



Uttarakhand Chief Minister Rawat in Delhi to meet BJP leadership
page 9



Six candidates score perfect 100 in first round of JEE-Main
page 10



Meghan Markle accuses U.K. royals of racism in interview with Oprah
page 11



Djokovic beats Federer's all-time record for most weeks as No. 1
page 13

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NEARBY



Women power across the divide at Tikri border

NEW DELHI

On International Women's Day, which was celebrated with much fanfare at the Tikri border here, there were women protesters on one side and women security officers on the other – both honouring the day in their own way. Women took over the stage at the protest site and the crowd too was filled with women.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

Iran denies links with blast near Israel Embassy

NEW DELHI

The Iranian Embassy denied any connection between the Quds Force, an arm of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps, and the IED blast outside the Israeli Embassy in Delhi in January. In an official statement on Monday, the embassy "strongly repudiated" the allegation that the NIA had "concluded" that the attack had been carried out by an Indian proxy group on the orders of the Quds Force.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 10



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SC seeks States' views on 50% cap on quota

Court to examine if three-decade-old verdict needs a relook

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday decided to examine whether its nearly three-decade-old judgment which fixed reservation for the marginalised and the poor in government jobs and educational institutions at 50% needs a relook.

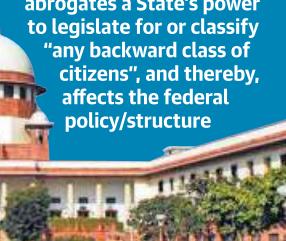
In 1992, a nine-judge Bench of the court had drawn the "Lakshman rekha" for reservation in jobs and education at 50%, except in "extraordinary circumstances".

However, over the years, several States, such as Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, have crossed the Rubicon and passed laws which allow reservation shooting over 60%.

Maratha quota law

A five-judge Bench, led by Justice Ashok Bhushan, set up to hear the challenge to the Maratha quota law, decided not to confine the question of reservation spilling over the 50% limit to just Maharashtra.

The Bench expanded the ambit of the case by making other States party and inviting them to make their stand clear on the question of whether reservation should continue to remain within the 50% boundary or not.



Justice Bhushan, leading the Constitution Bench, decided to start the hearing from March 15, giving time for the other States to prepare their arguments.

The court, meanwhile, framed a series of questions, which include whether the Indira Sawhney verdict of 1992, fixing 50% limit on quota, needs to be relooked by a larger Bench of more than nine judges.

Another question is whether the Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act of

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Under scrutiny

The Constitution Bench will decide on these broad issues:

- Whether the *Indira Sawhney* judgment of 1992, which fixed reservation at 50%, requires a relook by a larger Bench "in the light of subsequent constitutional amendments, judgments and changed social dynamics of the society"
- Whether the Maratha quota law is covered by the exemption of "exceptional circumstances" by which reservation can cross the 50% mark
- Whether Article 342A abrogates a State's power to legislate for or classify "any backward class of citizens", and thereby, affects the federal policy/structure

'SC has highest respect for womanhood'

Remarks on rape case were completely misquoted, says Chief Justice Bobde

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde on Monday said the Supreme Court, as an institution, had the highest respect for womanhood,

men's Day while hearing a plea made by a 14-year-old rape victim seeking the termination of pregnancy.

On March 1, during a virtual hearing, several media outlets reported the CJI asking the lawyer of a rape accused to find out whether his client would be willing to marry the victim or risk the prospect of going to jail. The lawyer came back later and said his client had declined



Sharad A. Bobde

as he was already married. On Monday, advocate V.K. Biju, who was appearing for the 14-year-old, told the Bench, led by Chief Justice Bobde, that certain people were out to tarnish the image of the judiciary. The

Bench said the reputation of the judiciary rested in the hands of the Bar.

'Twisted out of context'
Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta said the comments of the CJI on March 1 were indeed twisted out of context.

A flurry of outrage followed the reported comments of the CJI. According to the prosecution side, the accused had repeatedly raped the girl since she was in high school.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Courts in five countries back Cairn ruling

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Courts in five countries, including the U.S. and the U.K., have given recognition to an arbitration award that asked India to return \$1.4 billion to Cairn Energy plc – a step that now opens the possibility of the British firm seizing Indian assets in those countries if New Delhi does not pay, sources said.

The company had moved courts in nine countries to enforce the December 21 award from a three-member tribunal at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Netherlands.

FULL REPORT ON ▶ PAGE 12

Batla House encounter: 'IM operative' convicted

Ariz Khan, associates killed inspector'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Monday convicted Ariz Khan, allegedly associated with the terror outfit Indian Mujahideen (IM), for the murder of Delhi police inspector Mohan Chand Sharma in a case related to the 2008 Batla House encounter.

Two suspected IM operatives were killed and two were arrested when a Special Cell team raided a hideout of bomb blasts suspects at Batla House on September 19, 2008. Khan and another alleged IM operative, Shehzad, were present at the hideout but managed to escape. Inspector Sharma, who had led the team, was killed in the encounter. The incident took place a week after five serial blasts hit Delhi on September 13, 2008, killing at least 30 people.

Curtail House session, MPs request Birla

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Lok Sabha members from the poll-bound States of West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu and Kerala and the Union Territory of Puducherry have requested that the second part of the Budget session that began on Monday be curtailed.

Sources said nearly 145 MPs have written to Speaker Om Birla. The government is mulling over closing the session by March 25. Though there is no official announcement so far, both Houses are set to restore pre-COVID-19 timings and seating arrangement.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Delhi's per capita income dips by 5.9%

NIKHIL M BABU

NEW DELHI

The per capita income of the people of Delhi has fallen by 5.91% (at current prices) to ₹3,54,004 during 2020-21, compared to ₹3,76,221 in 2019-20.

Also, the Gross State Dom-

estic Product (at current prices) fell by 3.92% in 2020-21 to ₹7,98,310 crore from ₹8,30,872 crore in 2019-20, as per the Economic Survey of Delhi 2020-21 tabled in the Delhi Assembly on Monday.

"Because of COVID-19 pandemic, business was less

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 3

in the market and because of this revenue was less for the government. So, the financial condition was weak, and we couldn't spend on some schemes," Finance Minister Manish Sisodia said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

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Air Quality of Delhi-NCR	
Delhi 207	Gurugram 103
Ghaziabad 230	Faridabad 174
Noida 192	Greater Noida 196
■ Good 0-50	■ Satisfactory 51-100
■ Poor 101-200	■ Very Poor 201-300
■ Severe 301-400	■ >400
Air Quality Index at 4 p.m. yesterday (Average of past 24 hours) Source: CPCB	

IN BRIEF**Three stations on Green Line closed for six hours**

NEW DELHI

Entry and exit gates of three metro stations on the Tikri Kalan and Brigadier Hoshik Singh section of the Green Line were closed by the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation on Monday for around six hours following security advisories from the Delhi Police. The Tikri Border, Pandit Shree Ram Sharma (Modern Industrial Estate) and Bahadurgarh stations were closed by the authorities.

Delhi Police felicitates 37 women

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

On the occasion of International Women's Day, Delhi Police honoured 22 women personnel and 15 civilians for their remarkable efforts during the pandemic.

At the police headquarters, Commissioner of Delhi Police S.N. Shrivastava honoured the women officers for going beyond the call of duty during the lockdown, and other women from various fields such as medical services, social services, entrepreneurs, trainers and good Samaritans, who have made significant contribution to society, read a statement.

The police organised a number of events, including lectures on gender sensitisation, and installing sanitary pad-dispensing machines in washrooms. "We wanted to make a statement on Women's Day in two ways – one, by letting women officers take command roles and manage priority policing today, and second, by felicitating women officers who have done exceptional work," said Mr. Shrivastava.

Major traffic junctions, PCR vehicles and functioning of police stations were commanded by women on Monday, he added.

Women power across the divide at Tikri

While women farmers were celebrated at protest site, lack of recognition rankled women cops on duty

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

A girl holding a Bharatiya Kisan Union flag at the Tikri border on International Women's Day on Monday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

On International Women's Day, which was celebrated with much fanfare at the Tikri border here, there were women protesters on one side and women security officials on the other – and both honouring the day in their own way.

On Monday, women took over the stage at the protest site and the crowd too was filled with women. They took pride in their involvement and believed that this fight demanding repeal of the farm laws cannot be won without their support.

A 19-year-old BA first year student Komaldeep Kaur from Faridkot – volunteering

on the stage – said she had been at the protest site since November 26 and recently took her examinations online from there itself.

"College has opened back

home but this is more important than studies right now. If you look at history, there's no struggle that has been won without women. And if we demand equal rights, then

we should be here in equal numbers too," she said. The young woman has faced problems at the site – especially during her periods – but insisted that these issues are very minor in front of the broader fight, she said.

Her friend Paviter Kaur Preet, also 19, and another first year college student, said one thing that the protest had done was to make leaders out of women.

"Those women who hadn't seen beyond four walls of their house have come to the stage and spoken. Young girls like us are in leadership roles here," she said.

On the other side, while a senior police officer thanked

and praised lower rank women security officials for their work, they wished they could voice their concerns. A woman constable, holding a bouquet in her hand, said that on this Women's Day, they wanted freedom and rest days.

"We have been working without any leave for over three months now. Life has become very tough for women who live in nuclear families without in-laws," the constable said.

Visibly irritated, another constable said, "Ask those men, who ask us what we do, to swap lives for just one day and do all that we do for a single day – manage kids, home and work".

Plea to put off judicial exam filed before HC

Wait till vaccination drive ends: petition

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

A plea filed before the High Court has sought to postpone the Delhi Higher Judicial Service Main Examination (2019), which is scheduled for March 13-14, 2021, till the COVID-19 vaccination drive for lawyers is complete.

The petitioner – one of the exam candidates – said he is suffering from severe medical conditions that leave him at a risk of serious complications if he contracts the virus.

The petitioner said he is a meritorious, middle-aged person and is suffering

from severe health problems such as cancer. He had undergone radiation therapy with administration of chemotherapy doses and currently has extremely weak immunity.

Violation of rights

The plea claimed that the notice is in violation of the fundamental rights by forcing the candidates, like the petitioner, to risk their health and safety in the current pandemic situation.

The petition sought quashing of the February 18 notification issued by the HC notifying the schedule of the examinations.

On Women's Day, DCW honours ISRO scientists, elderly protester

Govt. has adopted women-centric approach in its policies: CM

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI



CM Arvind Kejriwal felicitates 80-year-old Mohinder Kaur on International Women's Day on Monday. ■ PTI

the Chief Minister said.

"The Delhi government's policies in the past five-six years have adopted a women-centric approach with its motive to provide relief to the working women in light of inflation and economic crisis. When free access to buses was provided to women, several women and students benefited. They were also benefited when electricity and water was made free," he said.

An acid attack survivor from among the audience appealed to the Chief Minister to ban the sale of acid in the city. The survivor was assured by the CM that the matter would be looked into.

Eighty-five-year-old Shanta Balu Pawar, a martial arts

performer-trainer, 11-year-old environmental activist Licipriya Kanguzam, acid attack survivor and activist Laxmi Aggarwal were some of the others who were awarded, apart from officials from the Delhi Police, the Army and Indian Air Force.

