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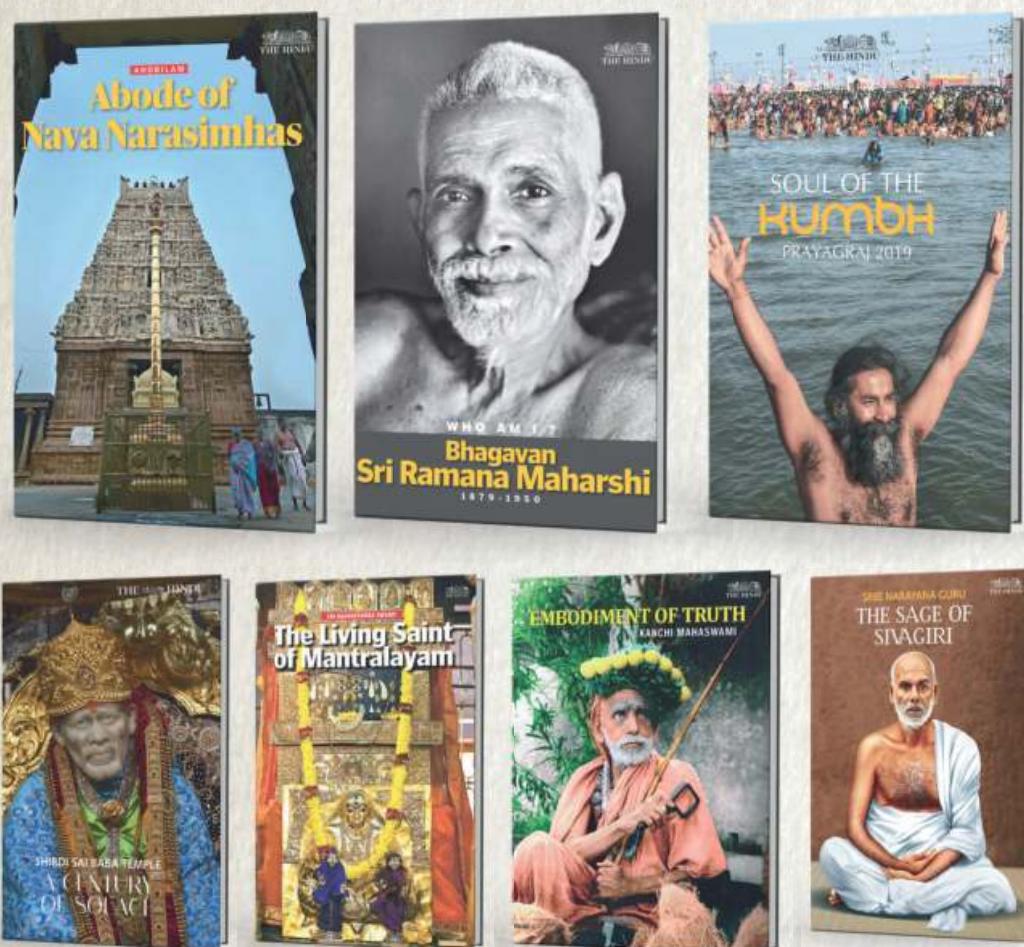


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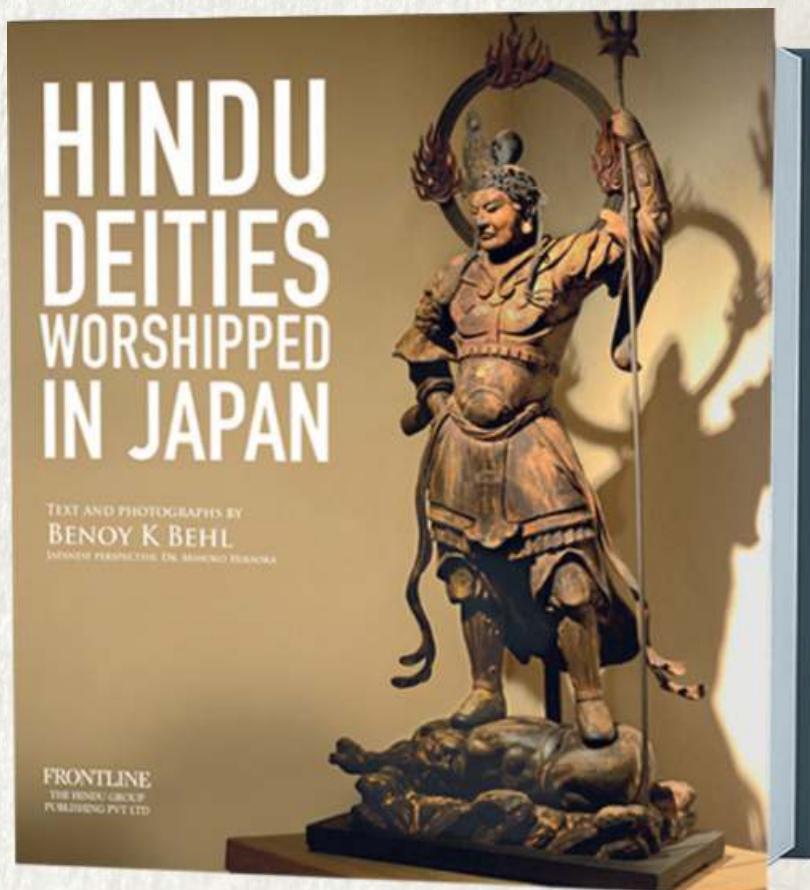
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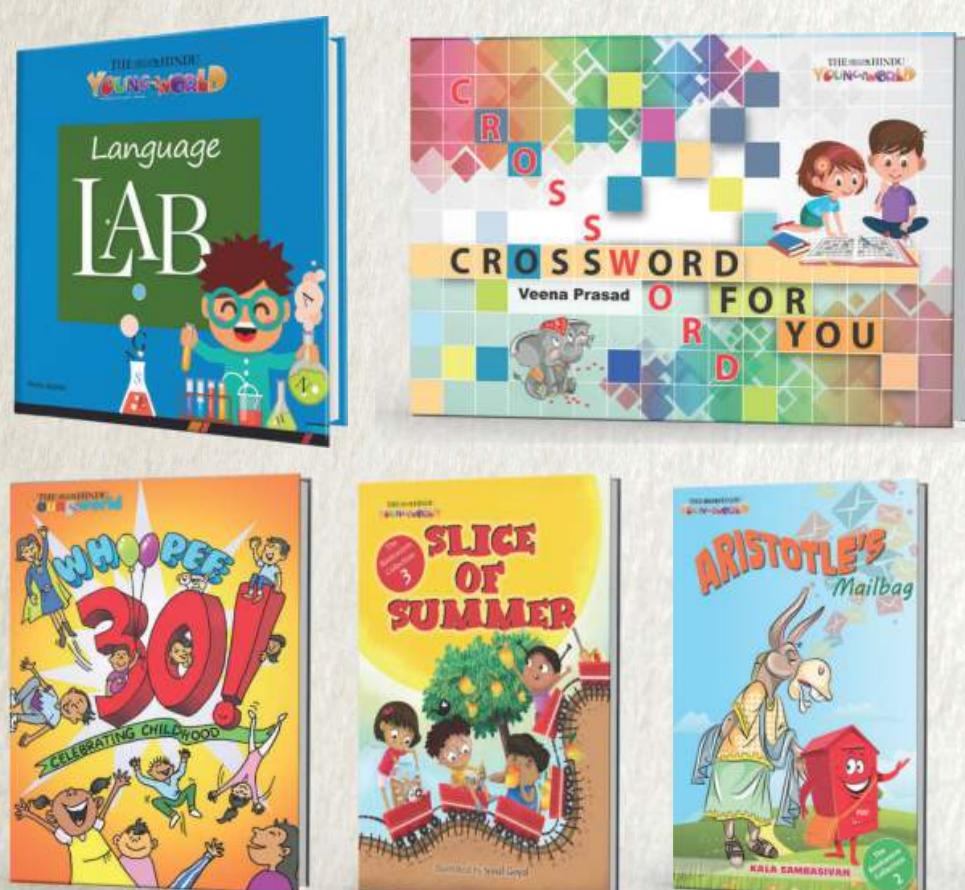
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Disha Ravi's bail plea:
court to pronounce
order on Tuesday
page 7



At least two dead as
police open fire on
protesters in Myanmar
page 9



Facebook has
'tentatively friended' us
again, says Australia
page 9



Osaka eases
past Brady, wins
Australian Open
page 14

NEARBY



Court hearings by Delhi
HC judges from March 15
NEW DELHI
The Delhi High Court on
Saturday issued an order that
all its judges would hold
physical hearing of cases
from March 15. The existing
system of 11 Benches hearing
matters via physical mode
will continue till March 12.
CITY ▶ PAGE 3



CLASSIFIEDS ▶ PAGE 4 & 5
MAGAZINE ▶ 8 PAGES

Ease path for businesses: Modi

States should work to reduce compliance burden, PM says at NITI Aayog meeting

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

States should work towards reducing compliance burden for citizens to ensure ease of doing business, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Saturday, stressing the importance of a better coordination between the Centre and the States for the development of the country.

"There are thousands of compliance requirements within the government that we can remove for the common man... There is no need to ask people again and again when there is technology. States should come forward. I have also said this in the Government of India and

Way forward

The NITI Aayog meeting had six key issues on its agenda

- Making India a manufacturing powerhouse
- Re-imagining agriculture
- Improving physical infra
- Accelerating human resources development
- Improving service delivery at the grassroots level
- Health and nutrition

We have to honour this enthusiasm of the private sector and give it as much opportunity in the Aatmanirbhar Bharat campaign

NARENDRA MODI
PRIME MINISTER

our Cabinet Secretary is following this. The number of compliance requirements to be reduced. This is also very important for ease of living," Mr. Modi said, speaking at the sixth meeting of the NITI Aayog Governing Council.

Twenty-six Chief Ministers, three Lieutenant-Governors and two administrators attended the meeting, besides Union Ministers, special invitees and NITI Aayog officials.

The Chief Ministers of Punjab, Gujarat, West Ben-

gal and Telangana did not attend the meeting.

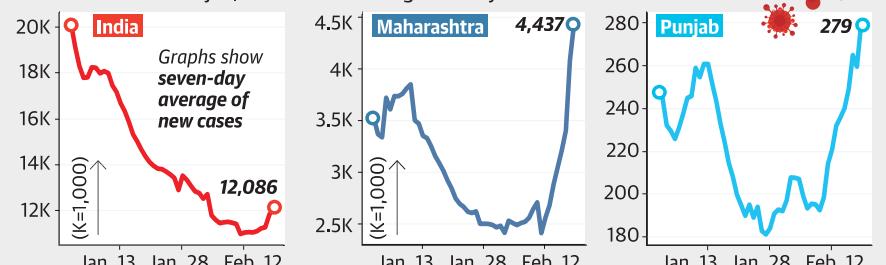
Farm laws not raised

Speaking at a press conference, NITI Aayog Vice-Chairman Rajiv Kumar said the farm laws were not discussed during the day-long meeting. "I can assure you that no State brought up the farm laws for discussion. Agriculture was discussed... but no discussion on the farm laws and that they should be repealed," Mr. Kumar said. He added that most of the Chief Ministers emphasised on developmental agenda and timely completion of infrastructure projects.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

Cases spike in Maharashtra, Punjab

COVID-19 cases in India have been consistently falling since mid-September last year. However, some States have bucked this trend in the past week. In Maharashtra and Punjab, new cases have significantly increased



■ Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Gujarat, and J&K U.T. are also seeing a slight increase in cases over the past week

■ More worryingly, in Maharashtra and Punjab, the number of COVID-19 tests conducted has marginally declined in February compared to January. Thus, the quick rise in cases cannot be attributed to increased testing

Source: covid19india.org

REPORT ON PAGE 8

India, China hold another round of talks

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

India and China held the 10th round of Corps Commander talks on Saturday on the next phase of disengagement at the Line of Actual Control. Talks were still on at the time of going to print.

The talks began at Morden on the Chinese side at 10 a.m., an official said. On Friday, the two sides completed disengagement and restoration of the ground on the north and south banks of Pangong Tso, as per the agreement reached at the ninth round of talks.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6
MORE STORIES ON ▶ PAGE 8, 9

Petrol price hike is a vexatious issue, says Nirmala Sitharaman

'Centre, States need to work together for reasonable prices'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday said the steep rise in petrol prices was a very vexatious issue and referred to the various aspects involved in the pricing as a "maha bayankara dharma

sankatam (a huge moral dilemma)".

"This is an issue in which no answer except reducing the price will convince anyone. I am treading on an area where whatever I may say will only sound like I am avoiding an answer or shifting the blame," the Minister

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

said, responding to a question after a discussion on the Union Budget at the Chennai Citizen's Forum. She said the Centre and the States should work together and figure out a way to keep the retail prices at a reasonable level.

Kin of Unnao victims and accused demand CBI probe

DAMINI NATH
UNNAO

A day after the police arrested a youth and detained a minor for allegedly poisoning three young girls of a family in Unnao – resulting in the death of two and leaving the third in critical condition in hospital – the families of the girls as well as the accused demanded a CBI inquiry into the incident.

"I will believe it when my

sister wakes up and I hear from her what happened. We still want a CBI inquiry," the brother of the survivor said on Saturday.

The sole survivor of the incident was "taken off ventilator support on Saturday and had spontaneous respiration", a statement released by the Kanpur hospital treating her said.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 7

Centre may rethink order on international seminars

Modifications soon: VijayRaghavan

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

The government would relook at the controversial order issued by the Ministry of Education in January that many scientists said curbs free scientific discussion at international fora, K. VijayRaghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India, said.

"We've taken note of this a couple of weeks ago. There is no intent to curb academic and research interactions at all. Modifications that both clarify and make enabling changes will be coming out very soon," he informed *The Hindu* in a text message.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

MORE STORIES ON ▶ PAGE 8, 9

Woman pilot is a Kashmir role model

25-year-old Ayesha Aziz gives wing to the hopes of young girls in the Valley

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

Ayesha Aziz became the nation's youngest pilot when she acquired her student flying licence at the age of 16. At 25 now, she flies GoAir planes and is emerging as a role model for Kashmir women.

Ms. Aziz was swarmed by dozens of enthusiastic girls at the Sher-i-Kashmir International Convention Centre here on January 2, when she attended the Lal Ded Khatoon-e-Kashmir Award 2021 function organised by Elfa International, an NGO, to ho-

In control: Ayesha Aziz in the cockpit. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT
nour Kashmir's talented women achievers.

Ms. Aziz's mother is from Baramulla in north Kashmir and father a businessman from Maharashtra.

"I received my first pilot li-

cence immediately after passing my Class 10 examination. I clocked 200 hours [of flying] to procure a commercial pilot's licence. I was 22 when I got my commercial licence," Ms. Aziz said.

"Our family went through trials and tribulations because we don't come from an aviation family. My father encouraged me a lot."

"She used to do five-day schooling and weekend flying to achieve her goal," Ms. Aziz's father, Abul Aziz, told *The Hindu*. He said her determination could be gauged

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Drug seizure leaves Bengal BJP red-faced

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

The arrest of Pamela Goswami, State secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), for allegedly possessing narcotics is turning out to be a major embarrassment for the party. Ms. Goswami on Saturday alleged that another BJP leader, Rakesh Singh, was behind the conspiracy leading to her arrest.

"I want CID to probe the matter. Rakesh Singh, who is close to Kailash Vijayvariya, is behind all this," she told presspersons while being produced in court.

Ms. Goswami and her colleague Prabir Kumar Dey were caught by the police on Friday with around 100 g of cocaine. According to reports, she was under the radar for some time now on suspicion of being involved in drug trafficking.

The Trinamool Congress leadership used the opportunity to hit out at the BJP. Its spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said instead of blaming the ruling party, Ms. Goswami's charge speaks volumes about the factionalism in the BJP.

In control: Ayesha Aziz in the cockpit. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

nour Kashmir's talented women achievers.

Ms. Aziz's mother is from Baramulla in north Kashmir and father a businessman from Maharashtra.

"I received my first pilot li-

from the fact that she met both her role models, Sunita Williams and Kalpana Chawla. "She also underwent an astronaut training programme at the NASA-Huntsville Space Centre," he added.

Ms. Aziz was given the First Ladies' Award by the President of India in 2018.

Saiqa Rashid, a Class 12 student from Bandipora, said Ms. Aziz motivated her to pursue her dream profession of being a pilot. "I had a mental block about the profession. She just removed it. When she can do it, I too can."

Kailash Satyarthi

Nobel Peace Laureate
and Child Rights Activist

Frank Rausan Pereira

Senior Anchor,
Public Broadcaster

Jayesh Ranjan, IAS

Secretary, IT, Electronics & Communications Deptt., Govt. of Telangana

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Confusion over
farmers-govt.
lunch meeting

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Delhi government sources on Saturday said it had invited leaders of farmer unions for a dialogue at the Delhi Vidhan Sabha on Sunday.

Darshan Pal of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha, however, said: "We have not received any invitation from the Delhi government."

The Delhi government's invite comes on the heels of a kisan mahapanchayat that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is scheduled to address in Uttar Pradesh later this month.

R-Day violence: police release 20 more photos

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI
The Delhi Police on Saturday released photographs of 20 more people allegedly involved in the violence that broke out at the Red Fort on Republic Day during the farmers' tractor parade, officials said.

Police said they are scanning videos of the incident and releasing pictures of people from them.

Earlier, the police had released 200 photographs of people in connection with the Red Fort violence.

Dental clinic at Singhu border will be among first to get ACs

Semi-permanent structures being erected will act as waiting room for patients

SHINJINI GHOSH
NEW DELHI

The free dental clinic at the Singhu border protest site, which has been running since the agitation began, is set to become one of the first facilities to instal air conditioners to beat the heat.

On Saturday, the clinic started installing semi-permanent structures that will act as a waiting room for patients as well as a stall from where free medicine will be distributed.

Sarabjit Kaur, a volunteer at the dental clinic said, "We have been providing services since the very beginning. Due to the gradually changing weather, it has become very difficult to distribute medicines in the open. So we decided to build a structure out here where we will instal air conditioners. This space will also act as a waiting room for the patients and they will not be exposed to direct sunlight."

The farmers' agitation against the Centre's three farm laws is now a few days short of the three-month mark. The past couple of months saw the protesting farmers brave the harsh winters and remain stationed on the highway.

Other medical camps and the 24X7 hospital which is functional at the border said



The free clinic has been running since the farmers' agitation began nearly three months ago. • SHINJINI GHOSH

Due to the gradually changing weather, it has become very difficult to distribute medicines out in the open

SARABJIT KAUR
Volunteer at the dental clinic

that there were plans to add layers of cloth above the existing tents to provide respite from the heat.

Jagter Singh, a volunteer at the hospital run by Life Care Foundation said, "As of now, it is only in the after-

noon that the mercury is rising so we have been able to manage well. However, once the temperature rises further, we will put another layer of fabric above the tents to bring down the temperature within the tents."

"We will not be able to put air conditioners as it is an open tent. However provisions for coolers can be made. We have another similar set-up a few kilometres away from the main stage. Even there, same arrangements will be done above the tents to ensure respite from the heat," added Mr. Singh.

