MMTC, NMDC, and OMC (20.47%) in NINL.



Tuhin Kanta Pandey

BHEL, MECON and two Odisha government-owned undertakings – OMC and IPICOL.

In January last year, the Cabinet had approved strategic disinvestment of equity shareholding of MMTC (49.78%), NMDC (10.10%), MECON (0.68%), BHEL (0.68%), IPICOL (12%) and OMC (20.47%) in NINL.

MobiKwik asserts all user, firm's data 'safe, secure'

Payments app reacts to reports of leak

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Payments app operator MobiKwik on Monday asserted that the data of its users and company was "completely safe and secure" in the wake of media reports and a flurry of social media posts on Twitter alleging that crucial know-your-customer (KYC) data had been leaked and was available for purchase online.

"Some media-crazed so-called security researchers have repeatedly attempted to present concocted files wasting precious time of our organisation as well as members of the media," MobiKwik said in a statement. "We thoroughly investigated

ed and did not find any security lapses. Our user and company data is completely safe and secure," a company spokesperson added.

On February 26, Internet security researcher Rajsheshwar Rajaharia tweeted: "Again!! 11 Crore Indian Cardholder's Cards Data Including personal details & KYC soft copy (PAN, Aadhar etc) allegedly leaked from a company's Server in India. 6 TB KYC Data and 350GB compressed mysql dump." That tweet, however, did not name any company.

On Monday, the hacker handle Elliot Alderson tweeted: "Probably the largest KYC data leak in history. Congrats MobiKwik..."

Nomura, Credit Suisse warn after Archegos share dump

Japanese, Swiss banks say they face big losses from a default

REUTERS

TOKYO/ZURICH

Nomura and Credit Suisse warned on Monday they were facing big losses after a U.S. hedge fund, named by sources as Archegos Capital Management, defaulted on margin calls, putting investors on edge about who else had been caught out.

Losses at Archegos Capital, run by former Tiger Asia manager Bill Hwang, had triggered a fire sale of stocks on Friday, a source familiar with the matter said.

Nomura said it faced a possible \$2 billion loss due to transactions with a U.S. client while Credit Suisse

said a default on margin calls by a U.S.-based fund could be "highly significant and material" to its first-quarter results.

Credit Suisse said that a fund had "defaulted on margin calls" to it and other banks, meaning they were

now in the process of exiting these positions.

Bank stocks slide

Nomura shares slid 16.3%, a record one-day drop, while Credit Suisse was down 14%, its biggest fall in a year.

Deutsche Bank was down 5% while UBS was 3.8% lower. UBS had no immediate comment on its exposure to Archegos.

Deutsche's Archegos exposure was a fraction of what others have, a source familiar with the matter said, adding that the bank had not incurred any losses and was in the process of managing its position.

Visa to allow payments using cryptocurrency

Consumer demand rising: Sheffield

REUTERS

Visa Inc said on Monday it will allow the use of the cryptocurrency USD Coin to settle transactions on its payment network, the latest sign of growing acceptance of digital currencies by the mainstream financial industry.

Tesla Inc boss Elon Musk said last week that customers can buy its electric vehicles with bitcoin, hoping to encourage more day-to-day use of the digital currency.

"We see increasing demand from consumers across the world to be able to access, hold and use digital currencies and we're seeing demand from our clients to be able to build products that provide that access for consumers," Guy Sheffield, head of crypto at Visa, said.

INTERVIEW | RAVI SUBRAMANIAN

Demand for small, medium ticket houses back, says Shriram HF CEO

'Work-from-home has spurred demand; people looking to upgrade their homes'

LALATENDU MISHRA

Shriram Housing Finance, which operates in the affordable home loan segment, is targeting a growth of more than 50% in FY22, says MD & CEO Ravi Subramanian.

Edited excerpts:

How will the housing finance sector benefit from the Union Budget's provisions?