Safety, security

DCW chief Swati Maliwal said: "The commission has handled 1 lakh cases in the last five years and over 4.5 lakh calls have been attended by the DCW's 181 helpline. When we started out, the DCW budget was ₹3 crore, now it ₹40 crore. We have started a war to ensure safety and security for every women in Delhi and the country."

Scindia could have been CM, now a backbencher: Rahul at IYC meet

Youth Congress chief says no such statement was made

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

BJP leader Jyotiraditya Scindia, who quit the Congress last March, could have become Chief Minister but now he will remain a backbencher in the BJP, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi is learnt to have told members of the Indian Youth Congress on Monday.

IYC chief B.V. Srinivas, however, denied that Mr. Gandhi made "any individual-specific remark" while delivering the inaugural address of the

two-day national executive of the Youth Congress. "This [reference to Mr. Scindia] is a plant by someone. Rahulji only spoke about strengthening the CM but he chose another route," Mr. Srinivas told *The Hindu*.

Sources, however, insisted that Mr. Gandhi made the remarks in the context of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh "rewarding" only their own members. "He [Mr. Scindia] would have become the CM had he stayed with Congress but Mr. Scindia has become a backbencher in the

BJP. He could have worked with workers to strengthen [the party]. I had told him 'one day you will become the CM' but he chose another route," a source quoted Mr. Gandhi as saying.

"Write it down, he will never become CM there," the source quoted Mr. Gandhi as saying and then appealing to the IYC members to work tirelessly irrespective of "who comes or leaves the party".

Mr. Gandhi also said IYC members would be urged to fight civic body polls soon.

Over 35,500 take COVID-19 vaccine in city

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

A total of 35,738 beneficiaries took the COVID-19 vaccination in the city on Monday and there was one minor Adverse Event following Immunisation.

Meanwhile, the city witnessed 239 new COVID-19 cases in 24 hours, taking the total to 6,41,340. The death toll rose to 10,924 with three more fatalities reported in a single day.

Of the total cases, 6,28,686 people have recovered and there are 1,730 active cases.

Body of baby found under pile of sand

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

A decomposed body of an unidentified newborn was found under a pile of sand at National Media Centre on Raisina Road in central Delhi on Monday.

The body was sent to a nearby government hospital mortuary where it has been preserved for identification. A case under Indian Penal Code Section 318 has been registered.

Teachers ask CM to rescind order merging DU college with AUD

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA) on Monday wrote to the city government, demanding immediate rescindment of its orders to merge the university's College of Arts with Ambedkar University Delhi.

It stated that the merger was in violation of statutory provisions of DU.

Stating that the Delhi government had not been disbursing salaries of em-

ployees in the 12 colleges funded by it, the letter to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal read: "The Delhi government has a woeful track record of not being able to maintain higher education institutions that are currently under its governance. This has been visible in the context of the 12 DU colleges that are 100% funded by the government."

The teachers' body urged the CM to not "subvert the democratic functioning of institutions of DU".

ders – UGC, DU and College of Arts – before making unilateral decisions. De-affiliation from DU and merger with AUD will have serious implications in service conditions of the workers. The proposals of de-affiliation and merger ought to have been first discussed in both the Academic Council and Executive Council of DU."

The teachers' body urged the CM to not "subvert the democratic functioning of institutions of DU".

Event on university campus ends in scuffle

Students' body alleges attack by ABVP members



Students in an altercation at DU on Monday.

■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

fore activist Nodeep Kaur could address the gathering.

"Instead of stopping the attack on students, the Delhi Police detained four students present at the spot.

After a united protest, the motive of the event. In reac-

tion to the questions, the men present on the spot attacked the DUSU members.

She then asked the administration to remove the anti-army posters from the campus and spoke to the prosecutor regarding the same," the students' body said.

They said objectionable slogans were raised at the gathering and when DUSU members questioned the organisers, a scuffle broke out between them.

"On seeing the anti-army posters, a few people led by DUSU joint-secretary Shiviangi Karwal questioned the organisers about the motive of the event. In reac-

tion to the questions, the men present on the spot attacked the DUSU members.

She then asked the administration to remove the anti-army posters from the campus and spoke to the prosecutor regarding the same," the students' body said.

A PCR call was received regarding quarrel following which a team reached the spot, an officer said. The police separated the two parties. Later, both the parties left the spot. The police said till now no complaint has been received at Maurice Nagar police station.

Administration of Union Territory of Chandigarh (Electricity Wing of Engineering Department)

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4. GST Details	GST Number: 04PTLE10623E1D6
5. Last date & Time of sale of RFP and submission of bids.	18.03.2021 at 04.00 PM

Note:
1. The existing bids which have already been received will be treated as valid, if no specific modification is made in writing by the bidders.
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Timings
DELHI

TUESDAY, MAR. 09
RISE 06:38 SET 18:26
RISE 04:02 SET 14:32
WEDNESDAY, MAR. 10
RISE 06:37 SET 18:27
RISE 04:50 SET 15:34
THURSDAY, MAR. 11
RISE 06:36 SET 18:27
RISE 05:33 SET 16:33

Delhi Weather	max min
Delhi City	32 19
Safdarjung	32 19
Palam	31 20

Delhi Palam Today
31°C Mist/haze at some places during morning. Dry comfortable weather with light surface winds.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
32°C Passing rain or thunder clouds development may affect towards night. Rise in temperature likely.

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THE HINDU
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Delhi's per capita income dips 5.9%, GSDP shrinks by 3.92%

This was due to the effect of COVID-19, series of lockdowns: Economic Survey

NIKHIL M BABU
NEW DELHI

The per capita income of the people of Delhi has fallen by 5.91% (at current prices) to ₹3,54,004 during 2020-21, compared to ₹3,76,221 in 2019-20. Also, the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) (at current prices) fell by 3.92% in 2020-21 to ₹7,98,310 crore from ₹8,30,872 crore in 2019-20, as per the Economic Survey of Delhi 2020-21 tabled in the Delhi Assembly on Monday.

This was due to the effect of COVID-19 and the series of lockdowns, which disrupted the economy across the world, according to the survey report.

Less business, revenue

"Because of COVID-19 pandemic, business was less in the market and because of this revenue was less for the government. So, the financial condition was weak, and we couldn't spend on some schemes as we had expected to," Finance Minister Manish



(From left) L-G Anil Baijal, CM Arvind Kejriwal and Speaker Ram Niwas Goel before the budget session. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Sisodia said.

Experts said that the fall in income and GSDP shows that there was less money in the hands of people, which reduced their purchasing power, and it also shows that investments had reduced.

"The actual per capita income will be even lesser, as this data does not take into account the unorganised sector, such as daily wage labourers, who were heavily hit during the pandemic. Also, the unorganised sector has not recovered compared

to organised sector," said Arun Kumar, former Professor at Economics Department of JNU.

At this stage, he said, the Delhi government should work to "generate employment" and spend more money on health, education, or small infrastructure projects, which generates employment.

He also said that the government should also try to look for an "urban employment scheme" on lines of Mahatma Gandhi National

Rural Employment Guarantee Act to (MGNREGA).

"The year 2020 witnessed unrivalled turmoil with the novel COVID-19 virus and the resultant pandemic emerging as the biggest threat to economic growth in a century. The pandemic has been unique in its wide-ranging effects on almost every section of the economy and the society," the report said.

But the government expects the economic condition to pick and register growth. "In 2021-22, a sharp recovery of real GSDP of Delhi with a double-digit growth is expected based on a low base effect and inherent strengths of the economy," the report said.

The report also said that Delhi has maintained its consistent revenue surplus which was ₹7,499 crore during 2019-20 (Prov.) as compared to ₹6,261 crore during 2018-19. Also, about 30.74 lakh Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) was recorded in Delhi during 2019.

City's economy likely to suffer 5.6% hit due to COVID-19: L-G

'Delhi, Centre worked in tandem to safeguard people's lives'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The city's economy is expected to suffer a contraction of 5.6% in its Gross State Domestic Product due to the impact of COVID-19, Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal said during his inaugural address for the Delhi Legislative Assembly's budget session here on Monday.

'Biggest challenge'
It was an unprecedented year due to the impact of the virus on all sectors, he said, adding that COVID-19 was the biggest challenge faced by the people of Delhi, which both the State government and the Centre had to

collaborate to face.

"My government, together with the Central government, garnered all resources to ensure preventive and curative actions to safeguard the life of citizens of Delhi," he said.

Measures taken

The L-G then outlined measures taken by the Delhi government in dealing with the pandemic, including raising the number of hospital beds, setting up of plasma banks and the home isolation model.

The House, which commenced proceedings by paying homage to farmers, who had died during the ongoing

Manish Sisodia presents Outcome Budget in Delhi Assembly

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Presenting the Outcome Budget in the Delhi Assembly on Monday, Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Manish Sisodia said that although the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated schools to be shut during the pandemic, the government, with the help of basic technology ensured that educational activities were conducted for a total of 229 days in a session which normally lasts for 220 days.

He stated that about 98% students received worksheets and 83% of them have given these worksheets back after completing them. He added that 89-90% students in Class XI and XII attended online classes conducted for twelve subjects.

The budget showed that at the Class-12 level, the pass percentage in government schools has improved to 71.58% the previous year.

The education department was one of the best performing departments of

the Delhi government as the budget showed that of 44 critical indicators of the Directorate of Education, 84% were on track, while in the Directorate of Higher Education 84% of the 61 critical indicators were on track.

The Economic Survey of Delhi 2020-21, also tabled on Monday, stated that the expenditure incurred by the Delhi government per student annually on education has increased from ₹50,812 in 2016-17 to ₹78,082 in 2020-21. It added that the total expenditure on education, including sports, arts and culture, increased from ₹6,555 crore in 2014-15 to ₹15,102 crore in 2020-21 and that the share of expenditure on edu-

cation to the total budget of the Delhi government has increased from 21% in 2014-15 to 23% in 2020-21.

Listing new initiatives taken in the field of technical education, the Economic Survey said that the Delhi Skill and Entrepreneurship University has been established in 2020 to provide quality education in applied sciences and skill education in various disciplines of education. University will not only focus on imparting higher education to its students but will also promote entrepreneurship development initiatives so that inspiring ecosystem, favourable for adoption of innovative practices be created to help setting up of business incubators leading to creation of job providers instead of job-seekers.

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71 lakh card-holders got ration from April-Nov.

'60% schemes of WCD Dept. on track'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Outcome Budget has stated that the Delhi government provided free dry ration to 71 lakh existing ration card holders from April to November last year, during the pandemic.

One-time financial assistance provided by the Social Welfare Department also saw an increase to 11,145 families in 2020-21 from 10,729 families in 2019-20.

The Outcome Budget also stated that 2.75 lakh women in distress were given monthly financial assistance in 2020-21 as against 2.66 lakh in 2019-20. The Women and Child Development Department also received 33,241 applications under the Ladli Scheme till December 2020 against an annual target of 65,000, according to the Outcome Budget presented at the Delhi Assembly on Monday.

According to the Outcome Budget, 4.49 lakh senior citizens were also provided financial assistance in 2020-21 against 4.64 lakh senior citizens who were provided financial assistance in

2019-20.

Additionally, 60.4 lakh non-ration card holders were provided 5 kg dry ration for free in April and May during the lockdown.