In another development, concertina wires were put up near the second barricade at the Singhu border, which is nearly a kilometre away from the main stage.

Nihang Sikhs rally
Earlier in the day, Nihang Sikhs took out a march demanding the release of those arrested for the Republic Day violence, including Deep Sidhu.

Gurbaj Singh from Amritsar said, "For the last few months we have been here fighting not just for the farmers but for the labourers as well. It seems like the government is on a mission to privatise everything. There is not a shred of democracy left in this country, especially the manner in which people were arrested after the January 26 incident."

"People got arrested without any cause whatsoever. What had Deep Sidhu done? The national flag was never touched and in fact the other flag is simply our religious symbol," said Mr. Singh.

In her complaint, Ms. Ilmi stated that she was invited to a dinner party by businessman Chetan Seth where ambassadors of different countries, family members and Mr. Ahmad were present. She alleged that she was discussing farm laws and trade prospects between India and South America when Mr. Ahmad allegedly passed snide remarks

Man bludgeons teen to death for refusing to marry him

Victim and her family used to be neighbours of the accused

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 17-year-old girl was bludgeoned to death at her residence in Rohini's Begumpur on Friday night for allegedly refusing to marry the accused, the police said.

DCP (Rohini) P.K. Mishra said the accused has been identified as Laik Khan (26), a factory worker in Begumpur.

The victim was a Class 11 dropout. "A case under Section 302 [punishment for murder] of the IPC has been registered and teams have been formed to find the accused," Mr. Mishra said.

A senior officer said the

victim and her family used to earlier live in Bawana and Laik's family used to be their neighbour. "The two families were close, but a year ago, the girl's family moved to Begumpur and started living in Begum Vihar. They were in contact with each other," the officer said.

The cousin opened the door to find the girl lying in a pool of blood. She had suffered a serious head injury.

The family rushed her to the hospital where she was declared brought dead.

"The girl's brother has informed us that Laik wanted to marry her but she refused. We will get more details once Laik is apprehended," the officer said.

The victim's parents are also factory workers.

Shazia Ilmi accuses former BSP MP of misbehaviour

Police register case in the matter

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Shazia Ilmi has accused former Bahujan Samaj Party MP Akbar Ahmad of misbehaving with her at a dinner party on February 5. The police have registered a case into the matter.

In her complaint, Ms. Ilmi stated that she was invited to a dinner party by businessman Chetan Seth where ambassadors of different countries, family members and Mr. Ahmad were present. She alleged that she was discussing farm laws and trade prospects between India and South America when Mr. Ahmad allegedly passed snide remarks

about the Prime Minister and the BJP.

She also mentioned that she spoke about her plans to visit Chile, to shoot a film on Mapuche tribe, where "Lord Hanuman's brother Sugriv had gone".

Ms. Ilmi alleged that she ignored him but he continued to pass "sexually filthy" remarks. Subsequently, he also threatened violence against the PM and the BJP. Later, he allegedly "charged" at her and abused her while shouting at her. She felt humiliated and insulted, she alleged.

A case under Section 506 and 509 of the IPC was registered at Vasant Kunj police station on February 7.

Three-wheelers most popular in electric vehicle segment: govt.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Three-wheelers have emerged as bestsellers in the electric vehicle segment in the Capital, the Delhi government said on Saturday.

Since the launch of the Delhi EV policy in August last year, 5,534 new EV three-wheelers have been registered and more users are coming forward, the government said.

Under the policy, 177 three-wheeler models are available and eligible for purchase, and scrapping incentives across 68 manufacturers. According to the government, subsidies under the policy on electric three-wheelers reduce the total cost of its ownership by up to 26% and by switching to one an individual buyer can save approximately ₹29,000 annually. Similarly, subsidies for e-rickshaws reduce the total cost of ownership by up to 33%.

"I received a subsidy of ₹30,000 for my e-rickshaw. Registration fee and road tax were waived under the EV policy," said Sunil Kumar, a beneficiary.

Air Quality of Delhi-NCR			
Delhi	250	Gurugram	258
Ghaziabad	336	Faridabad	248
NoIDA	269	Greater Noida	324
Good	Satisfactory	Moderate	0-50
Poor	Very Poor	Severe	201-300 301-400 >400
201-300	301-400	>400	
Air Quality Index at 4 p.m. yesterday (Average of past 24 hours) Source: CPCB			

IN BRIEF

E-cyclothon promotes energy conservation

NEW DELHI
With an aim to spread awareness about energy conservation and efficiency, the Petroleum Conservation Research Association organised a month-long awareness campaign Saksham-2021 from January 16 to February 15. As part of the campaign, an e-cyclothon was held in Delhi by the State Level Coordinator on February 6.

Police register case against two NGOs

NEW DELHI
The Economic Offences Wing of the Delhi Police has registered a case against two NGOs: Umeed Aman Ghar and Khushi Rainbow Home, in connection with alleged financial irregularities. Both were established by the Centre for Equity Studies.

Remembering Baba Moti Ram Mehra Ji for his supreme unparalleled sacrifice



Remembering

Baba Moti Ram Mehra Ji
for his supreme unparalleled sacrifice

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Capt. Amarinder Singh
Chief Minister, Punjab



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MONDAY, FEB. 22		
RISE 06:54 SET 18:17		
RISE 13:23 SET 02:55		
TUESDAY, FEB. 23		
RISE 06:53 SET 18:17		
RISE 14:16 SET 03:50		

Delhi Weather

max min

Delhi City 27 10

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Palam 25 12

Delhi Palam Today

28°C Moderate to dense fog

would prevail during morning.

A comfortable day with sunny

sky.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow

28°C Dry and comfortable

weather would prevail mainly

moderate fog at many places

and sunny sky.

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THE HINDU

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IN BRIEF

Police chief takes note of pending investigations

NEW DELHI

Delhi Police Commissioner S.N. Srivastava on Saturday reviewed the law and order, and crime situation in the city. The top cop took note of pending investigation cases and reviewed the analysis of Integrated Complaint Management System data for pending complaints. Mr. Srivastava also discussed the status of implementation of e-beat book and Crime and Criminal Tracking Network System. The performance of Districts Special Staff unit in terms of detection and cases under investigation were also reviewed.

All HC judges to hold physical court hearings from March 15

Videoconferencing will be allowed in exceptional cases, states office order

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Saturday issued an office order stating all its judges would hold physical hearing of cases from March 15.

The existing system under which only 11 Benches, including two Division Benches of two judges each and nine single-judge Benches, hear matters via physical mode will continue till March 12, the court said.

"The full court is pleased to order that the existing system of hearing the matters shall continue up to March 12, 2021," the office order issued by Registrar General Manoj Jain stated.

"It has further been ordered that all Benches of this court shall hold physical courts on a daily basis with effect from March 15, 2021, and shall continue to



take up the matters as per the existing arrangement of listing," it also stated.

In exceptional cases, according to the order, the court might permit any of the parties and/or their lawyers to join the proceedings through video conferencing, subject to the availability of requisite infrastructure.

Currently, some courts hold hybrid proceedings

where lawyers and involved parties have the option to attend the hearing via video-conference instead of an appearance in person.

Pending matters

According to the order, all pending routine or non-urgent matters listed before it from February 22 to March 26 would be adjourned en bloc to dates between April 15 and May 20.

It also urged advocates, litigants and other visitors to the High Court to "strictly adhere to norms of social distancing and other COVID-19 related guidelines."

On January 14, the court had decided to increase the number of judges who would be hearing cases physically from January 18 onwards, "in view of the decline in the intensity of spread of COVID-19 pan-

demic in Delhi".

Prior to January 18, only two to three Benches were holding physical courts daily on a rotation basis. On March 25 last year, the High Court had restricted its functioning as well as that of the district courts till April 14, 2020, which was later extended from time to time till January 16, 2021.

On August 27, 2020, the High Court decided to partially resume physical hearing of matters from September 1, 2020 by two Division Benches and three single-judge Benches on a rotation basis.

The number of Benches was later scaled down to one Division Bench and two single-judge Benches in view of the rise in COVID-19 cases, and a majority of the lawyers indicating their preference for virtual hearings.

Must focus on start-ups, manufacturing: Kejriwal

Delhi CM addresses NITI Aayog meeting

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday addressed the NITI Aayog Governing Council Meeting where he spoke on the importance of promoting the manufacturing sector and start-ups for the economic progress of India.

"The youth of our country need to come to the forefront. The youth possess the potential and the energy to start new businesses. We need to aggressively promote start-ups," he said.

'Centre, State together'

Mr. Kejriwal said the Central and State governments should come together to build manufacturing hubs

Chinese products are replacing Indian products on a large scale. We should aggressively pursue manufacturing," he added.

ists, for import substitutes and exports.

"In the last 70 years, our country has never given importance to the manufacturing sector as a result of which people are leaving the sector and moving towards trading and service sectors. Our country is lagging behind in the manufacturing sector," he said.

"We witnessed that India had to confront two issues in the last year. First is COVID-19, which hugely affected the manufacturing sector. Secondly, on one hand, we saw how China has been challenging us on the border, and on the other, it has captured our markets and

Chinese products are replacing Indian products on a large scale. We should aggressively pursue manufacturing," he added.

Virus spread

Total number of COVID-19 cases	Total deaths
6,37,755	10,898
New cases in the past 24 hours	New deaths

SOURCE: DELHI GOVERNMENT HEALTH BULLETIN

Over 26,000 take COVID-19 shot, highest till now: govt.

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

A total of 26,110 beneficiaries, healthcare and front-line workers took the COVID-19 vaccination in the city on Saturday, which is the highest till now.

Also, there were 13 minor Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI), said a Delhi government spokesperson.

Of the total beneficiaries, 21,759 received the first dose and 4,351 their second dose. Till now, a total of 1,31,854 healthcare workers and 1,53,037 front-line workers have received the vaccine, as per the government. The vaccination of healthcare workers started in the city on January 16 and front-line workers from the first week of February. The second dose of the vaccine is taken 28 days after receiving the first dose; the drive started from February 13.

One death

The national capital witnessed 152 new COVID-19 cases in 24 hours, taking the total number of cases to 6,37,755, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Saturday.

One death was reported in the past 24 hours, taking the total number of deaths to 10,898.

LoP launches renovation work on Agra Canal Road

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri on Saturday inaugurated renovation work on the Agra Canal Road. Mr. Bidhuri said the project, which falls under the jurisdiction of his constituency of Badarpur, would be completed at a cost of ₹1 crore.

The U.P. government will bear the cost, he said.

Pathak blames BJP for demolition of previous temple at the same site

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) senior leader and party in-charge of municipal corporations Durgesh Pathak on Saturday offered prayers at a newly constructed Hanuman Temple at Chandni Chowk. This temple was built in place of another which was demolished by authorities earlier this year.

Mr. Pathak alleged that the BJP-ruled north body had played with the faith of the devotees by "demolishing" the Hanuman Temple earlier this year. Devotees have built it again and the Delhi government is with the people, he said.

"It is very sad to say that this temple – Sankat Mochan Lord Hanuman in Chandni Chowk – was demolished by the North Delhi Municipal Corporation," the AAP leader said.

"We have come here to pray before Lord Hanuman that he removes all the crisis of the country and the

world and gives sanity to all. In the times of COVID-19, people have lost their jobs, suffered huge losses in terms of health and wealth, we pray that Lord Hanuman protects everyone," Mr. Pathak added.

The AAP leader said the corporation's job is to keep Delhi's roads, streets, and parks clean, along with ensuring good facilities in schools and hospitals. "The people of Delhi are perturbed by the BJP's rule in the civic body and they want to entrust the AAP government with this responsibility," Mr. Pathak said.

Cong. leaders join AAP

He said by praying at the temple, they have not only received blessings of the deity, but also received blessings of the people of Delhi.



AAP leader Durgesh Pathak

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CMYK

M-NDE

MATRIMONIAL

thehinduads.com

BRIDEGROOMS WANTED

INDEX OF MATRIMONIAL

BRIDEGROOMS WANTED

BRIDES WANTED

BRIDES & GROOMS WANTED

Classification common for Brides, Bridegrooms, Brides & Grooms

Assamese

Awadhi

Bengali

Bhojpuri

Bihari

Chhattisgarhi

English

Gujarati

Haryanvi

Hindi

Kannada

Kashmiri

Konkani

Malayalam

Manipuri

Marathi

Marwari

Nepali

Oriya

Parsi

Punjabi

Saurashtra

Sindhi

Tamil

Telugu

Tulu

Urdu

Advocate

Business

Defence

Doctor

Engineer

Finance/ Banking

Government/ Quasi-Govt.

IAS/ Allied Services

Information Technology

MBA/ CA/ ICWA

NRI

Cosmopolitan

Divorcee

Physically Challenged

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DIVORCEE

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BEAUTIFUL FAIR Punjabia Arora/ Khatri girl, 17.03.1994, 2.00 PM Chandigarh height 5'1" professional job in government hospital CHD, issueless divorce. Only tricity match welcome. 9885454982

DOCTOR

DOCTOR- PEDIATRICIAN, 42, Chennai- Christian, 10yrs daughter, strong family n social value needs Bridgroom aged 40-45yrs. Professional doctor aged 40-45yrs. Professor, IIT, 984909042261

MARAVAR, GIRL /MBBS, 25 yrs/ 153 cm, Thiruvananthapuram Seeks Doctor from Dever/ Mukkulathur. 9444225534

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Hindu DKV, 25yrs / 165cm (Rahu Ktu, BE)(EE) Seeks well educated and employed groom. Ct: 90876 76257

VANNIYI KULA Kshatriya well settled in Canada looking for educated groom, willing to settle in Canada/ US for our daughter, 25 yrs pursuing law. WhatsApp +91 457 0309 or Email pushparaj2005@hotmail.com

GOLDMIST GIRL SURAKSHA 28/MS seeks MBBS/ MD/ BDS Groom well settled from same/ other equal caste. W-app 9445453880

EZHAVA GIRL 32, 175, Ayillium, Mch (Surgical Gastro). Prefer PG Doctors. 9444183400

TIRUNELVELI SAIWA Pillai, 30yrs, MBBS, TN Govt Doctor seeks suitable MBBS/ MD/ BDS Groom from Tirunelveli / Tanjore Saiva Pillai/ Brahmin. Contact: 9486901679

HINDU, 30, 5.2, Devendrakulavallalar, Sadhayam, Whealish, MBBs, MD, PG Doctor Pathology employed in private seeks PG Doctor Groom 948984128.

ENGLISH

HINDU TAMIL Mukulathar, Magam, Chevai at 7, 25- 170 cm on MSc Stat, HR Analyst Bengaluru, Seeks Professionally Qualified Groom having Chevai at 7, Subcastes! Inter-caste acceptable # 096633 13500. gobinath.thirumaran@gmail.com

ANGLO INDIAN RC girl 28, MBA, senior manager in leading MNC, 18 lakhs. Suitable well placed grooms send your details to: lsd4955@ gmail.com or WhatsApp 9445027217

KANNADA

HINDU VOK GOWDA 26 B.E.Seks Groom of Same Community 9791768175

MALAYALAM

MUSLIM GIRL divorcee 30/165, One boy, Graduate, good looking, seeks suitable alliance. Ph.: 8089338010

MALAYALEE VISWAKARMA(G)s girl 37/ 162, Avittom, Deputy Manager in MNC,Chennai. Seeks educated & Employed Groom(CNB). 9445616226 / 9790739037

NAIR GIRL Tiruvonam 26Yrs BTech Employed Dosham Chennai Settled Seeks Suitable Alliance Ct: 9790913767

TAMIL HINDU, PG Doctor, 32/158 years well settled PG Doctor, PG Engineer. Reputed Business groom. Upper caste only. Ph. 9710932377

HINDU/DKV 32/152 B.E. Middle Class. Divorce Seeks Suitable Groom. Caste No Bar. 94986 95984

Hindu Senguthu Mudaliyar 25 / 153 Mithunam thiruvadhirai 2nd Cast. Divorced, good complexion, Masters in Hospital Administration, doing final year LLB. Looking for a groom preferably from doctors in and around Malabar. 9446782433

MALAYALEE NAIR girl 30/167, Thiruvathira , MAPDH, working as Assst. Professor in Central Govt. Institute Chennai seeking alliance from well educated, employed hair boys. 9446489258, 9061434972

EZHAVA GIRL 26, 165, Anizham, MBA (Abroad), working, upper middle-class family from Trivandrum and Kollam districts. Invite alliance from well educated and employed boys from Ezava families from Trivandrum and Kollam (preferred). 9995449217

MALAYALEE NAIR girl 30/167, Thiruvathira , MAPDH, working as Assst. Professor in Central Govt. Institute Chennai seeking alliance from well educated, employed hair boys. 9446489258, 9061434972

VIKASWARA-EZHAVA girl, 34/154, Uthram, Nilambur, M.Sc., M.Phil., Pursuing PhD in Chennai, seeks suitable alliance from well-educated and professionally qualified grooms preferably researchers from Kerala. Contact: 7397346611

NRI

REQD USA Settled Godly Man for USA Employed. Born Again/Christian Gud looking Girl 34yrs/162. Ct: 9448852727

TAMIL

CSI TAMIL Christian Pillai Velalar Girl, M.Arch, Fair, 32 yrs / 160 cms, Affluent similar profiles welcomed. Language no bar. Ph: 98948 36842.

CSI CHRISTIAN Nadar Girl, Fair, Good Looking, 03-04-1986 born / 152cm / M.Sc. M.Phil., working as Assistant Professor in a Reputed Women's College, Mount Road, Chennai. Both Parents Doctors (Private) , Suitable Alliance, Employed / Settled in Chennai / With Clean Habits from Same Community. Contact: 9841825214

PRACTISING AND successful PG Doctor from Pillai/Mudaliar Ct: 944253252/ danielenebezier1951@gmail.com

SOZHIYA VELLALA, 20/167cm BE(MC)working as a developer in IT organization earning 75K per month, Divorcee(No Issues) seeks Groom, Well educated , family oriented person. Contact – 9884494909/ 44-25547066.

EZHAVA GIRL, Chithira, 25/158cm, from a well known doctor family, Kozhikode, fair complexion, Masters in Hospital Administration, doing final year LLB. Looking for a groom preferably from doctors in and around Kancheepuram. Contact : 9791032376

HINDU NADAR 22/165 cm BE Fair Rich Kumbarattadi AS IPS Groom Wanted Chennai Contact: 9048877788

GAVARA NAIDU ME/26 Divorcee, No issues seeks suitable Broad minded Groom born in1990s & well settled

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NAIR GIRL Tiruvonam 26Yrs BTech Employed Dosham Chennai Settled Seeks Suitable Alliance Ct: 9790913767

TAMIL MUSLIM Girl 27/165, BE, MBA, Fair, 5la. Preferred Groom in Chennai abroad Settled. Ct: 6381837552 WhatsApp

AD PR BE MBA Wkg MNC Chennai Salary 1 Lakh pm seeks suitable other groom Wkg in Chennai Ct: 9844059639

DIVORCE, 34YRS with a daughter, working,upper middle class , RC wants a decent partner ph: 9840192878

VISHWAKARMA TAMIL M.Com, NET 23/ 157 Tiruvonam Very Fair Good Looking Raghu Kethu Cheval Dosham Seeks suitable Groom below 28 from Educated and Well Settled family Ct: 9791032376

TAMIL MUSLIM 25/167 MBBS MD Seeks prof qualifid groom. Ct : 8220042091 muddalash@ gmail.com

TAMIL VELLALA, Fellowship in Implantology, 35 / 163cms seeks suitable good natured & well settled groom from amicable family. Contact: 8124583002.