■ The government continues to be focussed on its agenda of 'Housing for All'. This Budget announced the extension of PMAY (Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana) benefits. The emphasis on this segment is clear with the affordable housing rental programmes. It's good to see that there is a clear plan for ensuring benefits to the last consumer.

There are also some changes at the sector level which are worth mentioning. One good change is that AIFs are now permitted to buy NPAs. This was earlier restricted to only ARCs. With AIFs entering this space, it brings in some competition. This is likely to expand the market.

From a pure housing market perspective, a lot of things have changed over the last 3-5 months and demand for small and medium ticket houses is coming back. Also, work from home has pushed the demand in mini-metros, even in metros people are upgrading their homes. We expect this demand to continue in the new year as well.

What is the growth you are expecting?

■ If you look at our home loan book, we are looking at a growth of around 50-60% next year. Our numbers this year, despite the three months of COVID, will be about 60% more than last

year. So effectively, we would double our volumes in FY22 when compared to FY20. We are in a strong growth trajectory, and we have made adequate arrangements, both financially and operationally, to manage this growth efficiently.

Where do you stand vis-a-vis larger peers?

■ We operate in the affordable housing finance segment. Our AUM is ₹3,500 crore and we have grown by about roughly 50% CAGR over the last two years. We have identified 6 States as our core markets, where we would build significantly deep-rooted distribution networks.

Apart from this, we would continue to have operations in major cities of another 3-4 States. Our focus is to have a well-entrenched network across the South and West.

In the Southern states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka, we focus on affordable housing. Shriram Group has a large customer base across various loans products. Shriram is a very strong brand in these States and we co-exist with other businesses of the group.

In the Western region which is largely Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan, we focus on the mid-income segment. Over here, our focus is to build and grow the Shriram brand.

Our core segment continues to be self-employed customers where we use internal credit tools to assess the customer and extend credit accordingly.

Overall, we operate in a diversified geo-segment for sourcing loans. And since we are working across segments spanning from affordable to the low-to-mid income category, we are able to maintain an average ticket size of ₹15 lakh.

Efficiency of scale in these markets. This minor restraint helped us increase our domination in the targeted markets.

Secondly, we brought in a management team, which will actually take the business from here to ₹10,000-15,000 crore. Our new team is capable of scaling our current business to 5X or 6X of the size.

Further, we have moved a lot of our customer service to the digital model. We have launched an app which assists the customer with any information he may need on his loan, including downloading essential documents or making EMI payment.

What is your overall growth plan?

■ We will end this year at ₹3,700 crore, which is roughly 60% more than last year's AUM. Our growth plan on the AUM side is to get to ₹6,000 crore next year and ₹10,000 crore the year after.

We intend to grow from 70-plus branches to around 175 branches by March 2022.

We would continue to enhance our distribution in our focused markets.

We will go deeper in the States and dominate the States of the South – Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu, and also the States of Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Gujarat.

In the coming couple of quarters, we may see infusion of growth capital in the range of ₹300-400 crore in SHFL. Our present net worth is about ₹600 crore, and in another two quarters we will reach an optimal leverage level.

So, we will be raising capital in the near future and it is likely to bring in the parent.

Start-ups to see upswing by mid-2021

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

While the pandemic's impact on the start-up segment was "debilitating" with about 15% temporarily shutting shop, Wadhawan Foundation – a not-for-profit group that works with start-ups in 20 countries – said it expected unparalleled growth going forward, in sectors such as healthcare, online education and e-commerce, due to a wave of digitisation.

"In 2020, the impact of COVID-19 on start-ups was debilitating. We expect unprecedented growth in the coming years because of the massive pent-up demand," said Ajay Kela, President and CEO, Wadhawan Foundation. He added that the recovery would be gradual, and that start-up activity may see an upswing from mid-2021.

It will subsequently acquire a net leasable area of up to 1.65 million sq. ft located at Hebbal, Bengaluru. a-iTrust will provide funding for the development of the project as part of the arrangement, the company said in a statement.