Free cooked meals were also provided by the government to both existing ration card holders under the Public Distribution Scheme (PDS) and those who did not possess ration cards, several of those being migrant workers, according to the Outcome Budget presented at the Delhi Assembly on Monday.

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While 62% of programmes and schemes are on track for the Social Welfare Department, the WCD department has 60% of the schemes on track, according to the document.

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PUBLIC NOTICE

NATIONAL COMPANY LAW APPELLATE TRIBUNAL PRINCIPAL BENCH, NEW DELHI

2nd & 3rd Floor, Mahanagar Doosar Sadan, (M.T.N.L. Building), 9 CGO Complex, Lodhi Road, New Delhi-110003.

Company Appeal (AT) (Insolvency) No. 1069 of 2020

in the matter of Mr. Jitender Arora

Resolution Professional M/s. Premia Projects Ltd.

... Appellant

Vs TEK Chand & Anr.

... Respondents Whereas, Mr. Jitender Arora Resolution Professional of M/s. Premia Projects Limited has filed the aforesaid appeal before the Hon'ble National Company Law Appellate Tribunal, New Delhi arising out of the final order dated 29th October, 2020 passed by the National Company Law Tribunal, Principal Bench, New Delhi, Under Section 07 of the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code, 2016.

Whereas you i.e. Respondent No. 2- M/s. Solitaire Infomed Pvt. Ltd., Basements, J-4, Shop No. 4, Block-J, Kirti Nagar, Delhi - 110015, is hereby given notice that the aforesaid appeal is listed for hearing before the Hon'ble National Company Law Appellate Tribunal, New Delhi on 22nd March, 2021.

You are hereby directed to appear before the Hon'ble National Company Law Appellate Tribunal in person or through your authorised representative or through your lawyer on 22nd March, 2021 at 10:30 AM to answer the same failing which the appeal will be disposed of ex parte.

This public notice is being published pursuant to the directions of the Hon'ble National Company Law Appellate Tribunal passed on 1st March, 2021 in the aforesaid appeal.

Given under the seal of the Court on this the 03rd day of March, 2021.

By order of Sd/- Assistant Registrar

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Telephone : 0651-2400799 & Fax : 0651-2400799 | [https://www.jbvn.co.in](http://www.jbvn.co.in)4th Extension NoticeThe RFB uploaded against NIT No. 76/PR/JBVLN/2020 -21 for Supply, Installation, Commissioning, Customization and Integration of Unified Metering, Billing, Collection (MBC), Customer Information System (CIS) and Meter Data Management System (MDMS) on Cloud F MS support of Entire System for JBVLN, Jharkhand (INDIA) has been revised and the revised RFB is available on <http://jharkhandtenders.gov.in>.

Calendar of Events :

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Details
1	Name of Work	IT hardware and software upgradation(billing and other application) complete turnkey installation. (Supply, Installation, Commissioning, Customization and Integration of Unified Metering, Billing, Collection (MBC), Customer Information System (CIS) and Meter Data Management System (MDMS) on Cloud.) Estimated cost Rs.181 Crores
2	Last Date / Time for receipt of bids	23-03-2021 till 16:00 hrs
3	Date and Time for Opening of Technical bid	23-03-2021 at 17:00 hrs

1. The tender documents with detailed conditions can be obtained through web site <http://jharkhandtenders.gov.in> and should upload all relevant documents as mentioned in the revised tender documents only through online e-tender portal/website <http://jharkhandtenders.gov.in>

स्वाक्षरित एवं राज्यित में ऊपरी वर्गों। कृपया अपनी शिक्षकों को टेल फोन नं. 1800 345 6570 पर दर्ज करें।

PR No. 236007

PR 243316 Jharkhand Bijlee Vitran Nigam Ltd(20-21)D

SD/- General Manager (IT)

PR No. 243316 Jharkhand Bijlee Vitran Nigam Ltd(20-21)D

CM YK

M.P. passes Bill penalising fraudulent conversions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

BHOPAL

The Madhya Pradesh Assembly on Monday passed a Bill that penalises religious conversion through marriage or any other fraudulent means and provides for fine of up to ₹10,000.

While the Opposition Congress questioned the need for a new law, Home

Minister Narottam Mishra said unlike the 1968 legislation, the present Act provides for annulment of marriage and a harsher sentence. The Act also provides for fine of up to ₹10,000.

After the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Bill, 2021 was passed by a voice vote, some BJP MLAs chanted 'Jai Shri Ram'.

He said the apathetic attitude of the Central government would not help resolve the situation.

The matter had to be resolved by the Centre and the farmers, with the Punjab government having no role to play as the farmers' associations had rejected any political interference," said the Chief Minister.

"Instead of amicably resolving the issue, the Central government was fuelling further angst among them," said Capt. Amarinder, adding that by seeking land record for making e-payment to the farmers directly from the Food Corporation of India, the situation would worsen.

"Punjab had a time-tested system in place in 1967, with farmers getting paid through the *arthiyas* with whom they had excellent relations and on whom they could depend in times of adversity," he said. "How can farmers rely on corporate houses in times of crisis," he asked.

Direct payment to farmers will worsen current crisis'

Centre should amicably resolve issue: Punjab CM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Capt. Amarinder Singh. ■ FILE PHOTO.

The Chief Minister stressed that the Centre should have taken the farmers into confidence before bringing the controversial Ordinances. "Had the Centre been sincere about finding a viable solution to this problem, it would have either consulted the Punjab government or our farmers, as our State alone contributes over 40% of foodgrains to the national pool," he said.

Legal recourse

The Chief Minister, in response to a question, said Governor V.P. Singh Badnore should immediately forward the State's Amendment Bills against the farm laws to the President.

"If the President refuses, it will open the doors for us for legal recourse," he added.

APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION



General public is hereby informed that an unidentified male namely Unknown, S/o: Unknown, R/o: Unknown was found on 26.02.2021 at Safdarjung Hospital, Delhi. He was admitted in Safdarjung Hospital, Delhi on MRN No. 58891 dated 26.02.2021. During the treatment doctors declared him dead on 26.02.2021. In this regard DD No. 12PP dated 26.02.2021 U/s 174 Cr. P.C. has been lodged at Police Station, Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi. Identification of unidentified dead body is as under:

Name: Unknown, Age: About 50 Years, Height: 172 cm, Face: Oval, Complexion: Dark, Built: Thin.

If anyone has any information or clue about this male deceased may kindly be informed undersigned.

SHO Police Station, Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi DP/541/SW/2021(UIDB) Ph: 011-24106345, 7065036231

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED WOMAN



Sushma

General public is hereby informed that this woman namely Sushma W/o Mithlesh Kumar R/o Parhladpur Banger, Delhi Age : 22 years Height : 5'1", Face : Round, Complexion : Fair, Build : Medium, wearing green colour suit, black colour jacket, white colour salwar and red colour slipper in feet, has been missing/ kidnapped since 25.01.2021. In this regard DD No. 92-A dated 14.02.2021 has been lodged at P.S. Shahbad Dairy, Delhi.

Any person having any information or clue about this missing woman may kindly inform to the following.

E-mail: cic@cbi.gov.in

Website: http://cbi.nic.in

Fax: 24368639,

Tel: 24368638/24368641

SHO: P.S. Shahbad Dairy, Delhi Ph. : 011-27821047, 27822207

DPI/2021



Vishal

General Public is hereby informed that one boy (depicted in the photo) namely Vishal S/o Satbir R/o 55, Village Holambi Khurd, Delhi Aged-16 Years has been reported missing since 06.02.2021 at about 9:30 AM from his residence vide FIR No.64/21 u/s 363 IPC Dated 13.02.2021 registered at Police Station Narela Industrial Area, Delhi. His physical description is as under:-

Complexion: Fair, Height: 5'7", Face: Square, Built: Thin,

Clothing: green coloured sweater, Blue coloured lower and

Blue coloured sports shoes in feet.

Any person having any information/Clue about this missing boy, may inform SHO, Narela Industrial Area, Delhi at E-mail: cic@cbi.gov.in or website : <http://cbi.nic.in>

Tele No.: 011-24368638 or 24368641

FAX No.: 011-24368639

SHO, Narela Industrial Area, Delhi

DP/823/ON/2021 Tel.: 011-2728350, 27280435

SEARCH OF MISSING

General public is hereby informed that one boy (depicted in the photo), Namely: Md. Riyaj S/o: Md. Juved , R/o: A-1420, JJ Colony Bawana Delhi Aged: 25 years has been missing since 16.02.2021 at 1100 PM. In this regard a DD No. 71A, Dated 18.02.2021, has been lodged at P.S. Bawana, Delhi His physical description is as under:

Height: 5'3

ASSEMBLY POLLS

DELI THE HINDU | TUESDAY, MARCH 9, 2021

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 Tuesday: Thunderstorm with lightning/gusty winds likely at isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Sikkim, sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Kerala and Mahe

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	6.8	31.9	20.3	Kozhikode	—	34.6	25.8
Ahmedabad	—	36.8	19.1	Kurnool	—	37.6	21.5
Aizawl	—	23.7	10.7	Lucknow	—	32.7	18.6
Allahabad	—	33.5	16.8	Madurai	—	35.9	24.7
Bengaluru	—	33.5	19.0	Mangaluru	—	35.3	21.8
Bhopal	—	37.7	16.9	Mumbai	—	35.0	19.2
Bhubaneswar	—	34.9	23.4	Nysuru	—	33.9	16.7
Chandigarh	—	31.1	19.8	New Delhi	—	32.2	18.9
Chennai	—	33.2	23.6	Patha	—	31.3	19.0
Coimbatore	—	34.6	22.5	Port Blair	—	32.1	26.0
Dehradoon	—	31.3	15.8	Puducherry	—	31.8	23.4
Gangtok	—	15.2	8.5	Pune	—	36.8	16.6
Goa	—	34.0	24.3	Raipur	—	38.0	19.4
Guwahati	—	29.2	16.0	Ranchi	—	34.2	16.5
Hubballi	—	34.0	19.0	Shillong	—	20.1	10.5
Hyderabad	—	35.6	20.5	Shimla	10.3	21.7	8.1
Imphal	1	26.7	13.5	Srinagar	—	5.6	5.0
Jaipur	—	35.0	22.6	Thiruvananthapuram	—	34.1	24.9
Kochi	—	32.4	26.2	Tiruchi	—	35.9	24.6
Kohima	—	19.4	11.0	Vijayawada	—	35.8	23.4
Kolkata	—	34.8	25.1	Visakhapatnam	—	31.1	25.6

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

Yesterday

CITIES	SO ₂	NO _x	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	70	101	.32	229	182	...■■■
Bengaluru	.5	.57	.28	.69	.73	■■■■■
Chennai	38	.5	.36	.69	—	■■■■■
Delhi	41	.28	.51	.265	.278	...■■■■■
Hyderabad	.4	.98	.59	.108	.127	■■■■■
Kolkata	15	.21	.45	.218	.142	■■■■■
Lucknow	15	.32	.52	.343	.255	...■■■■■
Mumbai	.6	.5	.87	.201	.140	...■■■■■
Pune	.6	.83	.107	.95	.85	■■■■■
Visakhapatnam	11	.45	.31	.40	.73	■■■■■

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.NO_x: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravated 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

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Panipat, Haryana recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 415 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Puducherry recorded a healthy AQI score of 27

Party insiders say he could be given a senior post in Modi Ministry or made CM if NDA retains power

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT GUWAHATI

The BJP does not seem to be looking beyond Finance, Health and Education Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for ideas in poll-bound Assam.