FAIR GOOD LOOKING Divorcee 38, Hindu(BC), No issues) .Wanted upper Middle Class below age 42. Mobile 9843178738, 9150091600

DIVORCE, 34YRS with a daughter, working,upper middle class , RC wants a decent partner ph: 9840192878

VISHWAKARMA TAMIL M.Com, NET 23/ 157 Tiruvonam Very Fair Good Looking Raghu Kethu Cheval Dosham Seeks suitable Groom below 28 from Educated and Well Settled family Ct: 9791032376

TAMIL MUSLIM Girl 30/163cm MS, Lives in Vancouver, Canada PR Status. Seeking Alliance from a Suitable Groom living in Vancouver / Intent moving to Vancouver. Ct: 8903905909

HINDU - M.A, Arch, Dip French, 27 yrs, Korthiga, 165 cm, self employed -Chennai Based - Tamil Chettiar/ Malayalee Warrier parents looking for professionally qualified groom. Contact +9194192925

AGAMUDAYAR Girl (Bgrl) BDS(HS) 22-52 Kannai Tamil Contact - 9739135075 WhatsApp

MARUTHUVAR-HINDU 24yrs, ME Engg, working in reputed MNC company, Software Engineer in WIPRO 6.7 Lacs Per Annum Seeks Groom Castle No Bar. Ct: 90809 83174

HINDU 29/167cm, Fair, B.Tech/ PGDM(IIM), Sr.Mgr. drawing above 18 yrs. Employed Well Settled Groom. Ct: 9844059639

AGAMUDAYAR Girl (Bgrl) BDS(HS) 22-52 Kannai Tamil Contact - 9739135075 WhatsApp

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AGAMUDAYAR Girl (Bgrl) BDS(HS) 22-52 Kannai Tamil Contact - 9739135075 WhatsApp

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



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

Forecast for Sunday: Thunderstorm with lightning/hail likely at isolated places over Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Muzaffarabad, south coastal Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karaikal, Kerala and Mahe. Dense/very dense fog likely in isolated pockets over Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	-	26.0	17.8	Kozhikode	-	33.8	24.4
Ahmedabad	-	33.0	19.2	Kurnool	-	31.6	19.1
Aizawl	-	22.7	11.7	Lucknow	-	29.0	12.6
Allahabad	-	30.0	12.4	Madurai	-	33.0	23.7
Bengaluru	6.6	27.0	17.2	Mangaluru	-	35.5	21.3
Bhopal	-	27.7	12.2	Mumbai	-	34.7	18.6
Bhubaneswar	-	28.4	21.6	Mysuru	15	31.8	17.8
Chandigarh	-	26.8	12.5	New Delhi	-	27.3	10.4
Chennai	2	30.2	22.8	Patna	-	28.6	13.6
Coimbatore	-	30.8	22.8	Pond Blair	-	30.3	26.2
Dehradun	-	26.6	10.6	Puducherry	1.5	32.0	21.4
Gangtok	-	17.7	7.7	Pune	-	29.8	13.6
Goa	-	33.7	20.8	Raipur	-	30.4	19.0
Guwahati	-	30.9	14.8	Ranchi	3.4	27.0	15.3
Hubballi	-	27.0	23.0	Shillong	-	21.3	11.1
Hyderabad	5.2	28.0	18.0	Shimla	-	17.0	6.9
Imphal	-	25.8	11.7	Srinagar	-	16.8	2.8
Jaipur	-	29.6	13.5	Thiruvananthapuram	-	33.5	24.7
Kochi	0.2	32.4	24.4	Tiruchi	-	31.7	23.6
Kohima	-	20.4	7.0	Vijayawada	-	30.2	22.6
Kolkata	-	27.7	20.5	Visakhapatnam	0.4	27.8	24.2

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m. Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 336 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Koppal, Karnataka recorded a healthy AQI score of 38

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

NO₂: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

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

PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Don't take any drastic step, Tikait tells farmers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD

Bharatiya Kisan Union spokesperson Rakesh Tikait said on Saturday that his appeal to farmers to be ready to sacrifice their standing crops should not be taken literally. This clarification comes after a farmer in Bijnor destroyed almost half of his wheat crop on Saturday morning.

Mr. Tikait said the appeal was made for an extreme situation. "The movement hasn't reached that stage yet. Farmers should not take any drastic step in a huff," he urged.

In a video that went viral, Rohit Kumar, from Kulchana village in Bijnor, could be heard saying that he destroyed his standing wheat crop to register his protest against the farm laws. Speaking over phone, Mr. Kumar said he ran his tractor over wheat crop in six bighas after listening to Mr. Tikait.

Mr. Tikait said farmers would continue with their protest during summer.

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Mr. N SELVA KUMAR

PH: 9820350726

selvakumar.n@thehindu.co.in

THE HINDU
India's National Newspaper

Forest Dept. urges PWD to take measures for safe movement of wildlife, but the latter cites paucity of funds



Highways keep snuffing out wild animals of Aravalis

culvert is opened, it could act as a passage for the wildlife as well as the local villagers," says Mr. Malik.

Two more culverts, around two km away from the temple on either side of a roadside eatery – Faaji Dhaba – at Panchgaon, too are choked to the top. "I remember having walked through it earlier. But gradually it got choked," says Hamid, who runs a puncture shop near one of these culverts. He also

confirms a leopard's death in a road accident near the culvert in 2019.

Vaishali Rana, a wildlife activist, says several wild animals, including leopards, were killed in road accidents on the three highways – Delhi-Jaipur Highway (NH-48), Gurugram-Alwar Highway (NH-248A) and Gurugram-Faridabad Highway – cutting through the Aravalis and fragmenting the wildlife habitat.

The authorities have put around 20 signboards on NH-48 and Gurugram-Faridabad Highway warning the motorists to slow down. ■ MANOJ KUMAR

It was after she pursued the matter with the Forest Department and the Public Works Department for more than two years that the authorities put around 20 signboards on NH-48 and Gurugram-Faridabad Highway warning the motorists to slow down. Thermoplastic rumble strips are also fixed at five locations on the Gurugram-Faridabad Highway.

The PWD remained in denial about the wildlife deaths for two years till November 2020 when the Forest Department provided them with a record of accidental deaths of leopards and golden jackals, says Ms. Rana.

Involvement of leaders

"But it was after I met Deputy Chief Minister and PWD Minister Dushyant Chautala two weeks ago that the department swung into action," says she.

However, the more important task of underpasses on the three highways still remains. The three highways bisect the corridor used by the wildlife to traverse from Asola Wildlife Sanc-

tuary in Delhi to Sariska in Rajasthan through Gurugram (Mangar-Bandhwari-Damda).

The forest department, in a series of letters to the PWD, has requested for the construction of underpasses on Gurugram-Faridabad Highway, but Rajeev Yadav, Superintending Engineer, PWD (Gurugram) says the paucity of funds is a major constraint.

Divisional Wildlife Officer Rajinder Prasad says the process would be kicked off with the fresh budget allocation in April this year. "We need an underpass at Manesar on NH-48 and two more near Pali Police Post and Bandhwari village on Gurugram-Faridabad Highway," he says.

Almost a year-old internal official communication of the Forest Department to the office of Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) says opening of the three culverts on NH-48 and two km fencing along the highway could stop the death of wildlife in road accidents.

"The forest policy calls for the creation of corridors to link the protected areas and funds are set aside for the protection of wildlife in projects through ecologically sensitive zones, but nothing substantial has been done," says Ms. Rana.

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DEATH

Farewell

P R VASUDEVAN

Loving husband to late Shyamala, father and grandfather, ex-Management Services, Tata Motors, Jamshedpur, Software Quality Consultant and son of late P N Ramachandra Iyer, Madras Legislative, passed away on February 19, 2021 at the age of 82 in Chennai. His son Ram and Rajesh, daughters-in-law Claudia and Anne-Helene, grandchildren, other relatives and friends mourn his passing. He was dearly loved and is missed. Please email your remembrances to: prvmemories@gmail.com

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

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In Memorium

100th Birth Anniversary

D. R. K. Sharma (1921-1980)

of Bombay and Hyderabad Born Ambasamunder. Son of Kalash Nath Iyer, Zamindar and Advocate.

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SEARCH FOR MISSING

General Public is hereby informed that a girl namely Ragini, W/o Suraj, R/o H.No. 3/75, Chakkwali Gali, Malka Ganj Subzi Mandi, Delhi Age: 21 years, Height: 5' Complexity: Fair, Built: Strong, Face: Round, Wearing: Red Kurta, Blue Salwar has been missing from her home since 14.12.2020 at 9.00 pm. In this regard a FIR No. 499/2020 dated 19.12.2020 has been registered at P.S. Sabzi Mandi, Delhi.

Ragini

Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing girl but no clue has come to light so far. If any one having any information about this girl please inform undersigned.

E-mail : cic@cbi.gov.nic.in

Ph.: 011-24368638, 24368641

Fax : 011-24368639

DP/815/N/2020

SHO
P.S. Sabzi Mandi, Delhi
Ph. : 011-23823161, 8750870126,
9582608911, 9999185666

Punjab seeks Centre's help to ramp up health infrastructure

Haryana CM for resolution to SYL Canal issue

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Saturday urged the Central government to consult with the State before fixing priorities for COVID-19 vaccination. With the database of healthcare and frontline workers frozen on the Centre's app, several such workers of the State who want to register have been left out, Capt. Amarinder said.

In his speech at the NITI Aayog meeting, the Chief Minister also urged the Central government to provide immediate financial assistance of at least ₹300 crore to upgrade health infrastructure, equipment and other healthcare needs (medicines and consumables etc.) in view of the pandemic.

'Release GST amount'

The Chief Minister also requested the Central government to release the pending amount of GST compensation to the State, amounting to ₹8,253 crore for the period April 2020 to January 2021.

He reiterated the State's demand for releasing the GST compensation on monthly basis in the coming fiscal year, and sought extension in the period of GST compensation beyond the current 5 years for States like Punjab.

FROM PAGE ONE

Ease path for businesses, says Modi

"I don't honestly recall any specific request for fiscal assistance. Nobody mentioned that... Some States had requests. For example, Bihar, which is a landlocked State, wants a special port in Odisha to handle their cargo. This was backed by Jharkhand. Rajasthan, for example, wanted the Indira Gandhi Canal to be given the national status... so, much more development-oriented requests rather than any financial," he said.

NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant added that agriculture issues which were discussed included aligning cropping system to agro-climatic conditions at district level for optimal resource utilisation, and promoting water conservation.

During his address, Mr. Modi asked the States to take advantage of Central schemes such as the production-linked incentive scheme to attract investments. He pointed out that States had a 40% share in the National Infrastructure Pipeline and therefore, it was imperative that the States and the Centre synergise their budgets, make plans, and set priorities.

Centre may rethink order on international seminars

The guidelines also covered "sensitive" subjects that included "political, scientific, technical, commercial, personal [subjects] with provisions for sharing of data in any form; presentations".

Though such permissions were required for visits by foreign speakers, this was the first time they were sought to be applied to virtual meetings as well as mentioned terms such as "India's internal matters".

Scientists have been protesting against the new guidelines. Partha Majumdar, president, Indian Academy of Sciences (IAS), wrote to Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal earlier this week requesting that the guidelines be withdrawn.

"The Indian Academy of Sciences considers the pro-

'Petrol price hike a vexatious issue'

She also pointed out that the prices of Brent crude had been increasing since November and with production cuts being forecast by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, there would be further pressure on oil prices towards the higher side.

The Finance Minister said given this reality, it was for the oil marketing companies to decide whether they could cut the prices. "Technically, the oil prices have been freed and the government has no control over it," she pointed out.

"I just cannot be one Union Minister in the Centre to say, right we will bring it down by this much (referring to the excise duty). Will that guarantee that space is

not going to be occupied by the States because everyone now needs money and revenue," Ms. Sitharaman said.

On whether petrol and diesel prices could be brought under the GST regime, she said that decision could be made only through discussion at the GST Council and with consultation among the States.

"Once they agree on a rate, then there can be a uniform rate of petrol across the country with just one tax that can be shared by both the Centre and States, rather than the States having their own tax rates and Centre having its own," Ms. Sitharaman added.

She also said there was a need for rationalisation of current GST rates.

India, China hold another round of talks

The other major friction points are Gogra, Hot Springs, Dapsang Plains and Demchok, of which the focus of this round of talks is expected to be on Gogra and Hot Springs, where partial disengagement took place in June-July last year.

For the disengagement at Pangong lake, both sides had worked out a step-by-step agreement and signed it.

A second official said a similar agreement would be worked out for the subsequent rounds of disengagement.

Bengaluru's age-old places of worship must prove land title

Corporation to issue notice to all religious structures in city following a HC order

**SHARATH S. SRIVATSA
K.V. ADITYA BHARADWAJ**
BENGALURU

"Globally, for positioning of India, for India to gain opportunities, ease of doing business is important. For this, we have to improve our laws, systems and meet the expectations of the citizens... We will have to emphasise what is necessary for ease of living," he said.

"We are also seeing how the private sector of the country is enthusiastically coming forward to participate in the country's development... As the government, we also have to honour this enthusiasm and give them as much opportunity in the Aatmanirbhar Bharat campaign," he said.

The Prime Minister said agriculture offered immense opportunities and that reforms were very important for farmers to get necessary economic resources, better infrastructure and modern technology. He added that even though India was an agrarian economy, it imported edible oil worth ₹65,000-70,000 crore. "We can stop this. Money can go to our farmers' account. Our farmers are entitled to this money. But we need to plan accordingly for this."

The BBMP, has also issued notices to several heritage



Tracing roots: A view of St. Mary's Basilica Church at Shivajinagar in Bengaluru. ■FILE PHOTO

churches in east Bengaluru, including the St. Mary's Basilica in Shivajinagar that dates back to 1803, and St. Patrick's Church built in 1844 for Irish soldiers.

Though most of them have received notices to furnish the title deed and other land-related documents, some have also been issued

notice to demolish the structure within three days of receiving the notice since they are unauthorised.

Civic Commissioner N. Manjunath Prasad confirmed that all religious structures in the city, both on public and private land, however old they

are, were being served notices to prove land titles.

A spokesperson for the Archdiocese of Bangalore J.A. Kanthraj said officials issuing notices had been rude during their meetings with priests. "Several churches have been issued notices to demolish structures within three days, without giving an opportunity to be heard," he said.

MLC and former mayor P.R. Ramesh, who is closely associated with Sri Dharmaraya Swamy temple, said, "The Centre has enacted The Place of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, that provides for maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947. Ideally, this should be the cut-off date. Seeking documents for title deeds of a centuries-old temple is absurd," he said.

Landing scare



Freak accident: Air India Express flight (IX1676), which flew in from Doha carrying 64 passengers, lost control and hit an electric pole while landing at the Vijayawada International Airport in Gannavaram on Saturday. All passengers and crew members escaped unhurt. ■PTI

High-security number plates to be mandatory in Karnataka

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

Motorists who registered their vehicles more than two years ago will have to change the number plates as Karnataka is making the installation of High-Security Registration Plates (HSRP) mandatory for all vehicles.

As per the Transport Department's data, 2.10 crore vehicles were registered till March 2019, of which 80.49 lakh were registered in Bengaluru alone.

The owners will have to pay to replace the number plates.

The rule for installing

HSRPs is already applicable for vehicles registered after April 1, 2019. The State government had initiated the implementation of HSRP in 2010-II. However, the tender process was embroiled in various controversies and the matter also reached the courts.

The painting competition will have a preliminary round and a finale. Students in Classes III to V can submit entries for the Sub-junior category, and the topics for them are 'Dream Home', 'Family Picnic' or 'My Favourite Animal'. Students in Classes VI to VIII under the Junior category can paint on 'Favourite festival', 'Fun with family', or 'Wildlife Safari'. Students in Classes IX to XII, who are a part of the Senior category, can paint on 'Colours of India', 'Family Vacation', or 'Clean and Green India'.

Students are mandatorily

Siddaramaiah to build Ram temple in his native village

The Congress leader says such temples are constructed everywhere and not just in Ayodhya

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Mysuru The former Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday said he would get a Ram temple constructed in his village, Siddaramanahundi, near here.

just in Ayodhya. He refused to divulge the estimated cost of construction.

Fund collection

His comment earlier that he was for building a Ram temple anywhere except in Ayodhya has attracted the wrath of RSS and BJP leaders. He had also raised ques-

tions on accountability in fund collection drive.

Asked if the BJP was trying to play on people's religious sentiments, Mr. Siddaramaiah said people have bhaya-bhakti (fear and devotion) towards god and hence they were donating.

However, Mr. Siddaramaiah reiterated that there

needs to be accountability.

When his attention was drawn to Minister for Rural Development and Panchayat Raj K.S. Eshwarappa's statement questioning who Mr. Siddaramaiah was to seek an account, the former Chief Minister said he was doing so as a citizen of the country.

He recalled that a similar

drive was taken up a few years ago when both funds and bricks for the temple in Ayodhya were collected.

Though he said he would not like to say that there was corruption in the exercise, Mr. Siddaramaiah said their refusal to make public the accounts would lead to suspicion.

Kerala freedom fighter pens memoir at 100

Gangadhara Panikkar has also brought out an audio version of his debut work

**SAM PAUL A.
ALAPPUZHA**

It could take a while for some to find their calling in writing. For Gangadhara Panikkar, a freedom fighter-cum-teacher from Punnamoodu, near Mavelikara, it came at the age of 100.

Rithubhedangalil, his debut book, which was released a few months ago, after he turned 100, is a recollection of his life through the change of seasons. "I am not a poet or a story-teller. I am an old teacher who loves literature," he says.

A voracious reader, he says the COVID-19-induced lockdown prompted him to pen the memoir. "I used to

write for magazines, but never attempted a book. Late actor Narendra Prasad was my student and he often told me to write a book. But it never happened until the pandemic struck," says Mr. Panikkar, a Gandhian who refused to accept pension benefits for freedom fighters.

He had a brush with history 90 years ago. When Mahatma Gandhi came to

Tattarambalam, near Mavelikara, Mr. Panikkar, then a 10-year-old, walked 4 km, without the consent of his parents, to catch a glimpse of him. On his return, he lost his way and a stranger brought him home. His anxious parents punished him and a scar on his thigh is a reminder of his adulation of Gandhi and his philosophy.

As a high school teacher from 1950 to 1975, he worked in different parts of Kerala before retiring in Lakshadweep. He also served in various posts in the Congress party, Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, and in cooperative societies.

Gangadhara Panikkar

Thattarambalam, near Mavelikara, Mr. Panikkar, then a 10-year-old, walked 4 km, without the consent of his parents, to catch a glimpse of him. On his return, he lost his way and a stranger brought him home. His anxious parents punished him and a scar on his thigh is a reminder of his adulation of Gandhi and his philosophy.

As a high school teacher

Initial talks on Kerala PSC strike positive

Agitation to be continued peacefully

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The initial round of discussions between the striking PSC rank holders' associations and the Kerala government ended on an optimistic note on Saturday.