Upon the project obtaining the occupancy certificate and fulfilment of other key conditions, a-iTrust shall purchase 100% of the shares of the two entities developing the project.

Ascendas trust signs ₹1,441-cr. IT park deal

Firm to eventually buy 100% of project

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Ascendas India Trust (a-iTrust) will acquire 1.65 million sq. ft area at an IT park in Bengaluru for an estimated deal value of ₹1,441 crore, according to a statement.

Ascendas Property Fund Trustee Pte. Ltd., the Trustee-Manager of a-iTrust, has entered into a forward purchase agreement with Gardeity Realty Pvt. Ltd. to acquire two buildings in an IT Park with a total net lettable area of up to 1.65 million sq. ft located at Hebbal, Bengaluru. a-iTrust will provide funding for the development of the project as part of the arrangement, the company said in a statement.

two land parcels. Initially, and during the construction period, a-iTrust's investment in the construction of the project will be through debt. a-iTrust will provide funding towards development of the project of about ₹828 crore.

Upon the project obtaining the occupancy certificate and fulfilment of other key conditions, a-iTrust shall purchase 100% of the shares of the two entities developing the project.

Equitas SFB names retail, unit chiefs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

Equitas Small Finance Bank (ESFB) has roped in industry veterans for its retail assets, technology, digital, operations and human resources functions.

The bank has appointed Narayanan Easwaran as chief technology officer and Vaibhav Joshi as chief digital officer.

Pallab Mukherji is the new chief people officer while Siby Sebastian has been named executive vice president – operations.

Roh

Gains outweigh losses in India's balance sheet

Seam bowling and middle-order batting prove the difference in a narrow ODI series win against England

ENGLAND IN INDIA

AMOL KARHADKAR
PUNE

India lost 10 of the 12 tosses across the three formats, but Kohli's cavaliers completed a clean-sweep, winning the Test, T20I and ODI series against England played over the last two months.

The three-match ODI contest, which concluded with a nail-biting seven-run victory for India on Sunday, signified the first of many preparatory steps towards the 2023 World Cup, also to be played on Indian soil. Here's a look at some of the team's gains – and pains – from the ODI series.

Bhuvneshwar Kumar – the quiet operator

Bhuvneshwar Kumar
continues to attack

After an injury-enforced hiatus of more than a year, Bhuvneshwar Kumar returned to the limited-over set-up last month. Having gained confidence in the T20Is, Bhuvneshwar was back at his miserly best in the ODIs.

On the flat beds laid out at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium, his economy-rate of 4.65 in 29 overs stood out, comfortably the best of the series. Add his six wickets, and Bhuvneshwar seems one of Kohli's top options even after Jasprit Bumrah returns.

Shardul Thakur, on the other hand, all but cemented his spot in white-ball cricket as third pacer and useful No. 8 batsman. His high economy-rate often draws comment, but that's expected for a wicket-taker.

The last week has shown that Shardul succeeds against the best of batsmen, even against the odds. In the third ODI, for instance, he was brought into the attack in the 14th over and cleaned up England's middle-order

in quick time to put India in the ascendancy.

Licence to thrill

Thanks to a less-than-reliable middle-order over the last five years, India's top three were forced to adopt the conventional approach of building an innings before letting loose at the death.

But with K.L. Rahul regaining his mojo and the fearsome pair of Rishabh Pant and Hardik Pandya back at their best, India has the ability to emulate England's crash-bang-wallop mantra right through the innings.

Both Pant and Hardik have shown that their methodical madness – one manufacturing strokes, the other using raw power to clear the field with elan – can not only devastate the opposition but also free up Rohit Sharma and Shikhar Dhawan at the top.

End of Kul-Cha?

When five pacers and a solitary spinner, Krunal Pandya, took the field in the decider, it was the first instance of India's ODI XI featuring neither Kuldeep Yadav nor Yuzvendra Chahal since the 2017 Champions Trophy.