A majority in the first list of 70 candidates announced by the party on March 5 are known to be loyalists of Dr. Sarma. Such has been his clout, party insiders say, that many aspirants backed by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and some new faces reportedly preferred by Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal were ignored. Party insiders said Dr. Sarma's loyalists have been fielded from four of the 11 constituencies from where the sitting MLAs were dropped. His loyalists also got tickets from as many seats taken from ally Asom Gana Parishad, including Barhampur that has been former Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta turf for three decades.

At least 15 of the new faces and current BJP legislators who have been fielded came along with or followed Dr. Sarma from the Congress in 2015. While Amiyo Bhuyan (Bilipuri seat) is said to be the only one among Mr. Sonowal's proteges to have been nominated, at least three RSS-backed candidates – former Deputy Speaker Dilip Paul, Ashok Kumar Sarma and Jagadish Dutta – did not get a ticket for the Silchar, Narbari and Lalimpur seats respectively.



Himanta Biswa Sarma

Ashok Sarma was replaced by Jayanta Malla Barua, a former Congress MLA.

Calculated move

Ahead of the elections, Dr. Sarma said he was not keen on contesting from his pocket borough of Jalukbari unless the party leadership wanted him to. The speculations that he could move to Delhi for a bigger role in the Narendra Modi government got traction when the BJP

nominated Biswajit Daimary from the Panery Assembly seat. Mr. Daimary, who

switched over to the BJP from its former ally Bodoland People's Front (BPF) in 2020, is a Rajya Sabha member. Some party leaders believe, if he wins the election, Dr. Sarma could replace him in the Rajya Sabha.

According to another school of thought, Dr. Sarma could very well break a "tradition" by becoming Assam's first Brahmin Chief Minister if the BJP and its allies retain power.

The BJP has not named its "CM face", as State party president Ranjeet Kumar Dass said this was immaterial for a party in power.

No time for campaigning in Bengal: Farooq

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA JAMMU

National Conference president Farooq Abdullah on Monday said he does not have time to campaign for the Trinamool Congress in the upcoming West Bengal Assembly elections.

"I do not have time for campaigning," Mr. Abdullah told reporters when asked if he would join West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee during the campaigning for the upcoming State Assembly polls.

NORTH & WEST

Maharashtra's debt rises to ₹6,15,170 cr.

Ajit Pawar says no freebies in Budget owing to financial strain, proposes to increase excise duty on liquor

STAFF REPORTER

MUMBAI

Maharashtra Finance Minister Ajit Pawar on Monday presented a Budget for 2021-22 with a revenue deficit of ₹46,177.59 crore for 2020-21 owing to a shortfall in estimated revenue receipts amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

In his Budget speech, Mr. Pawar said he was unable to announce freebies owing to the State's strained financial situation. In the last two years, the State's debt has increased by ₹1,64,056 crore.

According to the Budget estimate (2021-22), debt has risen to ₹6,15,170 crore compared with the revised estimate (2020-21) of ₹5,38,304 crore. The debt stock percentage compared with the Gross State Domestic Product stands at 20.6%. In the previous fiscal, it was 20.2%.

Mr. Pawar said the State is yet to receive over ₹30,000 crore as compensation from the Centre for implementing



Decision-makers: Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and son Aaditya arrive at Vidhan Bhawan for the Budget presentation, in Mumbai on Monday. ■ VIVEK BENDRE

Amid a visible rift, two dozen MPs and MLAs rally behind her

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

JAIPUR

A two-day "temple yatra" undertaken by former Rajasthani Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje in the Bharatpur region has depicted her strength within the Bharatiya Janata Party, with two dozen MPs and MLAs rallying behind her. Despite a rift visible in the Opposition party,

the Good and Services Tax. "Since Parliament has passed the law, we expect to receive the amount before March 31. In case we do not, the deficit will further in-

crease," he said. Mr. Pawar said he expected revenue receipts worth ₹3,68,986.86 crore in 2021-22 and the revenue deficit to dip to ₹10,225.66 crore. "We

have tried to focus more on capital expenditure and cut down on revenue spend

stating at reduced revenue generation," he said. The Budget has, however, proposed to increase the excise duty on liquor. Country liquor will be classified into two categories – branded and non-branded – and State Excise Duty will be levied at 220% of manufacturing cost or ₹187 per litre, whichever is higher, only on branded country liquor.

VAT to be hiked

It has also proposed to increase the VAT on the sale of liquor as prescribed in Schedule B of the Value Added Tax Act from the existing 60% to 65%, and the VAT as prescribed in Section 41 (5) of Act from 35% to 40%.

Tax-free budget in Punjab

Proposal for loan waiver for farmers, landless labourers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHANDIGARH

Mr. Badal, presenting the budget in the ongoing Assembly session, said the report of the 6th Punjab Pay Commission shall be submitted soon.

"Anticipating the same, I have made the necessary provisions in my budgetary estimates...it takes time for any government to examine and assess any recommendations but I am proactively laying the timelines for my government to act on the recommendations of the Commission."

I announce to implement those recommendations of the commission accepted by the government from 1.7.2021," he said.

Free electricity

Mr. Badal said the government would continue to provide free power to farmers for

which an amount of ₹7,180 crore has been provisioned. He added that an outlay of ₹11,861 crore has been earmarked for school education. He also proposed to raise the old age pension from ₹750 to ₹1,500 a month.

Previous govt. flayed

Hitting out at the previous Shiromani Akali Dal-Bharatiya Janta Party government, Mr. Badal said "I was astonished by the extent to which the preceding government had bankrupted our State and essentially mortgaged our people's future...I haven't the slightest hesitation in making the assertion, that the actions of the previous Akali-BJP regime, were for all practical purposes an attempt to reduce this State to a form of slavehood."

Masked masterpiece



Keeping up with the times: People walk past a graffiti depicting Mona Lisa wearing a mask, in Bandra on Monday. ■ EMMANUEL YOGINI

"This is not a show of strength, but a show of devotion," Ms. Raje said. She said she would keep working for all communities while following the "dharma niti" (path of religion) and would again let the lotus bloom in the desert State, getting inspiration from her mother, the late Vijaya Raje Scindia.

The yatra undertaken in the region where the BJP had won only one seat in the 2018 Assembly election gave an indication that the two-time Chief Minister is reluctant to leave Rajasthan. The central leadership, with which Ms. Raje had recently

raised her grievances, apparently wants her to play a more active role in national politics.

Protests planned

The State unit has also chalked out a plan to organise dharnas and demonstrations at the block level from March 9 to 14 to protest against the Congress government's alleged failure on all fronts.

State president Satish Poonia said the Congress had lost the moral right to govern in view of its inability to ensure development.

CM YK



Snakes and ladders

Disconcerting signs of violence are writ large in the electoral rhetoric in Bengal

Searing political rhetoric has already set the tone for an intensely competitive Assembly election in West Bengal. The ferocity of the combat between the ruling Trinamool Congress and the challenger BJP is set to go further north. The BJP's dramatic rise in 2019, when its vote tally crossed 40%, made its ambitions for power realistic, but also prompted drastic corrective measures by the Trinamool, which has been in power since 2011. The BJP has been trying to overcome its leadership deficiency by recruiting defectors, primarily from the TMC. It still cannot match the ground game of the Left Front that is in alliance with the Congress and the ISF under the new umbrella of the Sanjukta Morcha. The Morcha's rally on February 28 was not surpassed by the BJP's on March 7, which was addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi who is leading from the front. The absence of a recognisable chief ministerial candidate, and its patchy presence in much of the State are challenges to the BJP, but winning this election is within its reach. A large segment of the BJP voters remain silent and could mobilise themselves, if one goes by the 2019 experience. The dynamics of politics has changed since then, with new factors at play.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has rolled out new welfare schemes and reached out to regions and social groups that tilted towards the BJP. By declaring her candidacy from Nandigram, where she will take on former colleague Suvendu Adhikari who defected to the BJP, she has shown that she is on the offensive. The violence and corruption by her party cadres meanwhile continue to shadow her spirited fight, and that is going to be a focal point of the BJP offensive. Mr. Modi's speech on Sunday called for a regime change. The second prong of the BJP strategy is communal polarisation, which seems to have been assigned to second-rung leaders who are frequently making not-so-veiled references and insinuations about dangers posed by Muslims. Ms. Banerjee's appeal among Muslim voters could be unsettled by the mainstreaming of the Muslim outfit that goes by the misleading name of the Indian Secular Front by the Left Front. The Left has always accused the BJP and the TMC of competitive communalism but its new tactic has thrown open various possibilities. If the Morcha claims a segment of the anti-incumbency votes, it will weaken the BJP; if it splits TMC votes, it will help the BJP. And if a sharp communal polarisation emerges, it could benefit the TMC and the BJP. It was for drama effect that actor Mithun Chakraborty, who joined the BJP on Sunday, likened himself to a cobra that can kill in one strike, but disconcerting signs of violence are writ large in West Bengal. Violent language easily translates to violent action, as Bengal's history has shown over the years.

An alarming diktat

Haryana's new '75% jobs for locals' law is a harbinger of doom

Haryana Governor Satyadeo Narain Arya's assent to a law regulating private sector hiring portends a potentially perilous slide in India's investment climate and its socio-economic framework. The Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act of 2020 seeks to ensure that 75% of all jobs with gross monthly salaries of up to ₹50,000 are provided to the State's own residents. The clamour for preserving economic activity for 'sons of the soil' is a recurrent theme now – Andhra Pradesh (AP) had passed a similar law in 2019, and the Madhya Pradesh CM has promised one to reserve 70% private sector jobs. Haryana's law could face legal challenges like AP's did, as it ostensibly flies in the face of the Constitution, especially Article 19(1)(g) and Article 16(2). Operationally, the law imposes onerous and contentious responsibilities on key personnel of firms in the State, including those with as few as 10 employees. There are three critical action points for businesses, attached to severe monetary penalties for perceived non-compliance. They need to register every employee earning ₹50,000 on an official portal and employing 75% of locals in such jobs (presumably by removing existing non-Haryanvi employees beyond the 25% limit). Most preposterous is seeking exemptions to the law – firms can hire outsiders by proving that local candidates for a desired skill are not available.

Apart from the power to enter firms' premises for inspections, officials will decide if a firm can hire an outsider or should train local candidates instead, till they become proficient enough. Even if this harks back to an 'Inspector Raj' system, the process would dissuade employers from operating in the State, thus defeating the idea of boosting local jobs when unemployment is running high. But this is not just about 'Happening Haryana' becoming a difficult place to do business. A single disruption in the Gurgaon back office operations of a global firm or the supplies of auto components, on account of the new law, would be damaging to India's already fragile reputation as a stable, trustworthy investment destination with a talented workforce. A possible investor exodus aside, this runs counter to the Prime Minister's 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' and 'One Nation One Market' slogans. Rising unemployment could spur more States to follow suit, and the logic could be extended to internal capital flows next. Bihar CM Nitish Kumar has already pointed out that Bihar's deposits into the banking system are not matched by credit disbursements into the State. It is time the Centre dissuades such legislation which threatens to not only unleash a sort of 'work visa' regime for Indians within the country but also damage crucial workplace diversity. Immobilising a much-vaunted young workforce and rupturing the social fabric with this push for insularity would be the start of an unstoppable slide.