On the 26th day of the strike, the association leaders said they would continue the agitation peacefully until the discussions with the government yielded tangible results.

Principal Secretary, Home, T.K. Jose and Additional Director-General of Police Manoj Abraham represented the government. The police had served the strikers notice to attend the meeting in the morning.

Separately, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan urged PSC rankers not to fall prey to disinformation or resort to desperate acts of violence.

CPI(M) Polit Bureau member Kodiyeri Balakrishnan urged PSC rankers to walk back from the path of

agitation and to trust the government.

Congress legislators Shafi Parambil and K.S. Sabarinath continued their fast in front of the Secretariat to express their support to the striking PSC rankers.

Officials said the Sports and Youth Affairs Department would hold separate talks with national medal winners eligible for government jobs. The government would accommodate them as vacancies arose.

It would also confer with representatives of those on the PSC rank list for appointment to post of civil police officer. The administration would point out that the government had limited legal latitude in reviving obsolete rank lists.

The Opposition continued to intensify their struggle against the government on "backdoor appointments and denial of jobs to PSC rankers".

IN BRIEF



Jagan reiterates demand for SCS to Andhra Pradesh VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy during the virtual meeting of the governing council of NITI Aayog said the Central government is obliged to grant the Special Category Status to Andhra Pradesh as per the commitment given in Parliament as a precondition to bifurcation.

Display swords at home, says Pramod Muthalik

Sri Rama Sena chief Pramod Muthalik, who has often courted controversy for his provocative speeches, asked people to "display swords" in their homes addressing a crowd during Shivaji Jayanti in Karnataka's Gadag district on Friday night.

14-year-old boy killed in tiger attack in Kodagu

A 14-year-old boy was killed by a tiger at a plantation in Kodagu on Saturday. The victim has been identified as Aiyappa. The Class VIII student had gone to fetch timber from a private coffee estate when he was attacked. There are tell-tale evidence of the tiger on the victim's body, according to the residents of the village.

Hospitality sector gets 'industry' tag in Karnataka

The Karnataka government has assigned "industry" status to the hospitality sector, and this is particularly aimed at revival of star hotels, which have been suffering owing to the COVID-19 and the resultant slowdown in the tourism sector.

Video in slain lawyer case suspected to be morphed

The two versions may be different

MARRI RAMU

HYDERABAD

Was the video clip in which slain lawyer Gattu Varman Rao was heard taking the name of an ex-MLA of ruling Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) morphed? Investigators are not ready to say yes with certainty but strongly suspect it to be so. The video clip showing Rao slumped on the road with deep bleeding wounds and struggling to answer queries about his identity had gone viral.

Rao named Kunta Srinu as his attacker. He also told by-standers posing questions that Srinu and he hailed from the same village

of Kunjapadugu, 15 km from Manthani. Towards the end of the video, Rao is heard mentioning the name of the former legislator.

In the first version of the video clip, that politician's name was not heard. But a day after the murder, the same video got recirculated in which Rao is heard taking the ex-MLA's name, a police officer associated with the investigation said. He and other investigating officials believe the second version of the video clip was morphed.

However, they are not sure why anyone would morph the video and who could it be.

■MD-NDE

Former IPS officers slam Disha's arrest

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Former IPS officers have slammed the arrest of 22-year-old Disha Ravi, a climate change activist, by the Delhi Police on February 13.

Being anti-government is mistaken to be anti-national and the arrest of the student shows that the Centre is panicking, the experts said. "They [the government] seem threatened by her," said former DGP of Punjab and Padma Bhushan awardee Julio

Ribeiro. Retired IPS officer Meenakshi Borwankar said, "Youth by definition is radical and revolutionary. That does not mean they are violent or anti-national."

She said that police should engage and partner with youth than alienate them.

Unnao girl taken off ventilator

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
UNNAO

The teenager from an Unnao village, who was among three girls found unconscious in a field on Wednesday, was taken off ventilator support on Saturday, a statement from the Kanpur hospital treating her said.

The girl was "off ventilator and has spontaneous respiration" three days after she was admitted to the hospital at 11 p.m. on Wednesday, a medical bulletin issued by Regency Hospital PRO Paramjeet Arora said.

The girl was being treated in the paediatric intensive care unit and was "under constant monitoring", the bulletin said.

Meanwhile, the Unnao Police on Saturday registered an FIR against Congress leader Udit Raj over a tweet by him claiming that the victims' family had alleged the girls were raped and that the last rites were performed without their consent. The FIR was filed under Section 153 of the Indian Penal Code.

Priyanka keeps up attack on farm laws

Congress leader targets Modi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GAZIABAD

Describing Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the "arrogant raja" of fables, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi-Vadra on Saturday said the contentious farm laws would lead to the closure of government mandis and the weakening of the MSP regime.

The Congress leader was addressing a 'kisan panchayat' in Baghara town of Muzaffarnagar - her third such address to farmers in western Uttar Pradesh, after

Order on Disha plea on Tuesday

Police allege that the climate activist deleted emails and digital evidence

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

There is no evidence to show that the "toolkit" on the farmers' protest is responsible for the violence on January 26, climate activist Disha Ravi's counsel told a Delhi court which reserved for Tuesday its order on her bail plea.

"If highlighting farmers' protest globally is sedition, I'm better in jail," Ms. Ravi said through her counsel on Saturday.

Ms. Ravi's counsel was submitting arguments after the Delhi Police opposed her bail plea, alleging she was preparing the toolkit with those advocating for Khalistan and was part of a global conspiracy to defame India and create unrest in the country in the garb of the farmers' protest.

"This was not just a toolkit. The real plan was to defame India and create unrest



In solidarity: Protesters hold placards against the arrest of Disha Ravi at a demonstration in Hyderabad. • AFP

here," the police said before Additional Sessions Judge Dharmender Rana.

The police alleged that Ms. Ravi deleted WhatsApp chats, emails and other evidence and had been aware of legal actions she could face.

"She was part of the Indian chapter of the global conspiracy to defame India and create unrest in the garb

of the farmers' protest," the police alleged, adding she was in touch and preparing and sharing the toolkit with those calling for Khalistan. "It shows there was a sinister design behind this toolkit," the police told the court.

However, Ms. Ravi's lawyer rejected the allegations. "There is no evidence to link me with Sikhs For Justice, a banned organisation.

And even if I meet someone, there is no symbol on him that he is a secessionist," the defence counsel said, speaking for Ms. Ravi.

"The Delhi police gave permission for the farmers' march, which they're claiming that I (Ms. Ravi) asked people to join, so how did I become seditious," the lawyer said in court.

There has been nobody arrested in connection with violence at Red Fort who says he joined in because of the toolkit, Ms. Ravi's counsel said, adding that there was no evidence to show that the toolkit was responsible for the violence.

Counsel also questioned the contents of the FIR and asserted that people could have different points of view on a subject. "There is an allegation in the FIR that 'yoga' and 'chai' are being targeted. Is it an offence?" Ms. Ravi's lawyer asked.

'Right to peaceful protest is a non-negotiable human right'

Swedish activist Greta Thunberg extends support to Disha

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Swedish teen climate activist Greta Thunberg has extended her support to Disha Ravi, the 22-year-old environmental activist who has been charged with sedition for allegedly editing an advocacy toolkit on the farmers' protest, and sharing it with Ms. Thunberg.

"Freedom of speech and the right to peaceful protest and assembly are non-negotiable human rights. These must be a fundamental part of any democracy," Ms. Thunberg tweeted on Friday, using the hashtag #StandWithDishaRavi.

Her first public expression of support comes almost a week after Ms. Ravi's arrest.

The Swedish activist's earlier tweets, first sharing and



Greta Thunberg

"We consist of a group of students who, with only a ray of hope, strive towards creating a future which is worth living in...Disha has been an integral part of this movement. Not only has she been voicing our environment concerns in India but strived for the equality and representation of the country's most affected and marginalized groups in the global climate movement's narrative," said their tweet thread.

FFF India emphasised that the organisation has always condemned violence of any sort.

"If there is one thing [Ms. Ravi's] activism has taught us, it is to raise our voices peacefully and respectfully for those at stake, to ensure justice for everyone," the group stated.

SC judges ready for physical hearings

CJI Bobde to take a final decision

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court judges have informally told Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde that they are agreeable to hold physical court hearings of cases.

The judges have left it to Chief Justice Bobde to take the final decision.

Vinay, the eldest of six siblings of a Dalit family, had lost his job in a bird feeding unit during the lockdown, his sister said. Since then, he had been tending to the family's fields.

The father of the 13-year-old who has also been detained, said his son, Vinay and two others from the village were taken away by the police on Wednesday night. The IG, however, said only two youth had been apprehended in the case.

Echoing the demand of

the family of the dead girls,

the father said, "We want a

CBI inquiry. We don't know

who has framed our chil-

dren, but they will have to

face god."

noted in its February 18 order that "learned counsel for the appellant submits that they would like a physical hearing. Post the matter for physical hearing in the first week of March 2021".

On January 28, the Supreme Court issued a statement that though the infection was a major and unprecedented challenge, 1,998 Benches of the court had held 43,713 hearings through video conferencing till December 31 notwithstanding technological constraints, pandemic protocol and reduced workforce.

But the virtual court system has not been without its critics, that too, from within the Supreme Court judiciary. A Bench led by Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul had recorded its "exasperation" about the frequent disconnections and interruptions.

Lately, lawyers have pushed for the resumption of physical court hearings.

Chamoli toll rises to 65

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
GOPESHWAR (UTTARAKHAND)

Uttarakhand to 65, officials said.

The bodies were recovered from the desilting tank near the Tapovan-Vishnugad hydel project site on Saturday taking the toll in the February 7 glacial disaster in

Uttarakhand to 65, officials said.

Biology study must for MBBS admission'

Court says subject should have been taken in Plus 2

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has held in a judgment that prior knowledge of senior secondary biology or biological sciences along with practical knowledge of the English language is at "the heart of eligibility" for MBBS admission.

A Bench of Justices L. Nageswara Rao and S. Ravindra Bhat declared the eligibility criterion based on an appeal filed by the Kalojji Narayana Rao University of Health



MBBS students require a base in biological sciences, the court has said.

Sciences challenging a decision of the Telangana High Court. The High Court had allowed a student's contention that the institution illegally denied her admission to the MBBS course for the

2020-21 academic year on the ground that she did not produce records of her study in the required subjects.

Setting aside the High Court order, the apex court upheld that "MBBS primarily if not predominantly, involves prior knowledge - both theoretical and practical, of senior secondary level in biology or biological sciences"

Justice Bhat, who wrote the recent judgment, referred to Regulation 4 of the Medical Council of India Regulations on Graduate Medical Education of 1997, which stipulates that the eligibility criteria for admission to the MBBS course stipulated that

a candidate should have "undergone study at the 10+2 stage, [or in the Intermediate course] in the subjects of physics, chemistry and biology/Bio-technology".

"The substance of the eligibility requirement indeed is that the candidate should have qualified an Intermediate level examination or first year of a graduate course, and studied the subjects of physics, chemistry and biology at this level, along with practical testing in these subject areas, and the English language. This subject matter requirement is at the heart of eligibility to be admitted into the medical course," the court said.

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DIPR/320/Display/2021

REGISTRAR

Railways impetus a major boost for RuPay cards

The 12.54 lakh workforce of the largest employer in India to migrate from Visa, MasterCard gateways

S. VIJAY KUMAR
CHENNAI

In a major thrust to RuPay's increasing market share, the Ministry of Railways has advised its 12.54 lakh workforce to convert their Debit/ATM Cards to RuPay-powered cards. The largest employer in the country pays ₹1,54,214 crore a year as wages into the salary accounts of its staff.

The move is seen as a boost to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Aatma Nirbhar Bharat' and 'Digital India' initiatives. RuPay is a product of the National Payments Corporation of India, an umbrella organisation that facilitates retail payments and acclaimed to be



Large outgo: The Railways pays ₹1,54,214 crore to its staff every year. • FILE PHOTO

India's first-of-its-kind global card payment with wide acceptance across ATMs, e-commerce platforms and POS machines.

In a recent order to all the General Managers and pro-

tection, Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance, keeping in view the government's impetus for proliferation of RuPay Card.

"Taking this opportunity, it is advised that all officers/staff may be facilitated to get their Debit/ATM card attached to their salary account converted to RuPay based debit card," Sanjeev Sharma, Director Finance Accounts, Railway Board, said. There are several imprest holders in the Railways wherein re-coupling of imprest is regulated through the SBI imprest card. "Consequent upon the government of India's push to give imprest to RuPay Card, it is de-

sired that the SBI Imprest Card be replaced by SBI RuPay Imprest Card at the earliest. The Railways is also being advised to be ready to switch over to this system. Please give top priority and also early feedback on action taken..." the official said in a note to the SBI.

Last year, Railway Minister Piyush Goyal launched the new co-branded contactless credit card offered on RuPay platform by the IRCTC and the SBI Cards together. According to a senior SBI official, Debit/ATM cards on RuPay Card platform is being given to all account holders with a ₹2 lakh insurance cover offered by the Centre.

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M NDE

India backs the Maldives on UN role

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

India on Saturday reiterated its support for a greater role for the Maldives in multilateral affairs. Speaking at a joint media event in the Maldives' capital Male, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said Maldives' Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid is "best equipped" to be the President of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly.

"I reiterate today India's strong support to the candidature of Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid for the President of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly next year. Foreign Minister Shahid with his vast diplomatic experience and his leadership qualities is in our view the best equipped to preside over the General Assembly of 193 nations of the world. We will work together to make this a reality. We would really like to work with you during our membership of the UN Security Council for 2021-22," said Dr. Jaishankar in his remarks.

The senior Indian Minister said multilateral engagement was "very important" in the contemporary globalised system and maintained that India had always been "supportive" of the "larger participation of the Maldives", and added, "By joining the Indian Ocean Regional Association, rejoining the Commonwealth and by playing a greater role in the United Nations, Maldives has demonstrated its value in the comity of nations." The Maldives rejoined the Commonwealth in February 2020, three years after it quit the organisation.

Mr. Jaishankar handed over 100,000 additional doses of COVID-19 vaccines to his counterpart Mr. Shahid.

Trinamool plays 'daughter' card

Ahead of election, party aims at portraying Mamata as the 'daughter of the soil'

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

In an attempt to project Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee as West Bengal's "own daughter" and the BJP as "outsiders", the Trinamool Congress on Saturday launched a new slogan ahead of the Assembly election in West Bengal.

The slogan, *Bangla Nijer Meyekai Chay* (Bengal wants its own daughter), was officially announced at the party headquarters in the presence of senior party leaders.

"Every person of Bengal trusts her daughter. Under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee, Bengal's culture has been protected. She won't allow misogynistic *Boris* attack the culture of Bengal," Trinamool Congress MP Kali Ghosh Dastidar said. *Boris* or *Bargis* is a casual term used for troublesome outside forces.

The city is flooded with



Gearing up: Paramilitary forces after arriving in Kolkata by a special train on Saturday, ahead of the Assembly polls. ■ PTI

the posters of the CM with the slogan *Bangla Nijer Meyekai Chay* and the leader and supporters of Trinamool Congress promoted the slogan on social media. The party plans to take the message to every "nook and corner" of the State and a campaign will be organised at all

district headquarters on Sunday.

"Bengal wants her own daughter is the slogan. This is not a tough fight, but this is an election that the whole of India is looking at. This election will decide the fate of the Constitution," State party president Subrata Banerjee must be removed."

Bakshi said.

According to party sources, the slogan, which is crucial to the party's poll campaign, is aimed to appeal to the people on two levels – dubbing the BJP as an "outsider force" and appealing to the women of the State describing Ms. Banerjee as Bengal's own daughter. The CM, in her public meetings, has been saying that "Bengal will be run by Bengalis, not outsiders".

Trinamool Congress MP

and Ms. Banerjee's nephew Abhishek Banerjee, who addressed a gathering in north Bengal, said, "One must not forget she [Mamata Banerjee] is the only woman Chief Minister in the country who is being targeted by the Prime Minister, the Union Home Minister, several other Cabinet Ministers and Chief Ministers and Deputy Chief Ministers of several States. They are all saying that Ms. Banerjee must be removed."

Sonowal govt. raises daily wage of tea workers by ₹50

This is in a series of pre-poll sops for Adivasis in Assam

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Ahead of the Assembly polls, the Sarbananda Sonowal Cabinet in Assam has decided to increase the daily wage of tea plantation workers by ₹50.

The decision by the Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition government came a week after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi promised to increase the wage of tea workers from the current ₹167 to ₹365 a day, although Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had earlier promised a sustainable hike.

"Tea tribes" or Adivasis, originally from Central India, comprise about 20% of Assam's 3.3 crore people and are a major voting force in 45 of 126 Assembly seats in the State. They are thus the flavour of every poll season in Assam, and the BJP



Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal. ■ FILE PHOTO

government has provided a slew of sops including cash transfer and specific schemes for women plantation workers.

"The Cabinet has taken a decision to increase the wage of tea workers from ₹167 to ₹217. A decision has also been taken to form a committee headed by Principal Secretary J.B. Ekka for equal wage of small tea garden workers," Transport Mi-

nister and government spokesperson Chandra Mohan Patowary said on Saturday.

The wage structure largely applies to about 800 major tea estates in Assam.

Cong. slams hike

The Congress-affiliated Assam Saham Mazdoor Sangh slammed the "meagre" hike. "The BJP had in its 2016 vision document promised to increase the wage to ₹351. The amount is nowhere near this figure, let alone implement a plan for increased wages with retrospective effect from 2018," said Rupesh Gowala, the organisation's general secretary.

"This is sheer betrayal of the tea workers by the BJP after five years in power. We will increase the wage to ₹365 within 30 days of coming to power," Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi said.

Promote Indian languages: Venkaiah

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Ahead of International Mother Language Day on Sunday, Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu wrote to all members of the Upper House urging them to promote and preserve Indian languages. He lamented that regional languages were being given short shrift.

Writing to each member in his or her own language, Mr. Naidu said India was home to 19,500 languages and dialects, of which 200 were facing the threat of immediate extinction.

"For us in India, International Mother Language Day has special significance. Cultural and linguistic diversity form the bedrock of Indian civilisation. Our values and vision, aspirations and ideals, life and literature find expression in our mother tongue," he wrote in the three-page letter.

Languages were being driven to extinction, he said, because of the mindset of looking down upon regional languages and "wearing the linguistic badge of competence in English as a false sign of superiority".

Exhorting the virtues of the mother tongue, Mr. Naidu urged members to be facilitators in promoting native languages. "Given your standing among the people you represent, your effort could give a fillip to the promotion of Indian languages," he wrote.

Gogra point, where Chinese troops had built sizeable infrastructure in the last year, although a partial disengagement took place in July 2020.

According to Mr. Saran, who had in 2013 prepared a report of recommendations to the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh about the need for infrastructure at the LAC, the decision for Indian troops to vacate the Kailash Range heights, including Rechin La and Rezang La, in the first phase of disengagement was valid if there was an "overall agreement" to vacate all other territory, that China will adhere to.

However, he pointed out that after the Doklam stand-off in 2017 where Indian forces had stopped Chinese

troops from building a road in Bhutanese territory, Chinese troops had subsequently returned to build roads and infrastructure in other areas of the same region.