While Chahal was benched for the ODIs, Kuldeep appeared to have lost his zip and turn in the first two games. The left-arm wrist-spinner's mishandling over the last two years seems to have affected his confidence.

As a result, India will be desperate to see Ravindra Jadeja return from his injury break to partner Chahal. With R. Ashwin having been sidelined in the shorter formats, without Jadeja and Chahal, the coffers seem empty – the combined figures of India's spinners in the series read 39.0-312.1.



Game-changers: Pant's ability to manufacture shots and Hardik's power-hitting highlighted India's batting. ■ SPORTZPICS/BCCI

Congratulations guys for holding up and having a season of a lifetime in toughest of times across all formats and hemispheres against two of the best teams in the world. Take a bow!!

RAVI SHASTRI'S TWEET

I'm proud of the effort and the attitude shown by the boys. I think we've learned a lot

CHRIS SILVERWOOD
England coach

Top performers in India-England ODI series

BATTING	M	Inns	Runs	HS	Avg.	SR	50s/100s	Photo
Jonny Bairstow	3	3	219	124	73.00	120.32	1/1	
K.L. Rahul	3	3	177	108	88.50	101.14	1/1	
Shikhar Dhawan	3	3	169	98	56.33	94.41	2/0	
Rishabh Pant	2	2	155	78	77.50	151.96	2/0	
Ben Stokes	3	3	135	99	45.00	132.35	1/0	

BOWLING	M	Inns	Wkts.	BBI	Avg.	Econ.	4W	Photo
Shardul Thakur	3	3	7	4/67	22.57	6.72	1	
Bhuvneshwar Kumar	3	3	6	3/42	22.50	4.65	0	
Prasidh Krishna	3	3	6	4/54	29.00	6.91	1	
Mark Wood	2	2	5	3/34	21.80	6.41	0	
Ben Stokes	3	3	4	3/34	30.25	6.05	0	

Bhuvneshwar Kumar – the quiet operator

Fit-again pacer makes his presence felt

AMOL KARHADKAR
PUNE

neshwar appears to be hungry for success. His focus is not just on doing well in the Indian Premier League but keeping an eye on India's Test series in England later this year.

"I am just happy that I went through the entire series pretty well," he said after the third ODI on Sunday night. "Whatever preparation happens from my side will happen with red-ball cricket in mind. That's different from what will happen in team selections, but my training and workload during the IPL will happen with Test cricket in mind. I want to play Test cricket going forward."

But Bhuvneshwar isn't thinking too far ahead, instead setting short-term goals for himself.

"I don't decide on the long-term future. Whenever I have in the past, things haven't gone my way, whether it's due to injury or form," he said.

Focus on fitness

"Workload management is something I will focus on and the team management also tries and does its best. I was unfit for a long time, so I realised that fitness is something I have to maintain if I want to play regular cricket."

More importantly, Bhuv-



Fully focused: Bhuvneshwar Kumar's long-term plans revolve around excelling on the Test scene. ■ PTI

+ Gavaskar calls for reforms in cricket rules

Increasing the boundary distance and scrapping leg-byes among his suggestions

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM
HYDERABAD

Cricketing great Sunil Gavaskar says the current national team has to be the best in the history of Indian cricket.

Gavaskar, who was delivering the M.L. Jaisimha memorial lecture at the Jaisimha Academy here on Monday, said many teams had quite a few match-winners but this one stands out for winning so many matches.

"This is what my guru Jai would have loved to see – the evolution of the Indian cricket team into a world-beater and be there right at the top," the former India opener said.

Gavaskar said Jaisimha would have liked to see the game becoming a level-playing field rather than what it



Candid views: Sunil Gavaskar made a few points to help make the game a level-playing field. ■ NAGARA GOPAL

is today – tilted heavily in favour of the batsman.

Need for parity

"There is a need for a little bit of parity. The distance to the boundaries should be increased given the kind of bats the current players use.

goes above the batsman's head when he is in a standing position is too harsh for it to take away one of the weapons from the bowler," he said.