The contours of the endgame in Afghanistan

The U.S.'s objective of a just and durable peace while ensuring Afghanistan's unity is a tall order



JAYANT PRASAD

The peace process in Afghanistan has reached a critical turning point. As when then U.S. President Barack Obama announced the exit of U.S. forces from Afghanistan (and the Taliban famously exulted – 'you may have the watches, but we have the time'), and more recently, when the Doha Agreement was concluded a year ago between the U.S. Government and the Taliban. Now, a more decisive step is in store.

A U.S. review

Afghan social media and political circles are rife with details, corroborated by official sources in Afghanistan, that the U.S. Secretary of State, Antony J. Blinken, has unveiled the initial conclusions of the review by the United States of its strategy in Afghanistan in a letter he has addressed simultaneously to Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani and the head of the Afghan High Council for National Reconciliation of Afghanistan, Abdullah Abdullah. Mr. Ghani has been virtually read the riot act by Mr. Blinken, whose letter confirms the intention to fully withdraw all U.S. military forces from Afghanistan as early as May 1, as specified in the Doha Agreement. Mr. Ghani has been warned that without them, the security situation will deteriorate and the Taliban could make rapid gains.

Despite the Doha Agreement, the Taliban has not ended its ties with the al-Qaeda and other similar terrorist groups. Nor have intra-Afghan negotiations progressed. The policy review ordered in Washington DC by U.S. President Joe Biden has been shrouded in secrecy. What appeared in the U.S. media indicates that some within the U.S. Administration are voicing the need to defend American values. Protagonists in the Pentagon are passionate about keeping a modicum of U.S. military presence in Afghanistan.

Mr. Biden has long held, even as Vice-President, that Pakistan is strategically more important to the U.S. than Afghanistan, and that U.S. troops should be pulled out of the Afghan battlefield as soon as possible. Donald Trump was doing nothing different from his predecessor, only in his inimitable way, which Mr. Biden wishes to distance himself from and leave a narrative of orderly exit.

The ongoing review had raised hopes in Kabul of a turnaround in U.S. policy. That is not happening in substance. The U.S. is anxious to proceed to a final settlement rapidly on terms visible from the very outset of the peace process. The continuation of Zalmay Khalilzad as the Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation at the State Department was an early sign that, in substance, U.S. policy is going to remain unaltered.

The U.S. maintains that its objective is to bring about a just and durable peace through political negotiations in manner that Afghanistan remains united, sovereign, and democratic, and preserves the gains made over the past two decades. This is a tall order, as it contradicts the abiding U.S. priority, to cut its losses and



be out of Afghanistan at the earliest.

The conundrum for the U.S. is that it cannot disengage from Afghanistan, if that is its priority, without accepting Pakistan's terms. These would not be acceptable to Afghan patriots who want freedom for Afghanistan to choose its political direction.

If training, combat support, and the supply of weapons are stopped from Pakistan, the Taliban could be on its knees. The U.S. Government is wary but resigned about Pakistan's negative role. Instead of pressuring Pakistan, it is seeking Afghan acquiescence for a power-sharing arrangement with the Taliban, enabling the exit of U.S. soldiers.

The road map

The U.S. Government is advocating a new, inclusive government in Afghanistan, which implies an immediate 50% share for the Taliban in an interim government, as a *quid pro quo* for a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire. This will be without reference to a mandate from the people as elections will be held only in the future, after the principles guiding Afghanistan's future constitutional and governing arrangements are worked out.

As a prelude to the ceasefire, the U.S. has proposed to the Taliban,

ban to reduce violence for three months, intended to head off the Taliban's threatened spring offensive.

When the intra-Afghan negotiations envisaged under the Doha Agreement stalled, Russia offered Moscow as an alternate venue. Instead, the United Nations is being asked to convene, with Turkey being asked to host a meeting of foreign ministers or envoys from China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and the U.S. to discuss a unified approach to supporting peace in Afghanistan.

Mr. Ghani is being encouraged to work closely with a broad consultative group, for which the core leaders identified are Abdullah Abdullah, former President Karzai, and an important former Mujahideen commander, Professor Abdul Rasul Sayyaf. The objective of this exercise is to build consensus on specific goals and objectives for negotiations with the Taliban on power-sharing, governance, and essential supporting principles.

The implications for India

India remains fully committed to Afghanistan. Despite the policy flux there, bilateral relations are flourishing. There have been frequent and productive high-level exchanges between Indian and Afghan leaders. The Afghanistan acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohammad Haneeft Atmar, is visiting New Delhi on March 22.

India is to be part of the future consultation process on Afghanistan. Invites to prominent elders and senior Afghan leaders such as Abdullah Abdullah, Ustad Ata Muhammad Noor, and General Abdul Rashid Dostum over the past few months have helped India reconnect with the political spectrum in

Afghanistan.

India has stayed the course with a long-term commitment to supporting state institutions in Afghanistan, expanding its development partnership, working with all communities across the country, and asking leaders of all Afghan ethnicities to remain together. That policy has been well-received by most of the Afghan people and government, it was well-suited to the time, and it has served India well.

The moment has now come to directly engage with those leaders on the ground who will determine the course that the peace process will take. The patriotic Afghan people admire their erstwhile leaders, President Najibullah and Commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, who were committed to building the nation. Prints and postcards of their portraits are still popular in the streets and bazaars of Kabul. Their photographs are displayed on the windscreens of many Kabul taxis. Such people look to India as a friend and expect solidarity.

If the American plan results only in a 'reduction in violence' and not its complete cessation, and U.S. forces are pulled out, India must step up to assist materially those who want to defend the Afghan republic. It should explore commonalities with key countries in dealing with the rapidly evolving situation. When in the late 1990s no country was willing to help the democratic forces in Afghanistan, India and Iran had scaled up their support. That time is again at hand.

Jayant Prasad is a former Ambassador of India in Afghanistan and a former Director General of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

Pursuing the American dream with 'WFA'

U.S. immigration is unlikely to change soon, but those hoping to access opportunities could still have a new choice



PRITHWIRAJ CHOUDHURY

For companies and workers facing woes dealing with United States immigration, there is good news and a practical solution. Work-from-anywhere.

For years, high-skilled economic migrants seeking to relocate to the U.S. have faced uncertainty due to lack of clarity and flexibility in the H-1B visa programme. This uncertainty grew even worse under the Trump administration, with visa denial rates rising significantly. In addition to the negative effects this had on individual migrants and their families, restrictions on the H-1B policy led to economic costs. In recent research with coauthors Dany Bahar and Britta Glennon, we find that (former) U.S. President Donald Trump's June 2020 Executive Order limiting entry of migrants to the U.S. during the COVID-19 pandemic led to an estimated loss of around \$100 billion in valuation for publicly traded Fortune 500 companies.

As the U.S. adjusts to a new administration, there are signs that the immigration climate might improve. U.S. President Joe Biden has made reforming the immigration system a priority in his coming term.

However, with the ongoing pandemic and economic crisis, uncertainty remains. In the meantime,

high-skilled workers facing immigration woes can take advantage of another emerging employment trend – companies offering their employees the ability to work-from-anywhere (WFA). I will first shed light on the Biden administration proposal to fix the H-1B programme and then describe how WFA can mitigate immigration woes.

U.S. immigration reform

In January 2020, Mr. Biden had floated a proposal to overhaul the U.S. immigration system, expanding pathways for legal immigration for both family-based and employment-based migrants. Crucially, for high-skilled migrants, Mr. Biden's proposal would remove country-specific quotas for employment-based visas, and would exempt anyone with a STEM PhD from a U.S. institution from all quotas to receive a green card. In addition, current H-4 visa holders (i.e., spouses and children of H-1B visa holders) would become eligible for work permits.

However, it is important to note that this is still just a proposal. There is a long road ahead before the proposal becomes the law of the land, needing to pass through both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. Given partisan divisions in the U.S. legislature, it is quite unlikely that the proposal in its current form will ever become law.

With U.S. immigration unlikely to change in the immediate future, those hoping to access U.S.-based opportunities do have an alternative: embrace work-from-anywhere.



The difference

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, companies were beginning to explore remote work options. The pandemic accelerated this trend across all industries for millions of workers. Unlike a traditional work-from-home (WFH) model that allows workers to WFH a few days every week and from an office for the rest of the week, work-from-anywhere grants individuals the choice to live in their preferred locations. This gives them the flexibility to live in a town, city, or country, far away from where the company or its customers have a physical office.

As I discussed in a recent *Harvard Business Review* article (<https://bit.ly/3sTwXjs>), work-from-anywhere can benefit workers, organisations, and society at large. Workers can relocate to their hometown, be closer to family and friends, manage dual career situations and move somewhere where they can enjoy better weather or a better cultural and culinary fit. Workers can also benefit by moving to (or continuing to live in) a lower cost-of-living location. Organisations can benefit

from work-from-anywhere as well, and research I conducted at the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) found that worker productivity under a work-from-anywhere policy was 4.4% greater than when workers were in a traditional work-from-home environment (<https://bit.ly/20vrC2Y>). As more of the workforce shifts to remote work, organisations can also reduce and reimagine the utility of the physical office, reducing real estate costs. Society, too, can benefit, as daily work commutes are a major source of carbon emissions; the USPTO estimated that shifting to remote work cut emissions by their employees by more than 44,000 tons. In another article, I argue that work-from-anywhere can help talent move back from congested large cities to smaller towns.

A case study

Companies of all sizes and in all kinds of industries are embracing work-from-anywhere. It is most popular among start-ups, where WFA allows new companies to access a global pool of talent with relatively low investment in office space. That said, larger, more established companies are beginning to explore work-from-anywhere and hybrid remote models as well. Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) made headlines during the pandemic when it announced that its 400,000-plus employees will be 75% remote by 2025. TCS has rolled out a '25-25 remote-work model': 25% of the workforce will be in a physical office at any one time, and workers will only be ex-

pected to work from an office for 25% of their working hours.

In a recent Harvard Business School case (<https://bit.ly/2OB7Y5v>), I explored the changes being implemented by TCS. In this 25-25 model, TCS workers are mostly 'location independent'. This enables TCS clients to access the best talent within TCS, independent of the location of talent. The model also offers TCS employees an opportunity to simultaneously work on multiple projects around the globe, without relocating to the client site or worrying about immigration. The TCS Chief Operating Officer N.G. Subramanian recently joined my Harvard class to share the internal debates on how to effectively implement this model. Current priorities include ensuring remote workers interact informally with peers and receive mentorship from senior managers. Thought also needs to be given on navigating through the regulatory changes needed to enable work-from-anywhere.

The TCS example shows how work-from-anywhere can help Indian companies and workers mitigate the challenges of immigration. While U.S. immigration policies may change for the better, high-skilled workers should view work-from-anywhere as a viable alternative to physical relocation, allowing them to work globally without queuing up for an H1-B visa.