Not a clever move

"If the vacation of the Kailash Ranges is part and parcel of a larger deal, where we go back to the status quo ante and we do at the end of this process, manage to get disengagement along the entire LAC, then yes, this is fine. But if we have vacated these heights, and later on, we find that our expectations of Chinese disengaging is not borne out by what happens on the ground, then yes, we would say that this was not such a clever move on our

part," he said.

Asked why he thought

China had agreed to the disengagement, despite occupying areas along the LAC for nearly a year, Mr. Saran said

China may have "miscalculated" that its aggression would have been a "low cost or low risk" operation.

But after the Galwan incident in which 20 Indian soldiers died, and China has announced it lost at least four soldiers, the Chinese "script" went awry, and in fact it would appear that China didn't achieve much through the standoff, as Indian troops held their ground.

(Interview can be accessed at <https://www.thehindu.com/podcast/>)

Over 1,300 buildings sealed as COVID-19 cases rise in Mumbai

STAFF REPORTER
MUMBAI

Over 1,300 buildings have been sealed in Mumbai as of Friday, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) said on Saturday.

On Thursday, BMC Commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal directed the civic administration to implement the health norms strictly in the wake of the rising cases of COVID-19. The administration sent out directions to seal any societies with five or more coronavirus patients.

On Saturday, Mumbai recorded 897 new cases of COVID-19, indicating the rising



BMC marshals fine people without mask on Saturday.

■ EMMANUEL YOGINI

trend of patients. The total number of cases in the city stood at 3,18,207. It also recorded three deaths, taking the total death toll to 11,440.

As per the data, ward T (Mulund) has the highest number of sealed societies at 233. The total number of positive cases here stand at 514. It is followed by ward N (Ghatkopar) and ward P (South Goregaon), where 125 societies have been sealed.

The BMC had also directed to double the number of marshals to keep vigilance and fine citizens not wearing masks at public places. As of Friday, the total fine collected stands at ₹27.18 lakh. Zone 2, which includes the Wadala and Dadar area, has collected highest amount in fines at ₹4.64 lakh.

Break the chain: Health Ministry

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

With Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh reporting a surge in COVID-19 cases, the Health Ministry said on Saturday that people should keep in mind the importance of COVID-19-appropriate behaviour.

"This is essential for breaking the chain of transmission of the virus and containment of spread of the disease," it said.

Eighteen States and Union Territories did not report any COVID-19 deaths in the last 24 hours.

Gehlot considering kin connection in bypolls

Cong. under pressure to give tickets to relatives of deceased MLAs in three seats

MOHAMMED IQBAL
JAIPUR

Faced with the difficult task of selecting candidates for the upcoming by-elections in four Assembly seats, the ruling Congress in Rajasthan is considering political factors which could influence the perceptions of voters. The party is under pressure to give tickets to the kin of the deceased MLAs in three constituencies.

The bypolls are to be held in Sujangarh, Sahara, Vallabhnagar and Rajsamand, where the sitting MLAs died during the last four months. Three of these seats were with the Congress, while the Rajsamand constituency was represented by BJP leader Kishan Maheshwari.

The discussion on the domestic Australian rule between the two leaders is being viewed as unusual. It appears that following the enactment, the Bill is likely to influence other democratically elected governments struggling to contain online exchanges.

The discussion is being

viewed as significant as the

Centre has looked at reigning in major social media platforms.



Eye on by-elections: Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot inaugurating development works in four Assembly constituencies through videoconferencing in Jaipur. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

augmented and laid the foundation stones for various schemes worth ₹158 crore on Friday.

Mr. Gehlot said it was his responsibility after the death of the sitting MLAs to ensure that development is not stalled in the constituencies. "These works were sanctioned in the past. They have been inaugurated to give direct benefit to the people. About 55% of the promises made in our election manifesto have been fulfilled in the last two years," he said.

The frontrunner in Sujangarh in Meghwal's son, while the Congress may field Shak-

tawat's wife as its candidate in Vallabh Nagar to get the benefit of public sympathy. The party has appointed Ministers, MLAs and office-bearers as in-charges in the four seats to ensure timely completion of public works.

Son in the reckoning

Mr. Gehlot's son Vaibhav Gehlot is in the reckoning in the politically significant Rajsamand constituency, according to Congress sources. He has visited Rajsamand several times in the last month following the victory of the Congress in the local body polls and formation of its board in the municipal council after 25 years.

BJP State president Satish Poonia claimed that the Congress was focusing on development works because of its "insecurity and fear of defeat" in the bypolls. Mr. Poonia said at a meeting of chiefs of front organisations here that the Congress had lost ground in the State because of its "internal rift".

Modi, Morrison discuss media Bill

Legislation is being studied worldwide

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has discussed Canberra's media policy with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The conversation was held against the backdrop of the Australian government's negotiations with tech giants, which led to a temporary suspension of many Australian Facebook accounts on Thursday.

"As comprehensive strategic partners, we can work together on common challenges, including COVID-19, the circular economy, oceans and an open, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific. We also discussed the progress of our media platform Bill," Mr. Morrison said on Friday after his conversation with Mr. Modi.

Mr. Modi's social media post on the conversation did not highlight the portion on the Australian Bill.

Under the News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code Bill 2020, tech and social media giants such as Facebook and Google will have to pay local news outlets for using their content. The move is being studied worldwide as it will set a precedent in the use of Web-based news and content that may permanently impact the use of the Internet in Australia.

It is in this context that the discussion on the domestic Australian rule between the two leaders is being viewed as unusual. It appears that following the enactment, the Bill is likely to influence other democratically elected governments struggling to contain online exchanges.

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CM YK

Myanmar protests: 2 dead in police firing

Tensions escalated in Mandalay where police confronted striking shipyard workers, protesters

REUTERS

MANDALAY

Two people were killed in Myanmar's second city Mandalay on Saturday when police and soldiers fired to disperse protests against a February 1 military coup, emergency workers said, the bloodiest day in more than two weeks of demonstrations.

Protesters took to the streets in cities and towns across Myanmar with members of ethnic minorities, poets, rappers and transport workers among those demanding an end to military rule and the release from detention of elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi and others.

Tensions escalated quickly in Mandalay where police and soldiers confronted striking shipyard workers and other protesters.

'Live rounds used'

Some of the demonstrators fired catapults at police. Police responded with tear gas



Using force: Police charging forward to disperse protesters in Mandalay, Myanmar, on Saturday. ■AP

and gunfire, and witnesses said they found the cartridges of both live rounds and rubber bullets on the ground.

"Twenty people were injured and two are dead," said Ko Aung, a leader of the Parahita Darhi volunteer emergency service.

One man died from a head wound, media professionals, and a volunteer doctor said.

Several other injured protesters were carried away on stretchers by volunteer medics, their clothes soaked in blood.

State television MRTV's evening news broadcast made no mention of the protests or casualties. In the main city Yangon, residents again banged pots and pans in a night ritual expressing defiance of the coup.

More than a fortnight of demonstrations and a civil disobedience campaign of strikes and disruptions show no sign of dying down. Opponents of the coup are sceptical of the Army's promise to hold a new election and hand power to the winner.

Memorial ceremony

A young woman protester died on Friday after being shot in the head last week as police dispersed a crowd in the capital, Naypyitaw, the first death among anti-coup demonstrators.

The Army said one policeman has died of injuries sustained in a protest.

On Saturday, young people in Yangon carried a wreath and laid flowers at a memorial ceremony for the woman, Mya Thwate Thwate Khaing, while a similar ceremony took place in Naypyitaw.

"The sadness from her death is one thing, but we've also got courage to continue for her sake," said student protester Khin Maw Maw Oo.

The demonstrators are demanding the restoration of the elected government and the release of Ms. Suu Kyi and others. They have also called for the scrapping of a 2008 Constitution that has assured the Army a major role in politics since nearly 50 years of direct military rule ended in 2011.

The U.S., Britain, Canada and New Zealand have announced limited sanctions, with a focus on military leaders.

With media blitz, China crafts new narrative on border crisis

China announced 4 soldiers were killed in Galwan clashes

ANANTH KRISHNAN

Over the past 24 hours, the Indian Embassy in Beijing has received thousands of messages in its mentions on Weibo, the Twitter-equivalent used in China, more than it has ever received in one day.

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The flood of messages, which began on Friday evening, was not much of a surprise. Through the day, state media outlets had highlighted the announcement of honours for five soldiers, four awarded posthumously. The names and images of the five were being shared widely on Chinese social media, along with their personal stories, all leading to an outpouring of sentiment.



Face-Off: A video grab shows PLA personnel interacting with their Indian counterparts in Galwan Valley. ■AP/CCTV

national nerve in China, also occupied the focus of the attention, rather than any questions about the PLA agreeing to withdraw from the north bank of Pangong lake and other areas it occupied.

The broader aim of the narrative appeared aimed at underlining the message Qi Fabao, who sustained a head injury and was honoured as "hero regimental commander for defending the border", in an earlier confrontation with Indian soldiers. The state media also shared posts from their battlefield diaries, including a note from Wang Zhuruan to his parents, written "before he left for the battlefield", apologising if he could not return to be a "familial son" and promising "to repay their love and care in the afterlife".

The other messages were both patriotic and political. "We are the boundary stone of the motherland and every inch of land under our feet is the territory of the motherland," Xiao Siyuan was quoted as saying. "One should mark accomplishments wherever he is needed by the Communist Party," was the message from Chen Hongjun, battalion commander.

PLA Senior Colonel Ren Guoqiang, spokesperson for the Ministry of Defence, described the five as "iron soldiers nurtured by the Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and the Xi Jinping's thinking on strengthening the military", and as "outstanding representatives of the Chinese military in the new era".

The details of the PLA's withdrawal did not get in the way of the most popular social media hashtag of the day, which said, "Not an inch of our country's mountains and rivers can be lost."

That was shared by some of the most popular Chinese celebrities, including singer Hua Chenyu, who shared the message with his 39 million followers. The popular pop group TFBoys did the same to its 21 million followers, adding a message of thanks to the PLA soldiers.

By the end of Friday, the hashtag had 1.6 billion views and generated more than 1.7

Full effect

The carefully crafted narrative, which was buttressed by the state media releasing new footage from the Galwan clash of June 15, was timed for full effect. The announcement was made a day after China returned to work after a seven-day national holiday for the lunar new year, and nine days after India and China announced the beginning of a disengagement process.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) said the announcement, made eight months after the clash in which 20 Indian soldiers lost their lives, was aimed at honouring the soldiers and "setting the record straight", after it accused India of "distorting the truth" and "slandering the Chinese border troops".

By waiting for the disengagement to begin, the Chinese government avoided a situation where it would inflame national sentiment in the middle of an ongoing border crisis. The media blitz, which touched a na-

Moscow court upholds prison term for Navalny

He was ordered to serve the sentence for breaching his parole terms while he was in Germany

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

MOSCOW

A Moscow court on Saturday upheld a ruling to jail the Kremlin's most prominent opponent, Alexei Navalny, sealing his first lengthy prison sentence after a decade of legal battles with Russian authorities.

Judge Dmitry Balashov dismissed Mr. Navalny's appeal against a decision to imprison him for violating the terms of a suspended sentence received for embezzlement.

Mr. Navalny was ordered on February 2 to serve the time in a penal colony for



No relief: Alexei Navalny flashing victory symbol as he stands in a cage in the Babuskinsky District Court in Moscow. ■AP

breaching his parole terms while he was in Germany recovering from a nerve agent poisoning he blames on the Kremlin.

The anti-corruption campaigner appeared in court

on Saturday inside a glass cage for defendants, wearing a plaid shirt, smiling and flashing the V for victory symbol.

In a closing address that often broke from his usual

sarcastic tone, Mr. Navalny referenced the Bible and said he had no doubts about his decision to return to Russia.

"The Bible says: 'Blessed are those who hunger for righteousness, for they will be satisfied,'" he told the court.

"I have no regrets that I am back."

Absurd' case

He also quoted from a character in the Harry Potter books, saying it was "important not to feel alone" because that was what the villain Voldemort wanted.

He described the legal

process to jail him as "absurd" and called on Russians to take action to make the country a better place.

"Russia should be not only free, but also happy," Mr. Navalny said.

Prosecutors lashed out at Mr. Navalny, saying he acted as if he was above the law and had "an exclusive right to do as he pleases".

The judge decided, however, to count six weeks Mr. Navalny was under house arrest as part of the time served, so he will now be imprisoned for just over two-and-a-half years in a penal colony.

FB, Australia 'tentatively friended' again: Morrison

The company is back at the negotiating table: Australian PM



Scott Morrison

terest in similar action.

The Australian law, which would force Facebook and Alphabet Inc's Google to reach commercial deals with Australian publishers or face compulsory arbitration, has cleared the lower house of Parliament and is expected to be passed by the Senate within the next week.

Simon Milner, Facebook's vice-president of public policy for the Asia-Pacific region, was quoted on Saturday as telling the Sydney Morning Herald the company had three main objections.

"Facebook objects to being barred from discriminating between different news outlets that ask for money, to arbitration models that allow an independent body to select one payment over another, and to the obligation to enter commercial negotiations with Australian media firms," he said.

forms to pay for links to news content.

Australia's Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said on Friday he had spoken with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and further talks were expected over the weekend.

The stand-off comes as Australia vows to press ahead with the landmark legislation, which could set a global precedent as countries like Canada express in-

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Joe Biden's Indian-American nominee faces Senate challenge

Democratic Senator Joe Manchin says he will oppose her

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON



Neera Tanden

Tanden, 50, will be confirmed for the job.

Mr. Manchin said "her overtly partisan statements will have a toxic impact on the important working relationship between members of Congress".

Mr. Manchin's announcement means that unless a Republican Senator comes forward to support her nomination, it is unlikely that

The 100-member Senate is evenly split between the Republicans and the Democrats. The vote of Vice-President Kamala Harris will tilt the balance in favour of the Democrats. As such the vote of Mr. Manchin gains significance, given that a majority of the Republicans are likely to oppose Ms. Tanden.

In the past, Ms. Tanden has referred to Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell as "Voldemort", a villain in Harry Potter book series, and has battled Senator Bernie Sanders and his supporters online.

Divisional Railway Manager (Electrical) Salem

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Joint Secretary (Seeds)

SOUTHERN RAILWAY

E-TENDER NOTICE

No. SA-E-12-2020-21-W

dt.19.02.2021

Government of India

Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare

Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare

Krishi Bhawan, New Delhi-110001

Government of India is hosting 9th Session of Governing Body of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources on Food and Agriculture, from 4th to 11th December, 2021. EOI are invited from the interested firms as per the details given below:

Discussion/Pre-bid meeting with the interested firms

By 10:00 am on 15th March, 2021

Submission of the tender in two-bids system (i.e. technical and financial bids separately)

Technical Bid Opening

16th to 19th March, 2021

Detailed information available at

<https://agricoop.nic.in/en/tenders> OR
<https://seednet.gov.in> OR
https://www.iari.res.in/bic/projectnew32/admin/tenders/Tender_FarmersWelfare_18022021.pdf

CPP Portal ID

2021_DARE_617692_1

Contact details for any other query

Dr. Madan Pal Singh, Professor, Division of Plant Physiology, IARI, New Delhi, M: 9868783354

Joint Secretary (Seeds)

JAIPUR VIDYUT VITRAN NIGAM LIMITED

Regd. Office: Viraj Bhawan, Jyoti Nagar - Jaipur - 302005
O/o Superintendent Engineer (IT) and Field Data Centre Building,
Old Power House Jaipur-302006
energy.rajasthan.gov.in/jvnlvrml.html, oil@jvn.org, 0141-2200972

No./JPD/SE (IT)/TN-91/D

Date:

TENDER INVITING

SNAPSHOTS

**Mammoth tale**

Climate change and not extensive hunting by humans may have driven the large mammals of North America such as mammoths and glyptodonts to extinction, a new study suggests. Published in *Nature Communications*, the study used a novel statistical method to deduce that 13,000 years ago the intense lowering of temperatures resulted in their slow decline.

**Mapping naps**

Your liking for siestas may actually lie in your genes, finds a new study in *Nature Communications*. Undertaking a study of genetic information from 4,52,633 people, researchers found 123 areas of the human genome that could be responsible for how often a person naps in the afternoon. They also found preliminary links between napping habits and cardiometabolic health.

**Gauging einsteinium**

Despite its being hard and exceptionally radioactive, chemists have studied element 99 - einsteinium - and characterised its properties in the lab. Discovered in 1952 from the debris of the atomic bomb, the element has not been studied so far. In an article in *Nature*, chemists using less than 250 nanograms of the element gauged its bond distance.

**Against the flow**

Scientists from ETH Zurich have succeeded in propelling microvehicles to move against fluid flow using ultrasound. The researchers studied the behaviour of a swarm of magnetic beads spread out over 15-40 micrometre in fluid in a thin glass tube of diameter 150-300 micrometre - the size of a blood vessel in our bodies. Using ultrasound, they guided the swarm close to edge of the tube and then guided it with a magnetic field.

Challenges in developing, testing vaccines against variants

R. PRASAD

With the emergence of three variants less than two months after the first COVID-19 vaccine was approved for emergency use, all companies have begun making booster shots or tweaking the existing vaccine based on the new variants. Dr. Gagandeep Kang, Professor of Microbiology at CMC Vellore and a vaccine expert explains in an email the challenges in developing and testing newer vaccines to keep pace with the emergence of new variants. Edited excerpts:

What are the main challenges in developing and testing booster vaccine doses to address the new variants?

Each variant (and many more beyond the first three that have been widely reported in the last couple of months) will need to be evaluated to see whether the variant has mutations in sites known to affect the antibody response. Because we have good structural models now, this is feasible *in silico* (or studying structures on a computer). If variants are found that might affect the immune response, then we will need to validate this information in real life. Doing this in humans in phase-3 trials is going to be very difficult if not impossible, so we will have to develop methods that can be done faster. One example of an approach would be to carry out challenge studies in animals, where animals immunised

with the version of the vaccine to be tested are challenged with the variant virus. There have been experiments in primates, but not with the variant strains, where it was shown that a low level of antibodies is required for protection, but also that if antibody responses are less than needed then cellular immune responses may also contribute to protection. So we could hypothesise that in case of a variant, what was an effective antibody response could become less effective in terms of antibodies, but the cellular immune system could come to the rescue, but this will need to be tested.

How easy is to produce and test a booster vaccine using the mRNA platform? Should the booster vaccine be tested on thousands of participants?

Designing the vaccine requires the sequences of the variants. While we can predict which variants are likely to matter for antibody binding and neutralisation, there will be a need to validate the results. The design of the vaccine can be done in a few days, and production of the vaccine is a matter of a few weeks. But after that, knowing whether a vaccine works will require a testing strategy that has not been defined yet. It is highly unlikely that we will be repeating phase-3 studies for every new vaccine based on a variant strain, but we do need alternative regulatory pathways, and most likely these will in-

volve hundreds rather than tens of thousands of people.

If we had an immune correlate of protection, where a biological specimen, most likely blood, from a vaccinated person could be tested to show that the person was protected from disease, that would make it easier. But would we need a separate correlate for each variant virus? At the moment, we do not know.

Can AstraZeneca/Serum's vector-based vaccine be redesigned to develop a booster dose? How easy will it be to develop a booster dose using the platform?