Gavaskar also said that once a fielder dislodges the stumps with a direct hit in his attempt to run a batsman out, the ball should be declared 'dead' and no runs should be given even if the batsman is not out.

"Similarly, the leg-byes should be done away with since any runs should be scored off the bat and why should a bowler and his team be penalised," he said.

Gavaskar also felt that the fielding teams should be penalised not in terms of fines, but by way of giving penalty runs which will affect the result of the match.

India had given a good ac-

United Arab Emirates hits India for a six

After Mabkhout's hat-trick, Lima's brace and Ibrahim's strike complete the rout

FRIENDLY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DUBAI

India suffered an embarrassing 0-6 rout at the hands of the formidable United Arab Emirates – its heaviest defeat against the Gulf side – in the second international football friendly here on Monday.

India had suffered a 5-0 loss in an international friendly against the UAE in 2010 in Abu Dhabi.

Igor Stimac's side did not even have a single shot on target in what was a forgettable encounter. Striker Ali Mabkhout performed a hat-trick with goals in the 12th, 32nd and 60th minutes while Khalil Ibrahim (64th) and Fabio Lima (71st and 84th) completed the tally.

India had given a good ac-

count of themselves in its first friendly match against Oman on March 25 with an impressive 1-1 draw, but against the UAE, it was clueless as to how to hold the ball, stitch together passes and create chances.

The gulf in class and technical superiority were all too



Hemmed in: Manvir and India could never get going against the UAE and went on to lose by a big margin. ■ AIFI MEDIA

pared to India's 33 in the first half. Mabkhout chipped one over the Indian goalkeeper and captain Gurpreet Singh Sandhu before scoring from the spot after Adil Khan had handled the ball inside the box.

After Mabkhout completed his hat-trick at the hour-mark, Ibrahim made a fine finish with a first-time shot in the 64th minute before Lima added two goals in the 71st and 84th minutes.

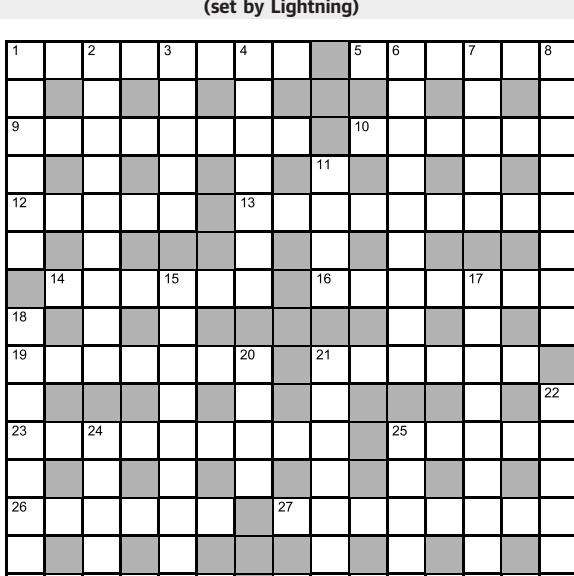
India's only noteworthy move came just before half-time when Liston Colaco, who made his debut, found Manvir Singh with a superb through ball but the striker's shot was blocked by the on-rushing UAE keeper.

The result: UAE 6 (Mabkhout 12, 32 & 60, Ibrahim 64, Lima 71 & 84) bt India 0.

TH CROSSWORD + 13208

(set by Lightning)

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ACROSS

- 1 Sun to rule Gambhir, Sehwag and Dravid perhaps? (3,5)
- 5 Disallow odd golden ornament (6)
- 9 Adjust excellent and standard pitch (4-4)
- 10 Damage one flute that is useless (6)
- 12 Press clubs (5)
- 13 Revolutionary act dividing group with fortune – it could be dangerous (5,4)

SUDOKU

4				8			3
			5			8	
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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★

Solution to puzzle 13207

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

W	Z	D	B	Z	M	C

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