Prithwiraj Choudhury is the Lumry Family Associate Professor at the Harvard Business School, where he studies the Future of Work. He can be reached at prithwic@hbs.edu

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Vaccination drive

The second phase of the vaccination drive may have commenced with great euphoria, but much confusion prevails. In many instances, health-care workers have not been able to register on the portal and can be seen rushing to the centres for spot registration. Even the elderly are taking a chance at centres which seem to be always crowded with at least 100 to 200 people at a time. The solution: more private hospitals need to be roped in. Senior citizens must be intimated at least two days before they receive their vaccination. Moreover, health-care workers must be allotted specific areas in a hospital or primary facility and also time slots

to help ease the rush.

Dr. JAYASEKHARAN V.P.,
Payyanur, Kannur, Kerala

■ Not all experiences are bad with corporate hospitals. I have a pleasant interaction to narrate that concerns a corporate hospital in Tenur. No sooner had I filled in an application form with an ID proof, my vitals (parameters) such as temperature, pulse, oxygen level and BP were measured in no time; data was fed into a computer immediately, with its attached camera taking my picture. In another five minutes I was vaccinated; the entire process took less than 45 minutes. After 30 minutes of waiting, which was mandatory, my vitals were again checked. I had a total of 90 minutes spent in an adjoining hall with

courteous staff on hand.

Within an hour, I received SMS alerts for the inoculation and the date for the second jab. A feedback survey also was done through voice and an e-mail.

A.V. NARAYANAN,
Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu

■ I am a senior citizen and chose a government peripheral hospital in Chennai, at Ashok Nagar, to get vaccinated even though there was pressure from my family to get it done at a private hospital. I went to the facility on March 4, and was impressed with its state of cleanliness and the efficiency of its staff. Though I had to wait for nearly an hour for registration, tokens were issued. Except for a few people walking in and throwing their weight

around, the staff managed the show very well.

At the time of registration, my BP, pulse rate, blood oxygen level were all checked and recorded.

Within five minutes of registration, I was called for my vaccination. The nurse informed me that it was Covishield. After the mandatory wait, my pulse and blood oxygen level were checked again and recorded before I was told that I could leave. I was issued a slip for the second dose, on April 1. In contrast, my sister and her family had visited a private hospital the previous day, where, despite things moving faster, there were no checks; the name of the vaccine was given only after asking for it.

T.N. SUBRAMANIAN,
Chennai

■ As a student, I have observed that the vaccination process can be enhanced by creating awareness.

Many are scared of the process as they do not have access to television and newspapers. Vaccination awareness can be boosted if the government arranges for publicity vans to disseminate basic information. A door-to-door survey can be initiated by anganwadi workers and block level officers, as senior citizens are unable to get vaccinated for several limiting reasons.

Ensuring trust in the electoral process

It is critical that the Supreme Court immediately adjudicates on the electoral bonds scheme



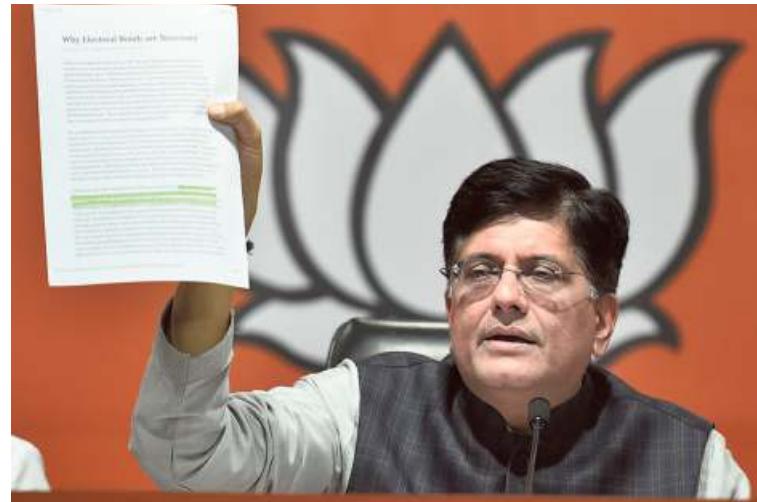
ANJALI BHARDWAJ & AMRITA JOHRI

The Election Commission of India has announced dates for elections to five Legislative Assemblies. It is a matter of grave concern that the petition challenging the electoral bonds scheme, which deals with the vexed issue of election funding, continues to languish in the Supreme Court. The delay in adjudicating on the case filed in September 2017 is inexplicable in light of the observation by the apex court that the matter gives rise to "weighty issues which have a tremendous bearing on the sanctity of the electoral process in the country."

No transparency

The political system in India has traditionally been hostile to the idea of transparency in electoral financing. Political parties have zealously opposed any examination of the linkages between their governments' policies and decisions, and the interests of their major donors. When the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government announced the launch of a new instrument of political party funding to ostensibly ensure greater transparency and eliminate black money from the system, it was hoped that the issue of anonymous financing would be squarely dealt with. However, using the money bill route to bypass the Rajya Sabha, the government introduced regressive amendments to laws, including the Income Tax Act of 1961, the Companies Act of 2013, and the Representation of the People Act of 1951, to introduce electoral bonds which allow donors to anonymously donate unlimited amounts of funds to political parties.

Under the scheme, an electoral bond, issued in the nature of a promissory note, can be bought by any Indian citizen or company incorporated in India. The scheme allows parties to receive these bonds without the public, the Election Commission or even the Income Tax Department knowing the identity of the donors. It has legitimised opacity and opened the floodgates for anonymous donations to parties, dealing a



Union Minister Piyush Goyal addresses a press conference on the issue of electoral bonds, in New Delhi, in November 2019. ■ PTI

severe blow to voters' right to know. People's ability to track donations by big businesses and expose quid pro quo has been undermined. Expressing its opposition to electoral bonds in the Supreme Court, the Election Commission has contended that they will have an adverse impact on transparency in political party financing and would make it impossible for the constitutional body to ascertain whether donations received were in compliance with the statutory framework governing political parties.

In 2016 and 2017, amendments were made to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010, with retrospective effect to bail out the BJP and Congress, which were found guilty by the Delhi High Court of having received contributions from foreign sources in violation of the FCRA. In conjunction with these amendments, which enabled Indian subsidiaries of foreign companies to make donations to political parties, electoral bonds allow anonymous financing by foreign entities opening Indian elections to the influence of foreign interests.

Money laundering

One of the stated objectives of introducing electoral bonds was to address the problem of black money and large cash donations. Propponents of electoral bonds have argued that since bonds can only be purchased via cheques, demand drafts, direct debit or electronic clearing, they will stem the flow of black money. The problem with this assertion,

however, is that it completely overlooks the crux of the problem: the provision of the Income Tax Act under which political parties were exempted from disclosing sources of donations of less than ₹20,000. Most parties claimed that a majority of their income was received in denominations smaller than ₹20,000 thus doing away with the requirement to disclose the source of donation. It is an open secret that most of the anonymous donations received by parties were large cash contributions, which were 'broken down' and shown as multiple small donations. If the government was serious about addressing the malaise of black money, it should have done away with the provision of non-disclosure of sources. Instead, amendments to the Income Tax Act in 2017 only lowered the stipulated ceiling of anonymous contributions from ₹20,000 to ₹2,000. Creative accountants can easily neutralise the impact of a lowered ceiling by multiplying the number of unattributed cash donations by a factor of 10, enabling donors to continue to anonymously pump cash into the system.

In fact, electoral bonds are likely to abet money laundering since the amendments to the Companies Act in 2017 removed the cap of 7.5% on political contributions by a company as a percentage of its average net profits of the preceding three years. This allows for black money to be easily routed through shell companies to purchase electoral bonds, an apprehension also expressed by the Elec-

tion Commission. Even the Reserve Bank of India flagged serious concerns about the electoral bonds.

Big money in electoral politics

The rationale given by the government for providing anonymity to donors of electoral bonds is to allow donors to use legitimate funds to support political parties by protecting them against the wrath of rival parties, especially the party in power. But as bonds are issued only through the State Bank of India, it would not be difficult for the party in power to access information about the identity of purchasers and details of bonds sold to them, and match those to deposits in political party accounts. It is no surprise, therefore, that the lion's share of donations through bonds have been cornered by the BJP - it bagged 95% of bonds issued in the first tranche in March 2018 and approximately 60% of bonds sold till March 2019.

Bonds worth nearly ₹6,500 crore have been sold so far. They have consolidated the role of big money in electoral politics. Information obtained under the Right to Information (RTI) Act shows that bonds with the highest denomination value of ₹1 crore are the most preferred by donors and constitute 92% of the total value of bonds sold till October 2020.

Electoral bonds militate against every known principle of transparency and lend themselves to use by special interest groups, corporate lobbyists and foreign entities to acquire a stranglehold on the electoral process and governance at the expense of citizens. To ensure public trust in the electoral process, it is critical that the Supreme Court immediately adjudicates on the matter. If bonds are to be retained as an instrument for contributing to political parties, donations must be made transparent and parties should be obligated to file reports with the Election Commission and other oversight bodies disclosing the names of donors and amounts received. This information must also be placed in the public domain. These steps are necessary to safeguard democracy and ensure that elections do not become a mere formality.

Anjali Bhardwaj and Amrita Johri are associated with the National Campaign for Peoples' Right to Information

Cow and conciliation

A theological denunciation of cow slaughter is an imperative for peace, and self-preservation of Muslims



NAJMUL HODA

It's axiomatic that the right to life would include the right to livelihood which, in turn, would include the right to food and dietary preferences, circumscribed by reasonable restrictions of law, customs, care for the public order, morality, health, etc. Beyond this, the state has no business peeping into one's kitchen. Food is a matter of cultural conditioning and individual choice. Therefore, one group's taboos should not translate into another's prohibition, as there would always be some to whom one or the other food would be an anathema.

On the question of beef, Gandhi said, "I have pledged to serve the cow, but how can my religion also be the religion of the rest of the Indians? It will mean coercion against those Indians who are not Hindus. How can I force anyone not to slaughter cows unless he is himself so disposed?" Thus, as it behoves a secular state, Article 48 of the Constitution seeks to prohibit the slaughter of cow, calves, milch and draught animals for preserving and improving the breeds in order to organise agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines.

Prohibition of cow slaughter

As far as Muslims are concerned, the sagacious have always been for the prohibition of cow slaughter. Babur was said to have left a testament instructing Humayun to forbid this practice in order to conciliate his Hindu subjects. Besides, *Tazkiratul Waqiat*, the memoirs of Jauhar Aftabchi, Humayun's page, bears witness that Humayun had a principled aversion to beef, and he proscribed it by a royal proclamation. Akbar not only reinforced this prohibition but also encouraged a more vegetarian fare. Howsoever lax the enforcement, the prohibition of cow slaughter remained a state policy through the longevity of the Mughal empire.

In 1887, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the father of Islamic modernity, praised the people of riot-prone Meerut for abjuring cow sacrifice during Eid. In a recent biography of him, Shafey Kidwai writes, "The sacrifice of cow is a divisive practice destined to foster enmity, and Sir Syed exhorts the Muslims to abandon it for the sake of friendly relations with the majority community". And during the Khilafat Non-Cooperation Movement, prominent Muslim leaders made fervent appeals to their co-religionists to renounce cow slaughter in order to conciliate their compatriots.