Yes, the AstraZeneca vaccine is easy to redesign as a booster based on a variant strain, and the time taken will not be much longer than for mRNA vaccines.

Redesigning and making



Gagandeep Kang • C. VENKATACHALAPATHY

protecting against variants and be required to go through all stages of clinical testing?

We do not know. What is known is that vaccines that are based on the whole spike protein work, and work well. For inactivated vaccines, we expect that immune response that is induced will be against many proteins, including the spike. Does this mean that the vaccine will be more protective? It is feasible that additional immune response might induce a T cell response that could contribute to further protection, but that has not been shown at this time.

At the moment, we do not know what protects and how well, but we do know that vaccines based on the spike protect against disease, so it is not essential to have an immune response against other parts of the virus to induce protection.

If the most important protein for inducing protection is the spike, then if an inactivated vaccine was made using an older variant with one kind of spike structure, why should we expect it to protect against a virus with a different spike?

This is feasible to do - in many vaccines the first dose of the vaccine induces a response to the virus on which the vaccine is based, called a homologous response. With further doses, the immune response becomes more able to recognise a wider range of viruses - this is called a heterogeneous response. What we would like to induce with the smallest number of doses is a protection against a wide range of viruses - old and new variants.

Will a separate booster dose be required for each variant in the case of Covaxin? Will the inactivated whole virus platform be better at

understanding of what constitutes protective immunity or influenza vaccines - where annually updated vaccines are made.

In general, will booster vaccines be required to undergo phase-3 testing?

I do not think new phase-3 trials will be required - proving variant-specific efficacy will be a logistic nightmare and very expensive, so we will need to have better ways for regulators to evaluate new vaccines on any platform. I think we will need phase-1 and phase-2 studies of safety and immunogenicity.

Can vaccine development and testing keep pace with variant emergence?

Not every variant requires a new vaccine. The D614G mutation emerged in early 2020 and became globally dominant, but vaccines based on older variants protect, and protect well.

We can design a new vaccine in days, produce small amounts in weeks and test in weeks or months. The duration of testing requires a regulatory pathway - how much testing will be needed to approve a new vaccine. Manufacturing at scale can take several months, but again when a vaccine is a modification going into an established process, this is not impossible.

Influenza vaccines developed each year do not undergo fresh trials? Why is

it so and can the same strategy be deployed for vaccines produced against SARS-CoV-2 variants?

Influenza vaccines are decided based on strains recommended by WHO twice a year for northern and southern hemisphere vaccines. They require animal studies in ferrets and small safety and immunogenicity studies, based on measurement of antibodies. If we had a reasonable antibody measurement which could reflect protection, then we could potentially follow a similar strategy for SARS-CoV-2.

How well will a fully vaccinated person respond to a vaccine against a new variant? Will the original antigenic sin come into play and not be effective against the new variant?

Original antigenic sin depends on the antigen which induced the immune response, and as far as I know should not differ between mRNA vaccines or spike-based protein vaccine (unless the adjuvant differs).

With the mRNA vaccines, we know that the antibodies induced by older variants have decreased but not absent activity against the variants. Unlike other infections, where a worry is that the original response might trap the immune system into an ineffective response, that does not appear to be the case at this time for [SARS-CoV-2] infection or vaccination, but we will need to do the evaluations.

Perseverance to search for signs of life

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

has to be noted that the first signs of the effect of climate change will be evident for the extreme cases such as the rainfall at Cherrapunji," adds the paper. "Northeast India has the highest vegetation cover in India and includes 18 biodiversity hotspots of the world, indicating the importance of the region in terms of its greenery and climate-change sensitivity."

Rainfall patterns

The team is currently looking at the changes in rainfall patterns across India. "We need to conserve the vegetation or forest area, biodiversity parks, the hills and valleys in the northeast. Also, solid water management strategies are inevitable to combat climate-induced changes of water bodies and ground water. Long-term plans are necessary," adds Prof. Kuttippurath.



Role of humans: Our study saw decrease in vegetation cover and increase in areas of cropland from the year 2006 onwards, says Jayanarayanan Kuttippurath • FILE PHOTO

the lead author of the paper published last month in *Environmental Research Letters*.

Increase in cropland

The analysis showed reductions in vegetation with 104.5 sqkm lost per year. On the other hand, there were significant increases in crop-

land (182.1 sqkm per year) and urban and built-up lands (0.3 sqkm per year) during the period 2001-2018.

The team noted that the annual mean rainfall for the period 1973-2019 showed decreasing trends of about 0.42 mm per decade. It was statistically significant along seven stations (Agartala, Cherra-

puni, Guwahati, Kailashahar, Pasighat, Shillong and Silchar).

But why study the northeast region? The team writes that since northeast India is mostly hilly and is an extension of the Indo-Gangetic Plains, the region is highly sensitive to changes in regional and global climate. "It

An estimate of WASH across healthcare facilities in India

The issue of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) is related to infection prevention and control.

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

The status of WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) in healthcare facilities is an important issue in development. In an article published recently in *BMJ Global Health*, researchers from Center for Disease Dynamics, Economics and Policy (CDDEP), Maryland, US, have estimated the cost of ensuring WASH and taking related steps for infection prevention and control for one year in healthcare facilities in all of India.

They estimate that improving WASH across the public healthcare facilities in India and maintaining this for a year would cost \$354 million (Rs 2567,00,00,000 approximately) in capital costs and \$289 million (Rs 2095,00,00,000 approximately) in recurrent costs.

The study further finds that the most costly interventions were providing clean water, linen reprocessing and sanitation while the least expensive were hand hygiene, medical device reprocessing and environmental



Dire need: In all, 8,27,000 people in low- and middle-income countries die as a result of inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene each year. • GETTY IMAGES

the 2030 sustainable development goals of the WHO.

Given this context, the India study by CDDEP comes as a welcome first-level estimate.

"The goal of our study was to gather estimates of unit costs for each intervention service unit from which we extrapolated facility wide costs," says Katie K. Tseng of CDDEP, the first author of the study, in an email to *The Hindu*.

Inadequacies in proving WASH and also lack of infection prevention and control can lead to healthcare associated infections. Some of the pathogens to look out for

the cost-effectiveness of WASH interventions to reduce healthcare-associated infections among mother and neonates across the Indian healthcare system," says Jyoti Joshi of CDDEP, another author of the paper.

JYOTI JOSHI
CDDEP, U.S.

are *Acinetobacter baumannii*, *Enterococcus faecalis*, *Escherichia coli*, *Salmonella typhi*, *Streptococcus pneumoniae* and many more.

"These pathogens are commonly implicated as causative agents of healthcare associated infections because of their ability to develop resistance to antibiotics. Common healthcare associated infections include central-line-associated bloodstream infections, catheter-associated urinary tract infections, surgical site infections and ventilator-associated pneumonia," says Dr. Tseng.

Antimicrobial resistance
In the fight against the spread of antimicrobial resistance too, the importance of prevention of infections cannot be overemphasised. "This study was a part of a larger project to determine

the cost-effectiveness of WASH interventions to reduce healthcare-associated infections among mother and neonates across the Indian healthcare system," says Jyoti Joshi of CDDEP, another author of the paper.

According to her, while this study forms the starting point for larger costing estimates, it also highlights the need for a concerted effort from local bodies, State and Central governments to sustainably address quality and inequality issues in WASH provision.

"We believe our findings show that addressing gaps in WASH across the Indian healthcare system is not only within the realm of possibility in terms of affordability - when compared to other national health campaigns - but can also be combined with other national efforts to address health priorities such as antimicrobial resistance," she says.

"The intersection between WASH, infection prevention and control and antimicrobial resistance is unique in that it offers policy makers an opportunity to address multiple overlapping problems through interventions on WASH in healthcare facilities," she adds.



Question Corner

Life beneath the freeze

How hospitable are lakes isolated beneath Antarctic ice?

British scientists have found (*Science Advances*) that lakes underneath the Antarctic ice sheet could be more hospitable than previously thought, and can host more microbial life.

More than 400 'subglacial' lakes have been discovered beneath the Antarctic ice sheet, many of which have been isolated from each other and the atmosphere for millions of years. Researchers drilled into two small subglacial lakes at the edge of the ice sheet, where water can rapidly flow in and out and found microbial life beneath.

"The lakes being cut off from sunlight, they derive their energy not through photosynthesis but by processing certain chemicals found in sediments on the lake beds. Since the sediments are found only on the lake bed, the water mixing is required so that the sediments are evenly distributed. While water in surface lakes gets mixed by the action of wind and convection currents due to the sun's heat, the team found that in the lakes beneath the Antarctic, ice mix is due to geothermal rising from the interior of the Earth and generated by the combination of heat left over from the formation of the planet and the decay of radioactive elements."

"The water in lakes is not still and motionless; the flow of water is quite dynamic, enough to cause fine sediment to be suspended in the water. With dynamic flow of water, the entire body of water may be habitable, even if more life remains focused on the floors," Louis Couston from the University of Lyon and the British Antarctic Survey and one of the authors of the study said in a release.

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in



R.V. MOORTHY

New air travel rules

Why have the guidelines for international fliers been tweaked as new SARS-CoV-2 strains emerge?

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN

The story so far: The Central government confirmed this week the presence of three mutant variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus – from South Africa (four cases), Brazil (one case) and the U.K. (187 cases). Following this, the government issued a fresh set of guidelines for international travel. The new rules, which will come into effect at 11.59 p.m. on February 22, were released on Wednesday and state that “based on the risk assessment, this document shall be reviewed from time to time”.

Why are the new strains of concern?

The World Health Organization reports that the new variants demonstrate increased transmissibility. The strains from the U.K., South Africa and Brazil have so far been detected in 86, 44 and 15 countries respectively. “While India has stabilised its active COVID-19 cases, these new strains and any laxity could prompt a surge in numbers,” said NITI Aayog member V.K. Paul.

Only those travelling to India in case of emergencies, such as the death of a family member, will be allowed to arrive without a negative report

negative COVID-19 report, and mention their travel history for the past 14 days. They also need to mention whether they plan to disembark at the arrival airport or take further flights within India.

Airlines are to identify travellers arriving from or transiting through the U.K., South Africa and Brazil and segregate them during the journey and while deboarding. These travellers will have to give their samples for testing before exiting the airport. If they test positive, they have to undergo treatment as per the standard health protocol, the SOP states. The guidelines specify that contacts of suspect cases are the co-passengers seated in the same row, three rows in front and three rows behind, along with identified cabin crew. Community contacts of travellers who have tested positive (during the home quarantine period) would be subjected to institutional quarantining in separate quarantine centres for 14 days and tested as per the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) protocol.

International travellers have to submit a self-declaration form before their travel and upload a negative COVID-19 RT-PCR report, with the test having been conducted 72 hours prior to undertaking the journey. Passengers also have to submit a declaration for the authenticity of the report, and if found otherwise, they will be liable for criminal prosecution. Only those travelling to India for emergencies, such as the death of a family member, will be allowed to arrive without a negative report. But they should seek exemption on the online portal 72 hours before boarding.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, in consultation with the Ministry of Civil Aviation, said they issued these guidelines after reviewing the situation with regard to point of entry actions and that these measures have been brought in to minimise the risk of import of mutant strains of the virus.

How many cases has India recorded?

The ICMR has said the South Africa variant, which first emerged independently in the country in mid-December 2020, has undergone multiple mutations, including in the receptor-binding domain of the spike protein. Currently, a majority of cases in South Africa are due to this variant. In India, the strain was detected in four different South Africa returnees in January 2021 – one each from Angola and Tanzania, and two from South Africa, said ICMR Director-General Balram Bhargava.

He added that the first six cases of the U.K. strain were reported in India in the last week of December 2020.

On the Brazil strain, the ICMR noted that it emerged independently in Brazil in early January 2021 and is linked to the rise in cases in Brazil, particularly in Manaus. “Mutations in the receptor-binding domain of the spike protein were detected and it has shown increased transmissibility. India detected a case of this variant strain in a Brazil returnee in the first week of February,” said Dr. Bhargava.

Are existing vaccines in India effective against these strains?

On the U.K. variant, the ICMR said the neutralisation potential matches other heterologous virus strains in India and the vaccines that we have.

For the other two variants, research is ongoing. “The ICMR-National Institute of Virology (NIV) is attempting to isolate and culture the South Africa strain,” said Dr. Bhargava. The Brazil strain has been successfully isolated and cultured at ICMR-NIV, Pune and experiments to assess vaccine effectiveness are underway, he added.

How are the variants being monitored?

To monitor the genomic variations in the SARS-CoV-2 on a regular basis through a multi-laboratory network, India has set up the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG), comprising 10 labs. “The consortium will ascertain the status of the new variant of the SARS-CoV-2 in the country, establish a sentinel surveillance for early detection of genomic variants with public health implication, and determine the genomic variants in the unusual events/trends (super-spreader events, high mortality/morbidity trend areas etc.),” said Dr. Bhargava. “Knowledge generated through this viral research consortium will also assist in developing diagnostics and potential therapeutics and vaccines in the future.”

The road map for reducing public sector role

How will the new disinvestment policy oversee the future of all central public sector enterprises?

VIKAS DHOT

The story so far: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her Budget speech for 2021-22, announced a new policy for central public sector enterprises (CPSEs), which she said will serve as a clear roadmap for disinvestment of government-owned firms across sectors. “We have kept four areas that are strategic where bare minimum CPSEs will be maintained and rest privatised. In the remaining sectors, all CPSEs will be privatised,” the Minister said.

What goes outside government control?

The government had revealed the broad contours of the policy in May 2020 as part of the Atmanirbhav Bharat package unveiled in the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The strategic sectors identified at the time for retaining certain public sector entities within the government’s control remain the same in the final policy approved by the Cabinet. These are atomic energy, space and defence, transport and telecommunications, power, petroleum, coal and other minerals, and lastly, banking, insurance and financial services. While the initial plan was to retain one to four public sector firms in these sectors, this has now been replaced by the phrase “bare minimum presence”.

Once the government decides what is the bare minimum number of firms it wants to retain, the rest of the firms will be privatised, merged or subsidiaryed with other CPSEs, or closed. For all firms in sectors considered non-strategic, privatisation or closure are the only two options being considered. The policy’s objective is to minimise the public sector’s role and create new investment space for the private sector, in the hope that the infusion of private capital, technology and management practices will contribute to growth and new jobs. The proceeds from the sale of these firms would finance various government-run social sector and developmental programmes.

Why is this significant?

A bold push for disinvestment of the public sector was expected soon after Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed office in May 2014 and announced that the government had “no business to be in business”. This was seen as a clear intent to privatisate a huge chunk of India’s large public sector, a legacy from post-Independence policies that placed government firms at the ‘commanding heights’ of the economy.

However, the first term saw little activity by the government on this front, barring an aborted attempt to sell 76% of its stake in the loss-ridden national carrier Air India. A few public sector enterprises were merged with other PSEs and the proceeds from the transactions counted as disinvestment proceeds in the government’s accounts.

In its second innings, however, there has been some enthusiasm to privatisate, with a fresh push to sell Air India (lock stock and barrel, with 100% stake sale), followed by Maharashtra oil PSU Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (BPCL), and the likes of Shipping Corporation of India, Container Corporation of India and Pawan Hans. The process for those sales is under way, although timelines and investor interest were affected by the pandemic. However, the process indicated a piecemeal approach to privatisation and created uncertainty.

The new policy is significant as it goes beyond such an approach and lays down a rationale for deciding the future ownership pattern of 439 CPSEs, including their subsidiaries. For instance, it is now clear that 151 public sector firms in non-strategic sectors (including 83 holding companies and 68 subsidiaries) will either be closed or sold. The policy also brings public sector banks and insurance entities into the disinvestment ambit for the first time.



A disinvestment bid for Air India under the Vajpayee government had got stalled amidst a political outcry. AP

In her Budget speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman promised the sale of two more public sector banks and a general insurance player, along with plans to list the Life Insurance Corporation of India on the stock markets

How is this different from policies in the past?

This is the first time since 2004 that India is working on a slew of privatisation deals. Earlier, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government between 1999 and 2004 had managed to sell off majority stakes in a dozen-odd public sector enterprises, including Modern Foods, Balco, Hindustan Zinc, VSNL

and a few hotels. A separate Ministry had been formed just for disinvestment, led initially by the late Arun Jaitley and then by Arun Shourie, who drove the process.

An attempt to sell Air India at the time had, however, got stalled in the face of a political outcry. Prior to that, the early 1990s saw the stock market listing of minority stakes in a bunch of public sector firms, a policy that was reaped when the UPA government was in office from 2004 to 2014. The new policy goes beyond the Vajpayee-era privatisation drive, which was limited to a ‘case-by-case’ sale of entities in non-strategic sectors, by stressing that even strategic sectors will have a ‘bare minimum’ presence of government-owned firms.

What is likely to be sold?

The government hopes to conclude the sale of Air India, BPCL and some other entities, where some progress has already been made over the past year. Ms. Sitharaman also promised the sale of two more public sector banks and a general insurance player in her Budget speech, along with plans to list the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India on the stock markets.

The Union Budget has estimated ₹1.75 lakh crore as receipts from PSU stake sales in the year, compared to its target of ₹2.10 lakh crore for 2020-21, of which just about ₹20,000 crore has been raised so far. However, the Finance Ministry mandarins are confident of achieving next year’s target.

What is the proposed process for selecting the

CPSEs to be sold or retained?

The NITI Aayog has been entrusted with suggesting which public sector firms in strategic sectors should be retained, considered for privatisation or merger or ‘subsidiarisation’ with another public sector firm, or simply closed. A core group of secretaries on disinvestment will consider the NITI Aayog’s suggestions and forward its views to a ministerial group. Apart from the Finance Minister, the group will include Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari and the minister in charge of the administrative ministry of the public sector enterprise concerned. After the ministerial group’s nod, the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management in the Finance Ministry will move a proposal to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs for an ‘in-principle’ nod to sell specific CPSEs. The NITI Aayog is expected to soon formalise its recommendations on which of the 77 public sector companies in strategic sectors should remain with the government.

Public sector firms and corporations engaged in activities allied to the farm sector, such as providing seeds to farmers, or the procurement and distribution of food for public distribution, will not be privatised. Similarly, the policy excludes departments with commercial operations like Railways and Posts, firms making appliances for the physically challenged, and those providing support to vulnerable groups through financing of SCs, STs, minorities and backward classes. CPSEs “maintaining critical data having a bearing on national security”, security printing and minting companies, will also be retained in the public sector.

What are the risk factors?

The turmoil in the global economy could impact the valuations of firms being privatised, as many potential investors may not have the appetite for bidding in these times. The prospect of post-deal scrutiny by audit and investigating agencies, like the CAG (Comptroller and Auditor General of India) and the CBI, will be a source of worry for officials, with similar cases pertaining to the Vajpayee-era transactions still cropping up in courts.

Lastly, as economist Pronab Sen has warned, privatisation is a good idea, but doing it during a recession may dampen economic recovery as investors will end up buying existing capacities instead of embarking on fresh investments.

Conclusive land titling and its challenges

Does India need to change the land ownership process and what are the hurdles in implementing it?