However, despite the symbiosis between politicians and ulema, the sentiment against cow slaughter had no corresponding reflection in theological formulation. Insofar as it had a religious sanction, for an argument to carry such conviction as to delegitimise it, the counter reasoning too had to be religious. Beef is just another permissible (halal) meat, sans any religious merit, for a Muslim. However, an egregious interpretation was devised which reasoned that since it was not forbidden in Islam, if the Muslims abjured it in deference to the religious sentiments of Hindus, it would be tantamount to unwittingly subscribing to a false faith. Such a convoluted argument contravenes the fundamental principles of Sharia which, though commonly considered divine, consists of legal derivations made by *fujaha* (Islamic jurists) in the light of the Quran and the prophetic precedent known as Sunnah. The principles of Islamic jurisprudence have two methodological premises: *Maqasid* (objectives) and *Maslaha* (public welfare). Imam Abu Is'haq al-Shatibi (d. 1388) defined the *Maqasid* as, "the attainment of good and welfare, and warding off evil, injury and loss of creatures." *Maslaha* denotes the prohibition or permission of a thing according to the necessity and circumstances, on the basis of whether it serves the public interest.

Violating doctrine of Sharia

Evidently, the Indian *fujaha*, conditioned as they were by imperial hubris, erred about the cow, for their position fomented enmity between the communities, and thus violated *Maqasid* and *Maslaha*. Maulana Maududi, the chief ideologue of Islamism in India, said that if cow slaughter were to stop for appeasing Hindu sensibilities, there would be demands to stop the *azaan* (call to prayer) as well. Such truculence bred the animus which the Indian Muslims could ill afford.

Though Muslims are not the only ones to consume beef, if a mere suspicion of a Muslim doing so evokes a strong emotion, it is because of the historical memories of it being used as an instrument of power. No wonder it remains germane to the contemporary reshaping of the power matrix. A theological denunciation of cow slaughter is an imperative for peace, and self-preservation of Muslims. In 1891, when the British monopoly over tobacco in Iran threatened the country's independence, the Grand Ayatollah declared tobacco antithetical to Islam. One wonders why the ulema and organisations such as the All India Muslim Personal Law Board haven't campaigned to make cow slaughter repugnant to Muslims for their own sake, and for the sake of public welfare - *Maslaha*.

Najmul Hoda is an IPS officer. Views are personal

In pursuit of power

Chinese leaders often pronounce ambitious targets to seek greater attention from global investors

YOGESH GUPTA

At the meeting of China's National People's Congress, the unicameral legislature, and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, a broad political advisory body, on March 5, Prime Minister Li Keqiang spoke of the U.S.'s attempt to contain China and of Beijing's attempts to win the economic, technological and strategic competition against the U.S. He unveiled plans to transform China into a manufacturing superpower by 2025 by upgrading its global competitiveness in eight core areas: rare earth materials; robotics; aircraft engines; new energy vehicles; high-end medical devices; major equipment in shipbuilding, aviation and high-speed rail; agricultural machinery; and applications of BeiDou.

Major announcements
How will China do this? It will "fix weak links of components, software and fundamental systems" by boosting expenditure on basic research and raising investment in research and development over the next five years. It will try to attract more foreign talent and explore "science and technology immigration." Value addition in the digital economy will be expanded to 10% by 2025.

Though China has made considerable advances in 5G, artificial intelligence, drones, bio and financial technologies, progress has been patchy in high-end technologies for manufacturing engines for its fifth-generation aircraft, miniaturisation of nuclear reactors for aircraft carriers or semiconductors and microchips.

Other major announcements included expansion of the Chinese military budget. China will continue to modernise its navy, missile and strategic forces to challenge the U.S.'s dominance in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.

Disregarding external criticism, China will strengthen its grip on Hong Kong by overhauling its election laws to ensure that "patriots govern" it. Similarly, Beijing will push its efforts to assimilate China's ethnic minorities such as Uighurs, Tibetans, Mongols and others. Public protests will be dealt like "fight on a battlefield," it was added.

A U.S. State Department spokesperson reacted strongly saying the Biden administration would "harness collective action against Beijing for rights abuses". The European Union (EU) urged Beijing to be careful in tinkering with Hong Kong's electoral system saying that it was ready to take additional steps to prevent serious deterioration of political freedoms and human rights.

China will make more efforts to augment its economic partnership with the EU, ASEAN, Japan and South Korea. It has already signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership with a number of Asian countries and the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment with the EU. It is working to sign free trade agreements with Japan and South Korea. China is hoping to lure these countries away from the U.S. by offering increased market access.

Mr. Li proposed an economic growth rate of 6% for 2021 to cut down on debt and disorderly investments. Domestic consumption will be increased by amending the hukou system providing residency permits in the cities to the rural migrants. China's Five-Year Plan for 2021-25 calls for the construction of a Polar Silk Road aimed at extracting natural gas below the melting rice in the Arctic and establishing a faster shipping route to Europe via the North Arctic.

Meeting targets

Chinese leaders are accustomed to pronouncing ambitious targets at important meetings to maintain high national fervour and seek greater attention from global investors and business leaders. Often, the targets are imprecisely spelt out without any specific plans of implementation. No one is allowed to question if these targets have been missed. For instance, one target was to achieve a "moderately well-off society by 2021". Mr. Li himself admitted that 600 million Chinese had an income of just 1,000 yuan. Whether these targets will be achieved is anybody's guess, but according to Professor of Chinese Politics, Carlos Minzer, these pronouncements are likely to help President Xi Jinping secure a third term next year.

Yogesh Gupta is a former Ambassador

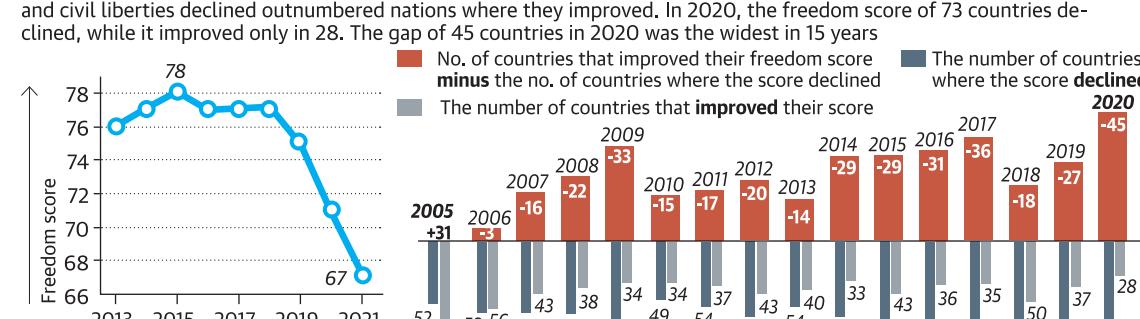


DATA POINT

Freedom deficit

India's freedom score, which measures people's access to political rights and civil liberties, has declined sharply since 2018, according to the recently released report, "Freedom in the World 2021". India was downgraded from a 'Free' nation in 2019 to 'Partly Free' in 2020 in the report. Curtailing of personal liberties such as freedom of expression and religious practice coupled with a crackdown on the media and on protest gatherings were some reasons given for the decline

DECLINING FREEDOM | With a freedom score of 67 in 2020, India has been categorised as a 'partly free' nation. The country is part of a global decline in the state of democracy — every year since 2006, the countries where political rights and civil liberties declined outnumbered nations where they improved. In 2020, the freedom score of 73 countries declined, while it improved only in 28. The gap of 45 countries in 2020 was the widest in 15 years



EROSION OF RIGHTS | The chart shows the change in India's scores in 2020 compared to 2013 across various components which together compute the freedom score. India's score declined in four out of the seven components and improved in only one. People's associational and organisational rights and their freedom of expression and belief declined the most

SOME OF THE ATTRIBUTES THAT EACH COMPONENT EVALUATES	
■ Electoral process: Free and fair elections	■ Associational and organisational rights: Freedom of assembly, freedom for NGOs and trade unions
■ Political pluralism and participation: Free political organisation, political rights of marginalised sections	■ Rule of law: Independence of judiciary, use of physical force by authorities
■ Functioning of govt.: Corruption-free and transparent governance	■ Personal autonomy and individual rights: Freedom to choose marriage partner, freedom from economic exploitation
■ Freedom of expression and belief: Media freedom, freedom of religious expression, free speech	

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 9, 1971

Chou leaves Hanoi after secret visit

The Chinese Prime Minister, Mr. Chou En-lai, left Hanoi today [March 8] after an unannounced four-day visit officially described as a "severe warning to the American aggressors." Mr. Chou said during a speech while here that "the Chinese people will not be afraid to make the greatest sacrifice to aid the Indo-Chinese people until final victory." Mr. Chou arrived here last Friday at the head of a communist party and government delegation including the top-ranking military officials, the Chief of Staff and Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army. For security reasons, an embargo was placed on the news of his arrival. Speaking before several thousand residents of Hanoi, Mr. Chou declared: "the Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian peoples are brothers-in-arms united in life and death. We shall fight together, we shall win together. The United States will be defeated." Mr. Chou said his country had made "adequate preparations" to meet the continued U.S. war efforts in Indo-China. The U.S. Government must be responsible for all the "serious consequences" arising from such military action, he warned. He did not specify the preparations China has made.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 9, 1921

The Census

Many people are asking why the supervisors and enumerators are expected to do work for the census without receiving pay. The Government of India have decided that members of the public and Government officials may be asked to do the work of census supervisors and enumerators in addition to their ordinary occupation and that it is unnecessary, except in special circumstances, to grant pay to Government officials or members of the public for the work since it will occupy them for only a few hours on a few days and since it can be done in addition to their ordinary duties and without seriously interfering with them. This decision is in accordance with the practice followed at previous censuses. Census work is in fact regarded as a public duty imposed in the interests of the community and any citizen may be called upon to spare some hours to help in getting the census taken without an undue addition to the expenses which have to be borne by the Indian tax-payers, just as any citizen may be called upon to serve on a jury without receiving pay.

FROM PAGE ONE

SC seeks States' views on 50% cap on quota

The court will also examine whether the Maharashtra State Backward Classes Commission, under the chairmanship of Justice M.C. Gaikwad, had made up a case of "extraordinary circumstances" of deprivation suffered by the Maratha community, requiring the helping hand of reservation even at the cost of crossing the 50% line.

In fact, the Bombay High Court had, in June 2019, reduced the quantum of reservation for Marathas from the 16% recommended by the Gaikwad Commission to 12% in education and 13% in employment.

A significant question the Bench wants to judge is whether the Constitution (One Hundred Second Amendment) Act of 2018, which introduced the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC), inter-

feres with the authority of the State legislatures to provide benefit to the social and educationally backward communities in their own jurisdiction.

The Constitution Amendment Act had introduced Articles 338B and 342A in the Constitution. Article 338B deals with the NCBC. Article 342A empowers the President to specify the socially and educationally backward communities in a State.

It says that it is for the Parliament to include a community in the Central List for socially and backward classes for grant of reservation benefits.