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ

The story so far: The Centre wants to reform the country’s land markets through a fundamental legal and procedural shift in how land titles are awarded. In 2020, even as laws for farm reform and labour code reform were being enacted, the government’s think tank, NITI Aayog, took steps to initiate land reforms. A Model Bill on Conclusive Land Titling was sent to States and Union Territories last June seeking their comments. In September, after many States failed to send in their feedback, the Centre warned that their agreement would be presumed.

How does the current system work and what will change in the new system?

India currently follows a system of presumptive land titling. This means that land records are maintained, with information on possession, which is determined through details of past transactions. Ownership, then, is established on the basis of current possession. Registration of land is actually a registration of transactions, such as sale deeds, records of inheritance, mortgage and lease. Holding registration papers does not actually involve the government or the legal framework guaranteeing the ownership title of the land.

On the other hand, under a conclusive land titling system, land records designate actual ownership. The title is granted by the government, which takes the responsibility for accuracy. Once a title is granted, any other claimant will have to settle disputes with the government, not the title holder. Further, under conclusive land titling, the government may provide compensation to claimants in case of disputes, but the title holder is not in any danger of losing ownership, says agricultural economist T. Haque, who chaired the Special Cell on Land Policy at NITI Aayog which recommended a shift to conclusive titling in a 2017 report.

Why is conclusive land titling needed?

The main advantage is that a conclusive system will drastically lower litigation related to land. According to a 2007 World Bank study on ‘Land Policies for growth and poverty reduction’, land-related disputes accounted for two-thirds of all pending court cases in India. A NITI Aayog study on strengthening arbitration estimated that disputes on land or real estate take an average time of 20



A conclusive system is expected to drastically lower litigation related to land. A NITI Aayog study estimated that disputes on land or real estate take an average time of 20 years in courts to be resolved

years in the courts to be resolved.

“Right now, because land titles are based on transactions, people have to keep the entire chain of transaction records, and a dispute on any link in that chain causes ambiguity in ownership,” says Dr. Haque.

He says the potential impact is extensive. “Once conclusive titling is in place, investors who want to purchase land for business activities will be able to do so without facing the constant risk that their ownership may be questioned and their entire investment may go to waste,” he says, noting that the spectre of long-running court cases currently stifles the appetite for investment in many sectors of the economy. “The idea is to promote an active land market,” he adds.

Land disputes and unclear titling also create hurdles for infrastructure development and housing construction, leading to costly delays and inefficiency. In cities, urban local bodies depend on property taxes that can be levied properly only if there is clear ownership data available. Ambiguity in ownership also results in a black market for land transactions, which deprives the government of taxes.

In rural areas, the need is even more acute. Access to agricultural credit is dependent on the ability to use land as collateral. Without being able to prove their ownership of land and access formal credit from banks, small and marginal farmers are often left at the mercy of unscrupulous moneylenders, entrenching themselves in a mountain of debt.

What does the model Bill propose?

The Bill circulated by the NITI Aayog in 2020 calls for

Land Authorities to be set up by each State government, which will appoint a Title Registration Officer (TRO) to prepare and publish a draft list of land titles based on existing records and documents. This will be considered a valid notice to all potential claimants interested in the property, who will have to file their claims or objections within a set period of time.

If disputing claims are received, the TRO will verify all the relevant documents and refer the case to a Land Dispute Resolution Officer (LDRO) for resolution.

However, disputes which are already pending in courts cannot be resolved in this way.

Having considered and resolved all the disputed claims, the Land Authority will publish a Record of Titles. Over a three-year period, these titles and the decisions of the TRO and the LDRO can be challenged before Land Titling Appellate Tribunals, which will be set up under the law. After a three-year period, entries in the Record of Titles will be considered conclusive proof of ownership. Further appeals can only be taken up in High Courts.

What are the difficulties?

“The biggest challenge is that land records have not been updated for decades, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. Land records are often in the name of the grandparents of the current owner, with no proof of inheritance. Unless they are based on updated records, conclusive land titles could create even more problems,” says Dr. Haque. He says comprehensive village-level surveys with community involvement are a necessary precursor to the land titling process. Relying on current records or even satellite imagery will not provide the same accuracy as actual, on-the-ground, local surveys. However, local governments have not been provided with the resources or manpower to conduct such surveys, says Dr. Haque. If surveys are not conducted, the onus falls on village claimants, many of whom have no access to documentation, to proactively challenge the titling during the three-year period.

EXTINCTION REBELLION

Rebels with a green cause

The environmental group that seeks to turn public attention to climate change through shock protests has now branches in 75 countries

G. ANANTHAKRISHNAN

When Extinction Rebellion set out to literally block the path of the fossil fuel-powered economy in the U.K., in the autumn of 2018, the core of its philosophy was that stopping public activity with even small actions would change politics. It would shock a status quoist, cynically manipulative system, and turn public attention to the world's biggest problems: climate change and biodiversity loss.

The vision of its small group of founders led by Roger Hallam, an organic farmer-turned-researcher of civil disobedience at King's College, London, and Gail Bradbrook, a molecular biology scholar from Yorkshire who had launched her activism in the Occupy movement after the 2008 financial crisis, draws heavily from the U.S. civil rights struggle and Gandhian civil disobedience. The two worked to create an environmental movement that would use disruptive, non-violent methods in the climate and biodiversity struggle. It immediately appeared to resonate with common citizens, hundreds of whom were ready to court arrest in street protests.

"We refuse to bequeath a dying planet to future generations by failing to act now. We act in peace, with ferocious love of these lands in our hearts. We act on behalf of life," says the Declaration of Rebellion document of the movement. When it formally made the declaration on October 31, 2018, XR, as it has

come to be known, expected a couple of hundred people to gather at Westminster outside the British Parliament, but the event attracted a thousand. Since then, its logo of an hourglass within a circle has become familiar globally.

The high visibility protests carried out by XR groups – three major ones so far – often involve dramatic scenes staged by brightly costumed activists to drive home the message of climate ruin. The movement has three primary demands: all governments "Tell the Truth" about the climate crisis and the mass extinction of species, commit themselves to act on net zero carbon emissions by 2025, and create citizens' assemblies that will advise them on a just transition. Yet, the group also does not look to the government to solve the world's problems. It favours people collectively creating the structures to challenge power, eliminating the bias of the voice of the rich and the powerful. Among the core concerns it pursues are "decent healthcare, education, social care and housing, clean energy production, and protections in law to prevent ecocide."

Open source model

Like any good open source project, the U.K. kernel produced by XR has been embraced by activists abroad, who get the freedom to build upon it. A strategy document released by XR last year titled "Power Together" says it is now present in 75 countries. Legal systems and political tolerance levels for



protest differ around the world, inviting prosecutions and harsh crackdowns. Yet, XR has inspired groups of citizens, particularly the youth, and professionals in different fields to start local branches. The India website of XR lists 14 local groups, ranging from Bengaluru and Delhi to Rajasthan and Guwahati. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, hobbled the climate protests in many places around the world.

Initially seen as nothing more than an outcrop of the environmental fringe made up of small groups of stragglers, XR moved to the mainstream as it linked up with activists such as Greta Thunberg and the Fridays for Future campaign she inspired and acquired a wider base of supporters connected with the arts, sciences, law, and finance.

Over the past two years, the movement has received support from many prominent people, including the former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, the former Chief Scientific Adviser to the British government, David King, public intellectuals like Noam Chomsky, actors, doctors, health workers, scientists and blue collar workers.

XR's most prominent rebellions have thus far been carried out in the U.K. against projects that are carbon intensive (such as the costly HS2 high speed railway line). Protests have also been held in other countries, including India.

XR launched its first major protest in April 2019, a two-week rolling wave of demon-

strations in London during the protest that they were showing the world the path they had chosen to take and were waiting for others to follow. There were over 3,000 arrests.

Yet, the path for XR itself has not been smooth, and the movement has been wracked by differences involving co-founder Roger Hallam. A major critique, to which the movement has responded, is on the role of minorities in protests and the impact that aggressive tactics have on them.

Just over a year after the mass protests in London, in July 2020, it acknowledged that its disruptive approach centred around privileged white people and put people of colour at risk vis-à-vis the police. Youth, who wanted a separate identity, formed their own sub-group, XR Youth.

Mass arrests

Mr. Hallam, now 55, looked at mass arrests – within the bounds of a democratic system that tolerates dissent – as a tactic that would overwhelm the government. "We recognise now that our tactic of arrest has made it easier for people of privilege to participate and that our beha-

viours and attitudes fed into the system of white supremacy. We're sorry this recognition comes so late," a statement said. More recent interpretations among XR activists view the climate change, COVID-19 and human rights crises (including rights of people of African origin) as the ramifications of an economic and financial system run wild.

Mr. Hallam was censured by the movement for making comments that described the Holocaust as "an almost normal event" in the long sweep of history. He apologised. Once moving away from XR, he has taken part in protests against Heathrow airport expansion separately and describes himself also as a leader of another combative organisation, Burning Pink (BP), whose activists splash bright pink spray paint on property and court arrest in support of climate and equality objectives.

Gail Bradbrook, 49, is the prominent face of XR today. "I am involved in both BP campaigns and also doing mobilisation training and development work with XR groups around the world, as well as videos and interviews," Mr. Hallam said in an email to *The Hindu*. "Assum-

ing COVID retreats, there will be a new impetus to mass civil disobedience given the situation is getting exponentially worse," he said.

Challenge policies

With every new crisis – wildfires, failed agriculture, drought, flood, heatwaves and coldwaves – governments and corporations are apprehensive that XR's idea of "collaborative rebellion" will challenge locked-in policies on fossil fuels. In the U.K., the movement is encouraging 'money rebellion' by small businesses. Participants will fund green goals, and work to deny funds to non-compliant governments to stop funding of fossil fuels interests.

Disha Ravi, who organised Fridays for Future events in India, activists Nikita Jacob and Shantanu Muluk have provoked the government's ire. The implications of growing environmental and climate crises merging with other struggles, such as the farmers' agitation, add to the establishment's worries. XR is constantly tweaking its toolkit for non-violent direct action, attracting public attention and demanding responsible replies from governments.

POETIC JUSTICE FOUNDATION

Eye of the 'toolkit' storm

The Canada-based group created a user guide supporting farmers' protest

VIJAITA SINGH

The Poetic Justice Foundation (PJF), a Canada-based non-profit, has been at the centre of a roving investigation launched by Delhi Police regarding a social media campaign around the ongoing farmers' agitation. It was founded in March 2020 by Canada-based Mo Dhaliwal, a digital brand strategist, and Anita Lal, a community relations specialist at a charitable organisation in Canada that provides low-interest micro-loans to skilled immigrants and refugees for education and career goals.

On her LinkedIn page, Ms. Lal writes that she is the "co-founder and Executive Director" of the PJF that promotes "anti-racist, anti-casteist and inclusive education, programming and dialogue".

The PJF created an open user guide or the 'toolkit', suggesting hashtags and Twitter storm to create global awareness about the farmers' protest. The user guide shared by Swedish environmentalist Greta Thunberg on her Twitter page on February 3 – which she deleted later, replacing it with another guide – convinced the police about an "international conspiracy" to sully India's image. On February 4, the cyber cell of Delhi Police registered an FIR under sections 153A (promoting enmity between different groups), 124 A (sedition), 120 B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Pe-



nal Code based on the content of the toolkit.

Disha Ravi, a 22-year-old climate activist from Bengaluru who edited "two lines" in the online user guide, was arrested by police on February 14. Two others – Nikita Jacob, an advocate, and Shantanu Muluk, an engineer-turned-activist, are currently out on bail. The PJF's website says that it challenges "structures of oppression and discrimination through intersectional grassroots advocacy".

Emotionally connected "Currently, we are most actively involved in the #FarmersProtest that has activated Indian diaspora worldwide," the website says, referring to a page – AskIndiaWhy.com – that has been blocked in India. On February 6, the group issued a three-page statement denying that it coordinated with pop star "Rihanna, Greta Thunberg or any number of specific celebrities to

tweet about the #FarmersProtest".

The PJF said that it connected with like-minded people who were equally moved and "emotionally connected to the plight of our people in India" and saw that the diaspora struggled to "organise and galvanise support".

"The materials we produced were made freely available for all. In fact, these materials are still available online. We didn't take them down, because we believe in the work. There is no hate being propagated and we will never promote hate," the PJF said.

It said that the PJF did not coordinate any protest activities occurring within India...Up to India's Republic Day, January 26th, 2021, and beyond – whether at Red Fort in Delhi or elsewhere in the country – we were not involved in directing or fomenting any protest activity of any sort within India."

On January 9, Mr. Dhal-

iwal shared on his Facebook page that the PJF was developing campaign and media kits that are "simple, shareable and have a powerful messaging to arm our global sangat of organisers" as a network of youth organisers from around the world are signing on to organise a Global Day of Action – a protest and campaign triggered by the farmers' protests to take place on January 26.

Delhi Police has alleged that the PJF is a "pro-Khalistan" organisation and the roles of all its founders and co-founders are under scanner. The PJF is not on the government's list of banned terrorist or unlawful organisations in India. Its website and Twitter accounts are not blocked either.

The website's registrant is Skyrocket Digital Inc, a digital branding platform in Canada of which Mr. Dhaliwal is a director. The Instagram page of Skyrocket says Jagmeet Singh, leader of the New Democratic Party (the first non-white to head a national political party in Canada) was elected in 2017 as its leader aided by the "Skyrocket-branded campaign slogan", Love and Courage.

Mr. Dhaliwal did not respond to an interview request by *The Hindu*, claiming that he needs a few days at least as he was "inundated right now". His Facebook profile says he lives in Vancouver and studied at University of British Columbia. Ms. Lal did not respond to an interview request sent on her LinkedIn page.

House Speaker Nancy Pe-

MITCH MCCONNELL

Trump's 'political hack'

The Senate minority leader fell out with Trump over his impeachment trial

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN

Mitch is a dour, sullen, and unsmiling political hack, and if Republican Senators are going to stay with him, they will not win again, former President Donald Trump said in a 600-word statement released on Tuesday attacking Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell. "He will never do what needs to be done, or what is right for our Country. Where necessary and appropriate, I will back primary rivals who espouse Making America Great Again and our policy of America First," he said.

Mr. McConnell has been in the news of late, having provoked the ire of both Democrats and Republicans. The Democrats criticised him for his apparent expediency and his inconsistent positions on the Trump impeachment trial and his view on Mr. Trump's role in the Capitol attack of January 6. Mr. Trump attacked him for the same thing.

Mr. McConnell, who had voted on February 13 to acquit the former President for inciting an insurrection, told the Senate that very same Saturday afternoon that there was "no question" that Mr. Trump was "practically and morally responsible" for provoking the Capitol attack. In a Sunday op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, he said the mob was incited by Mr. Trump's "unhinged falsehoods". House Speaker Nancy Pe-

losi criticised Mr. McConnell, saying he could have scheduled the trial after the House impeached Mr. Trump and before the former President had demitted office on January 20. She called him out for voting to acquit Mr. Trump and then saying he was to blame for the violence of January 6.

Mr. McConnell, however, argued in his op-ed that he could not have scheduled a trial between January 14 and 20 as it would not have been "remotely fair or regular" – that even pre-trial briefing period ended up taking more than a week. He reiterated that it was unconstitutional to impeach someone not currently in office.

In his Tuesday statement, Mr. Trump went all out – almost (he reportedly left out an unflattering reference to Mr. McConnell's "chins" on being advised to do so). He nevertheless took credit for the party's recent electoral gains in the House, while blaming Mr. McConnell for

ILLUSTRATION: J.A. PREMKUMAR



the GOP's Senate losses – specifically for countering the Democrats' and his preference for \$2,000 coronavirus relief cheques with \$600 cheques. (A section of the party had blamed Mr. Trump's rhetoric for the GOP debacle in Georgia, where the former President attempted to delegitimise the elections and cried fraud, potentially demotivating voters from going to the polls).

Passing shot

Mr. Trump also took a passing shot at the McConnell family – alleging that their business holdings in China meant Mr. McConnell had no credibility on China policy. Mr. McConnell is married to Taiwanese American Elaine Chao, whose family owns a global shipping business, the Foremost Group. Ms. Chao was also Transport Secretary in the Trump administration. Her family's connections to China have been scrutinised since at

least 2001, when Ms. Chao was George W. Bush's Labor Secretary. In 2017, Ms. Chao and the company (neither Elaine Chao nor Mr. McConnell have a stake in it) were again in the news for blurring the lines between official government work and the Chao family business.

Things have not always been this bad between Mr. Trump and Mr. McConnell. In fact, the two have been allied for most of Mr. Trump's time in the White House. Mr. McConnell, who led the Senate then, was instrumental in getting Trump-appointedees – Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett – confirmed to the Supreme Court. He helped get the Trump tax cuts through the Senate and "made short work of the 2020 impeachment" as the *New York Times* put it. So the current rift has Republicans worried. "I'm more worried about 2022 than I've ever been. I don't want to eat our own," Senator Lindsey Graham, a Trump ally, told Fox News last week.

However, with seven Senate election victories under his belt, Mr. McConnell may know a thing or two about political survival. For now, he is the most powerful Republican in Washington and is focused on Republicans reclaiming their Senate majority in 2022. "My goal is, in every way possible, to have nominees representing the Republican Party who can win in November," Mr. McConnell told *Politico* last weekend.

GST shortfall:
₹1 lakh crore
released so far

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Centre has now transferred ₹1 lakh crore to States on account of GST compensation shortfalls for the year, the finance ministry said on Saturday.

These funds have been raised through a special borrowing window set up in October 2020 to meet the estimated shortfall of ₹1.10 lakh crore in revenue for States on account of implementation of GST.

Till now, 91% of the total estimated GST compensation shortfall has been released to States and Union Territories with Legislative Assembly. Out of this, an amount of ₹91,460.34 crore has been released to the States and an amount of ₹8,539.66 crore has been released to the 3 UTs with Legislative Assembly," the ministry said.

Petrol touches ₹97 a litre in Mumbai

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Petrol price on Saturday touched an all-time high of ₹97 per litre in Mumbai, while diesel rate crossed the ₹88-mark.

Petrol price was increased by a record 39 paise per litre and diesel by 37 paise a litre, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.

This is the twelfth straight day of price hike and the largest daily increase since oil companies started to revise rates on a daily basis in 2017. The increase pushed petrol price to ₹90.58 a litre in Delhi.

'View India's spending in context of stimulus'

Rating agencies should consider pandemic challenges: FM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India is urging global credit rating agencies to look at its fiscal deficit and debt numbers in the context of the stimulus spending requirements posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Saturday.

Stressing that the government's infrastructure spending push would have an 'immediate impact' on core sectors, opportunities for labour, and demand creation at the industry as well as consumer level, the Minister said she expected the Indian economy to recover and record good, sustainable growth in the next decade.

Glide path

"Spending is being taken up even with borrowings, but we have also given a glide path on the fiscal deficit management," Ms. Sitharaman said.

"We are spending but we are also very clearly telling even the credit rating agencies that every country is going through the pandemic and every country has to spend to keep the stimulus going," she said in an address at the 65th foundation day of the All India Management Association.

"So every country's rating will have to be in relative terms, and not just into the silo of India, 'x' or 'y' country. So spending, borrowing are all relative terms and we would want every institution to look at it with a sense of the relative understanding and context," Ms. Sitharaman said.

"However, because we have given the glide path,



Push start: The Minister urged private investors to come forward with animal spirits to help the economy recover. ■ PTI

the fiscal deficit is something we will watch probably after the stimulus giving has shown clear impact on the ground," she added.

Urging the industry to have confidence in the Centre's infrastructure building strategy as 'it is not just short-term relief' but investments whose impact could last for the "next 5-6 years," Ms. Sitharaman said it was now time for the industry to step up and invest.

"Post the corporate-tax reduction, I have been waiting to see expansion happen from the private sector in India. Now, the policy is clear and consistent, and ease of doing business is still going further," the Minister said.

"I would like now to see private investors in India coming forward with that so-called animal spirits to show that it is possible for India to pull up and keep it high as one of the fastest growing economies. It is now on your shoulders entirely," she said.

"With all your participation, involvement and ideas

coming to us, I expect the Indian economy to recover and recover such that we are an exemplar for the entire world," she said.

Privatisation for good

The Minister also said the government was privatising public sector units not for them to be closed down but for improving their operational efficiency with professional skills available outside the government.

"We want them to be kept running. For an economy like ours, which has a high demand for many of these items of production like steel, coal or copper, that public sector firms have been making for decades now, the economy still needs them," the Finance Minister said.

"So, when we are selling it away, it's not as though we are selling them away totally even if it ends up being closed. We want these institutions to be run better, and productivity to be improved over the next several decades," she added.

INTERVIEW | SANJEEV SANYAL

'Vodafone, Cairn disputes will get resolved in a way most consider fair'

Since we inherited it, we are following the process to its logical end, says advisor

VIKAS DHOOT

India's recovery in recent months from the steep contraction in the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, is probably the strongest in the world, and the economy could record a fairly high growth rate in the coming two years if the global economy recovers by 2022-23, said Sanjeev Sanyal, principal economic advisor, Finance Ministry. Terming the Vodafone and Cairn tax disputes 'legacy issues', Mr. Sanyal said these would hopefully be resolved in a manner considered fair. Edited excerpts:

The Budget has taken steps like coming clean on the fiscal deficit position, a privatisation push and FDI liberalisation. What is the broad message?

■ Obviously the Budget has come at a time after we have gone through a difficult shock in the global economy that affected us too. We needed to respond to it. Since the lockdown, we have taken a lot of measures to ramp up demand even before the Budget. Two things we did - unlike almost any other country in the world, we did a lot of supply side reforms in labour laws, farm laws, large scale deregulation in sectors. At the same time, once the lockdown had been reasonably opened up, some pent-up demand came in and we also added to it by ramping up very significantly the capital expenditure, with data showing a 129% rise in October 2020, 249% in November, and 62% in

December. So a demand stimulus was already being delivered for four months. And that has shown in the V-shaped recovery with virtually every indicator coming back strongly, probably the strongest in the world right now.

Now, we will presumably open up the supply side even further - there are some sectors still under tightness - entertainment and so on, where there are some restrictions. But we will be opening them up and getting the benefits of all the supply side measures done over many years - GST is now by and large settled. I don't think people grumble too much about it and it is obviously a vast improvement on what used to be the old system.

The IBC is in abeyance right now, but cases are still happening and some backlog is still getting cleared. The benefit of these will keep coming in and so what we are doing in the Budget is to provide a demand kick. We have a very specific approach to pump demand using capital expenditure on infrastructure in a wide sense, including health and

education. The reason we are doing this is because we are conscious of the fact that while the economy requires some support, we will be running up more debt. It is very important that we build assets and leave behind future generations who will repay these debts, with assets. The second reason is because this has the biggest multiplier effect.

Many studies show infrastructure spending is the one that gives the biggest bang for the buck, because it creates jobs across the talent and skill range - from engineers to the man who pours the cement. Multiplier effects extend to cement, steel, earth moving equipment and once the infrastructure is in place, creates other jobs. So the job multiplier is high and it is reasonably quick. While the project may take many years, as soon as you get the projects running, you are creating demand.

All this fits together very well at this point of time. It is investment-driven growth, initially driven by the public sector, but hopefully, the private sector will come in, in the not-too-distant future.

We are opening up to FDI, but, at the same time, there is a protectionist stance on customs duties...

■ This is a complete misunderstanding. Atma Nirbhara Bharat is not a return to 1950s style import substitution. We are open for business and want to be part of global supply chains. The PM and the FM are absolutely clear on this. We are opening systems for

foreign investors to come in and build capacities in India. But at the same time, Atma Nirbhara means we do invest in some sort of resilience. For example, we may have a globally competitive pharma sector. But we do need some of the key inputs to be produced in India as well. Otherwise, as we found last year, if you have a single foreign source, all of a sudden, that source may stall for whatever reason and this great sector you have stalls too. So Atma Nirbhara is not about going back to the Ambassador car at all. We intend to be at the cutting edge of technology, we intend to bring in the very best of the world and we want to compete with the rest of the world in foreign markets as well. And we are doing so, whether it is in vaccines now or in electronics. As far as tariffs are concerned, some have gone up but some have gone down as well, like in special steels. That is tactical management.

You spent several years at Deutsche Bank and looked at the Indian economy from a foreign investor's viewpoint. What is the signal that goes out from the Vodafone and Cairn taxation cases?

■ This is a legacy issue... The former Finance Minister had given a commitment that such retrospective taxes will not be done.

Nevertheless, since we inherited it, we are following the process to its logical end and at some point of time, it will get resolved in a way that I think most people will consider fair. It's just going through the process.

Expedite vaccine roll-out: Uday Kotak

Banker urges govt. to ensure higher borrowing doesn't push up long-term rates

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Top banker Uday Kotak has called for the rapid roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines, stressing it was critical to revive the economy. He also urged the government to work with the central bank to ensure that the planned higher public borrowing in the coming year did not push up long-term interest rates, hurting potential investments.

Recalling the global economy's resurgence after the Spanish flu in the 1920s that came to be known as the 'Roaring Twenties', Mr. Kotak said that 2021 could see the start of a similar recovery if the vaccinations could be expedited.

"The faster we do it to get into the post-pandemic era,



Uday Kotak

the better it is. The world, and India, have taken up the challenge of vaccination and I do hope we can vaccinate our people as soon as possible and embark upon the new journey," Mr. Kotak said in a keynote address to the All India Management Association. "I would like to see the world and India getting into the roaring Twenties of

2021 and beyond. For us to get there, one of the most critical aspects is to get COVID behind us and under control as soon as possible," the banker said.

"The biggest opportunity and challenge for us is to get the vaccination done as soon as possible. This is one big critical item for our future," said Mr. Kotak, who is also the president of the Confederation of Indian Industry.

The CII has urged the Centre to allow the private sector to help, adding that industry could help vaccinate 100 million people expeditiously.

Risks to opportunity
Contending that India could become the factory and the office to the global economy

in a post-COVID world, Mr. Kotak, however, flagged the risks to the investments that would need to be made to tap the opportunity if long-term interest rates rose.

"Over the next 12 to 18 months also, we need to ensure that as the size of the borrowing programme goes up, we are able to keep the long-term interest rates, on the basis of which businesses and industry take investment decisions, in a reasonable range."

"I understand it is a challenging thing because you are managing many different variables, but I think a stable tax rate and a reasonable range for long-term interest rates will really help business and industry invest," Mr. Kotak said.

Mr. Kotak said.

CSR shouldn't be mandated, says Premji

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

IT czar and philanthropist Azim Premji on Saturday said companies should not be legally mandated to engage in corporate social responsibility as contributions to society need to "come from within".

Mr. Premji, who contributed ₹7,904 crore in donations last year, also highlighted that the COVID-19 crisis was a "wake-up call"

to look at fundamental issues like the need to improve public systems like health, and changing the structure of society to make it more equal and just. "I do not think we should have a legal mandate for... CSR," he added.

Reacting to data in high velocity is key, says Srivastava

Data has a seat in the boardroom, avers Genpact official

MINI TEJASWI
BENGALURU

Data became a first-class citizen last year and now has a seat at the board table of large global corporations, said Sanjay Srivastava, chief digital officer at Genpact commenting changes and challenges in the post-pandemic market.

"It is not just that data has become the first-class citizen in enterprises but reacting to data in high velocity is emerging as the new market driver," remarked Mr. Srivastava. "Data is no longer a by-product of automation," the Genpact official added.

Citing the example of a

U.S.-based client trading in farm produce, he said the company sources strawberries, blueberries and other berries from all over the world. "You actually pluck a berry when it's ripe. But, if you are in the banana business you can harvest a banana before it's ripe and it gets ready for consumption as it travels from farm to market."

Just two weeks'

"The berry has two weeks, from the point it is picked to the time it has to be eaten. So in the shortest possible time, you will have to connect farmers, suppliers and buyers around the globe together. And that brings the point that velocity is becoming so important, not just data. Genpact is ensuring this by using automation, analytics, and AI along with the right mix of digital technologies and industry experiences," he elaborated.

Sovet Pride should make amends

HYDERABAD: Sovet Pride, who ended third in her last start, should make amends in the Moment Of Glory Plate, the main event of Sunday's (Feb. 21) afternoon races.

Rails will be announced one hour before the first race.

1 WISHFUL THINKING PLATE (Div. I) (1,400m), rated 40 to 65 (Cat. II) - 3.15: 1. Shaquille (4) Deepak Maiden, 3-y-o only (Cat. II) - 1.45: 1. Akido (9) B.R. Kumar 56, 2. Epson (6) N.B. Kuldeep 56, 3. Indian Glory (1) Mukesh Kumar 56, 4. Magic Mark (4), 5. Solar Eclipse (7) Ashad Asbar 56, 6. Special Effort (2) Ajeeth Kumar 56, 7. Winning Streak (4) Trevor 56, 8. Keystone (3) Akshay Kumar 54.5, 9. Muaser (10) Kuldeep Singh 54.5, 10. N.R.I. Style (8) A.A. Vikrant 54.5 and 11. Spectacular Cruise (5) Suraj Narredu 54.5.

1 KEYSTONE, 2. WINNING STREAK, 3. AKIDO

2 AUXILIARY PLATE (Div. II) (2,000m), rated 40 to 65 (Cat. II) - 2.15: 1. Warrior N.R.I. Symbol (9) Deepak Singh 60, 2. N.R.I. Symbol (8) A.A. Vikrant 59, 3. Wah M. Zara (4) Suraj Narredu 57, 4. Sporting Smile (2) Abhay Singh 56.5, 5. City Of Blossom (10) Gaurav Singh 55.5, 6. Aesthesia (7) G. Naresh 54.5, 7. Mr. Shanghai (1) Ashad Asbar 53, 8. Mystery (3) Koushik 53, 9. Dunkirk (5) Ajeeth Kumar 52.5 and 10. N.R.I. Vision (6) Akshay Kumar 51.5.

3 PLANETARIUM PLATE (Div. II) (1,200m), rated 3-y-o only (Cat. II) - 3.45: 1. Falcon Edge (6) Akshay Kumar 59.5, 2. Horse O' War (7) QUTAN SHAHI PLATE (1,600m), rated 20 to 45 - 4.45: 1. Alta Vita (1) Deepak Singh 60, 2. City Of Passion (4) Gaurav Singh 59.5, 3. Committed Warrior (6) Akshay Kumar 59.5, 4. Queen Daenerys (8) Mukesh Kumar 58, 5. Eagle Bluff (9) Abhay Singh 57.5, 6. Castlerock (6) Koushik 56, 7. Melting Ice (14) B.R. Kumar 56.

4 ABERDEEN PLATE (Div. II) (1,200m), rated 3-y-o only (Cat. II) - 3.45: 1. Falcon Edge (6) Akshay Kumar 59.5, 2. Horse O' War (7)

Cool Rider wins feature event

BENGALURU: Manjri Horse Breed Farm Private Limited's Cool Rider (Srinath up), won the Sherlock Bangalore Juvenile Million, the chief event of the races held here on Saturday (Feb. 20). The winner is trained by Neil Darashan.

THE RESULTS:

1 RAICHUR PLATE (1,400m), rated 00 to 20, 5-y-o & over: COMMANDPOST (Angad) 1, Fierce Fighter (Ikram Ahmed) 2, AZEMEEMI Princess (Neaveen K) 3 and Gazebo Talk (Likhith Appu) 4. 9-1/4, 1/2 and 1-3/4, 1m 30.34s, 212(w), 31, 27 and 17 (p), SHP: 69, TPH: 46, FP: 3,575 Q: 1,398, Trinella: 33,153 and 7,104, Exacta: 34,899 and 14,956. Favourite: Gazebo Talk. Owners: Mr. S.M. Choudary & Mr. S.N. Harish. Trainer: Narayana Gowda. S. Attalaih.

2 HORANADU PLATE (Div. II, 1,200m), rated 15 to 35: DECORUM (Akash Chavan) 1, Star Hopper (Shreyas Singh) 2, Phoenix Surprise (Ankit Yadav) 3 and Star Citizen (Chethan G) 4. 2-3/4, 3-1/4 and 3-1/4, 1m 34.3m, 282(w), 19, 16 and 17 (p), SHP: 52, TPH: 166, FP

The day in numbers

3 Osaka is just the third player in the Open Era after Seles and Federer to triumph in her first four Major finals

4 Osaka is the fourth active women's player to hold four or more Slams after Serena, Venus and Clijsters

4 Osaka has won four out of the last eight Majors she has entered

13 Come Monday, Brady is set to rise to No. 13 in the world, marking her debut in the top-20

21 The win over Brady was Osaka's 21st straight match win, including title-runs at the 2020 US Open and 2021 Australian Open

One year ago, [a Slam final] would have been like going to Mars. [Now], I feel more comfortable at this level. Winning a Grand Slam is totally achievable. It's within reach

The biggest thing I want to achieve is to play long enough... to play versus a girl that would say I was her favourite player. Unfortunately, I was not able to play Li Na

Osaka reigns at Melbourne

Brushes aside Brady; Ram and Krejcikova win mixed doubles title

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MELBOURNE

Japan's Naomi Osaka dismissed Jennifer Brady 6-4, 6-3 in front of thousands of fans to win the Australian Open in style for her fourth Grand Slam title here on Saturday.

Third seed Osaka preserves her 100% record in Grand Slam finals after winning the 2018 and 2020 US Opens and the 2019 title in Melbourne.

In elite company

The 23-year-old, who becomes only the third player after Monica Seles and Roger Federer to win their first four Major finals, will now rise to second in the world rankings.

Osaka, the world's top-earning female athlete, wore down fellow big-hitter Brady with consistency, and lifted

her racquet above her face in a muted celebration of her win as the crowd roared.

It was a rematch of last year's epic US Open semifinal, dubbed by some as the best match of 2020, but Osaka triumphed far more comfortably on this occasion.

Rise in ranking

Brady's resilient run ended after serving 14 days' hard quarantine before the tournament, unlike other players who were allowed out of their hotel rooms to train.

Despite the defeat, Brady will rise to a career-high 13th in the WTA rankings.

Later, Barbora Krejcikova and Rajeev Ram won their second Australian Open mixed doubles title in three years with a 6-1, 6-4 win over home pairing Sam Stosur and Matthew Ebden. For Krejcikova it was her

third Australian Open title in a row after combining with Nikola Mektic of Croatia to win the mixed doubles a year ago.

She had lost in the women's doubles final with fellow Czech Katerina Siniakova on Friday to Elise Mertens and Aryna Sabalenka, but put her disappointment behind her in just 59 minutes on Rod Laver Arena.

Ram has a chance to pick up another title on Sunday, when he and Britain's Joe Salisbury defend their men's doubles title against Ivan Dodig and Filip Polasek.

THE RESULTS

Finals: Women: 3-Naomi Osaka (Jpn) bt 22-Jennifer Brady (USA) 6-4, 6-3.

Mixed doubles: 6-Rajeev Ram (US) & Barbora Krejcikova (Cze) bt Matthew Ebden & Sam Stosur (Aus) 6-1, 6-4.

CHAMPION A NEW
AO FINALS
australian open

TODAY
2 PM

DJOKOVIC MEDVEDEV
STREAMING LIVE
SONY liv



Djokovic will be gunning for his 18th Major title to pull himself just two shy of Federer and Nadal

The 33-year-old Serb has a combined 17-0 record in Australian Open semifinals and final

The last top-10 player Djokovic lost to in Melbourne was Stan Wawrinka in 2014

This will be Medvedev's second Grand Slam final. He lost his first at the 2019 US Open to Nadal in five sets

The 25-year-old will look to become only the third men's singles Grand Slam champion from Russia after Kafelnikov and Safin

Medvedev has beaten Djokovic in three of their past four meetings, including the most recent one at the 2020 ATP Finals. But in their only meeting in a Slam, Djokovic won in four sets at the 2019 Australian Open

I have nothing to lose. It's him (Djokovic) who has all the pressure. I'm the guy that challenges the guy who was eight times in the final and won eight times

Medvedev, looking ahead to the final

There has been a lot of talk about the new generation taking over. Certainly they will be the leaders of the future of tennis. But I'm not going to stand here and hand it over to them

Djokovic on the rise of men's tennis' Next Gen

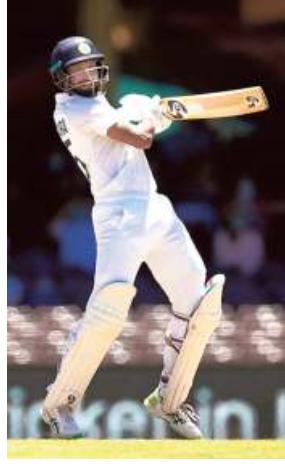
We have to accept the conditions, says Pujara

Talks about the challenges of pink-ball cricket on a relatively untested pitch

AMOL KARHADKAR
MUMBAI

Having grown up in Rajkot, a four-hour drive from Ahmedabad, Cheteshwar Pujara is no stranger to the Sardar Patel Stadium in Motera. In fact, the last Test the ground hosted before being rebuilt as the world's largest cricket stadium saw Pujara scoring a double hundred against England in 2012.

As he trained at the swanky venue for the first time, Pujara recalled that the last match was so long ago that he had "just got engaged". Despite the fond memories, he was not sure about what's in store next week for the third Test against England. Not only will India play just



Pujara. ■ FILE PHOTO

its second day-night Test at home but it will also be confronted by a pitch that is yet to stage a First Class game.

"We didn't have too many games after the completion of the stadium due to COVID, so I feel we have to accept the conditions and move on," Pujara said in a virtual interaction on Saturday.

"We don't have enough experience with the pink ball. We will get used to it as we keep playing more. Going forward, not sure if we'll play more games with the pink ball," he said. "It's again a Test, we'll have to play normal cricket, have similar game-plans to what we had in the last match depending on how the pitch is. As a team, we have certain goals as batting and bowling units, so we would stick to that."

While the possible grass cover, necessary to maintain the condition of the pink ball, will be the talk of the town, last week's turner at Chepauk continues to draw flak from former England cricketers. Pujara, however, didn't see anything untoward with the pitch.

"When it comes to turning tracks, you can't define how much it should turn," he said.

"It's a thin line. I don't think it was a bad pitch. Yes, it always becomes difficult to bat in the second innings. [But that's also the case] when we play in Australia on Day 4 or Day 5, [when] the pitch becomes a little dangerous, with the odd ball hitting cracks and taking off."

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