The court wants to delve into the issue whether Article 342A strips the State legislatures of their discretionary power to include their backward communities in the State List.

'SC has highest respect for womanhood'

Monday saw the CJI clarifying that his oral remarks, on March 1 again, during the hearing of another case concerning a man accused of falsely promising marriage to a woman was also misinterpreted.

The accused had ap-

roached the court saying he was framed. He said they were in a live-in relationship and she had accused him of rape when their relationship turned sour. Their sexual intercourse during the period was consensual. The court had stayed his arrest.

Curtail House session, MPs request Om Birla

For the first time in a year, members of both Houses will sit in their respective chambers instead of being spread across the two chambers.

Sources said the pre-COVID-19 timings and seating arrangement were being restored to provide more time to each House so that the Budget session can be wrapped up before schedule, as per the demand of the MPs.

The MPs will, however, continue to sit in the galleries of the chamber to maintain physical distance as per the COVID-19 protocol.

On Monday, during the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) of the Lok Sabha, floor leaders of various parties advanced the same view. The Trinamool Congress and DMK leaders were not present at the meeting.

Mr. Birla met some leaders one-on-one to get a sense of the situation. Sources said he would arrive at a decision only after ascertaining the "sense of the House" on the matter.

While the Shiv Sena said it would go with whatever the government decided, the YSRCP was one of the few parties that felt that the days lost, in case the session is cut short, should be made up for.

2011 & 2008 precedents

The Trinamool Congress, in letters addressed to both Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu and Mr. Birla, referred to the 2011 and 2008 precedents, when the session was similarly cur-

tailed. In the letter to Mr. Naidu, Trinamool Congress national spokesperson and Rajya Sabha floor leader Derek O'Brien said due to the election, the MPs of his party would not be able to attend the Parliament session.

He cited the 22nd session in 2011, which started on February 21 and was scheduled to conclude on April 21. But it was adjourned *sine die* on March 25 due to the Assembly elections in Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

He also referred to the 214th session in 2008, which commenced on October 17 and was adjourned early on October 24 to meet again on December 10. The session, as per the original schedule, was to continue up to November 21. However, it was adjourned early due to Assembly elections.

"I am optimistic that you will consider this proposal of ours," Mr. O'Brien said.

Trinamool leader Sudip Bandopadhyay had written to Mr. Birla in February stating that due to campaign commitments in West Bengal, MPs from his party would be unable to attend Parliament, and requested that the session be curtailed.

The government has started reaching out to the Opposition parties seeking to close the session early. A section of Congress leaders, including Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, supported the demand, but others felt it would send a wrong message.

50 held after clashes in Telangana's border town

Prohibitory orders imposed, Internet barred in Bhainsa

ABHINAY DESHPANDE
HYDERABAD

Prohibitory orders were clamped and Internet services suspended by the authorities at Bhainsa town of Nirmal district in Telangana, following communal clashes between two groups on Sunday evening.

The clashes broke out after heated argument between a motorcyclist and people from another community.

Some houses, vehicles, and petty business establishments were damaged in the arson that followed the violence on Sunday.

This led the law enforcement authorities to invoke the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety Rules 2017) of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, to stop pe-



Tense pocket: Senior police officials reviewing the situation at Bhainsa town in Telangana.

ople from sharing videos and photographs of the incidents on online messaging platforms. The police resorted to a lathi-charge more than six times till Monday afternoon.

More than 10 people, including police personnel and a journalist of a Telugu news channel, were

injured in the clashes. The journalist, Vijay, who rushed to the spot to report the incident, was attacked by a few miscreants with a sword. He was shifted to a hospital in Secunderabad, where his condition is said to be stable.

Superintendent of Police in-charge Vishnu S. Warrier

told *The Hindu* that till Monday evening, four cases were filed against several persons on charges of rioting, arson and bodily offences.

600 personnel deployed

"More than 600 additional police personnel from five neighbouring districts, apart from the Nirmal police, are deployed in the town to con-

Amit Shah expresses concern over violence

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

Home Minister Amit Shah dialled Union Minister of State for Home Affairs G. Kishan Reddy on Monday to enquire about the prevailing situation in Bhainsa and expressed concern over the violence.

Earlier, Mr. Reddy strongly condemned the violence and said the attack

on media personnel was "disturbing". The Minister said he had already spoken to Director General of Police M. Mahender Reddy twice and stressed the need to arrest the culprits at the earliest and suggested deployment of additional forces. Party's Adilabad MP Soyam Bapu Rao and Nizamabad MP D. Aravind visited the injured persons.

problems not only in communally sensitive areas but also in other parts of the State and country.

Last year, two communal clashes – one in January and another in May – took place in this town bordering Maharashtra, wherein more than 30 people were injured and several houses and vehicles were set on fire.

Pinarayi hits out at Shah as he kicks off campaign

Union Minister's comments not befitting of his office: CM

STAFF REPORTER
KANNUR

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Monday termed Union Home Minister Amit Shah a "personification of communism".

At the start of his 18-day Left Democratic Front campaign tour in Dharmadam constituency here, Mr. Vijayan countered Mr. Shah's speech in Thiruvananthapuram on Sunday.

The Chief Minister said Mr. Shah's words did not suit his stature as the Union Home Minister, adding that he had belittled his high office by his communally divisive politics.

The communal overtones in Mr. Shah's speech would stoke resentment in society and divide people, Mr. Vijayan said.

Gujarat record

Mr. Vijayan then listed the "fake encounter killings" in Gujarat under Mr. Shah's watch as Home Minister of the State, pointing out that Mr. Shah had faced criminal charges in at least one extrajudicial killing case.

Demanding that Mr. Shah answer how the Thiruvananthapuram Airport had become a conduit for contraband gold after the BJP assumed power at the Centre, the Chief Minister said multiple investigations by Central agencies into the gold smuggling case had reached a dead-end.

Chithra Sukumaran, 50, will contest from Perumbavoor. She is the managing director of S&C MultiCommer-



Supporters welcoming Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan at the Kannur airport on Monday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Twenty20 to contest from five constituencies

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOCCHI

Twenty20, a corporate-backed political party that scripted an impressive victory in the recent civic polls in parts of Ernakulam district, has announced candidates for five Assembly seats.

It has nominated Sujit P. Surendran, 38, to contest from Kunnamkulam. He is a post-graduate from the National Law School of India.

Chithra Sukumaran, 50, will contest from Perumbavoor. She is the managing director of S&C MultiCommer-

cials and a trained classical dancer. Jose Joseph, 50, a doctor and associate professor, will contest from Kothamangalam.

C.N. Prakash, a media-person, will contest from the Muvattupuzha seat, while Job Chakkalakkal, 60, formerly an associate professor, will contest from Vypeen.

Industrialist Koenchouse Chittilappilly is the chairman of the advisory council for Twenty20, while film actor Sreenivasan and director Siddique are its members.

Auction to be held today through RBI's e-platform

M. RAJEEV
HYDERABAD

The Telangana government has decided to raise another ₹1,050 crore from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) through sale of securities to

meet its immediate financial requirements.

The government did not opt for the green shoe option so far as it has been doing for the past couple of months, but the tenure of the loan remained at 30 years. The government has bid for the amount which will be mobilised through auction of securities. The auction, to be

conducted through the e-Kuber platform of the RBI, will be held on Tuesday and payment by successful bidders would be made the next day.

The Central government said Telangana's share of Central taxes has been fixed at ₹11,731.76 crore for the current financial year according to the revised estimates. The

Centre had released ₹7,927.1 crore of it till December and the releases were to the tune of ₹9,473.89 crore till February-end.

Central funds

The releases of States' share/tax devolution was as per the accepted recommendations of the Finance Commission for its award period.

Of the ₹5.49 lakh crore devolution to States as per revised estimates, the Centre has released ₹4.44 lakh crore till February, Union Minister of State for Finance Anurag Singh Thakur said in reply to a query in Parliament on the amount of Central taxes shared/divided between the Centre and the State governments.

Youth injured in elephant attack in Chittoor CHITTOOR Tension gripped several villages of Vedurukkupam mandal of Andhra Pradesh's Chittoor district, after a youth was injured in an attack by wild elephants on Monday.

The youth, who was attacked while he was working at a farm at Tallabailu village, was rushed to a hospital in Tirupati. A house in the same village caught fire when some youth burnt fireworks to stop the herd.

Boy killed in third Kodagu tiger attack

Animal tracked to sacred grove, say forest officials

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MYSRU

A boy was killed and his grandfather seriously injured in a tiger attack at Belluru village in Ponnampet taluk of Kodagu district on Monday. The victim was identified as Rangaswamy, 8, while his grandfather, Kencha, a plantation worker, has been hospitalised.

Conservator of Forests T. Hirral said the Forest Department team has identified

the marauding tiger, which is about 10 years old. The official said the team has tracked the animal to a sacred grove or *devara kaadu*. Combing operations are on and the tiger has been cornered, he said.

Earlier in the day, the team had tried to tranquillise the animal but sources said the tranquilliser dart missed its mark. The marksmen accompanying a team had come close to the tiger and hence were forced to open fire but the tiger escaped.

A senior official said the

combing and tracking operation would resume at dawn. Monday's incident is the third death due to a tiger attack in Kodagu in the last three weeks and has resulted in widespread anger against the authorities for their failure to curb human-animal conflict.

Locals in distress The local community has complained that at least 16 animals – mainly cattle – have been killed by the tiger. The State government has issued permission to shoot

and put down the tiger if efforts to tranquilise and shift it fail.

An injured tigress that killed two persons in a single day last month, had been trapped and tranquillised two weeks ago. Mr. Hirral said there are reasons to believe that this is a different tiger and they had not captured the wrong tiger as alleged by the local community. "The tiger trapped almost three weeks ago and shifted to the wildlife rescue centre in Mysuru was an injured animal, unable to hunt, while this is a different tiger," he said.

More stocks likely to reach State soon

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala received 48,960 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine on Monday. This time, the consignment received is Bharat Biotech's indigenous COVID-19 vaccine, Covaxin. Of the stock received, 16,640 doses are for the Thiruvananthapuram region, 19,200 for Ernakulam region and 13,120 for Kozhikode region. More vaccine stocks are expected to reach the

State in a few days, when more vaccination sites would be opened, an official release said.

10 lakh people covered

Till date, 10,19,525 persons have received COVID-19 vaccine in the State, of whom, 1,53,578 are senior citizens, who received the first dose. A total of 3,65,942 healthcare workers have received at least one dose of vaccine, with 1,86,421 among them receiving both doses. The State has also vaccinated (first dose) 98,287 frontline workers and 2,15,297 poll officials.

through the CoWIN portal and schedule an appointment for receiving the vaccine or directly go to the nearest hospital and get the vaccine after registration. Every beneficiary who registers will be vaccinated as per schedule.

Over 1,000 vaccination sites have been opened at public and private hospitals and other centres.

Any vaccine-related queries can be directed to the Health Department's helpline Disha at 1056 or 0471-2552056.

Kerala reported 1,412 fresh COVID-19 cases on Monday.

CM

YK

Kerala gets 48,960 doses of Covaxin



More than 1,000 vaccination sites have been opened in Kerala.

The Health Department has made it clear that there is no need for people to crowd at vaccination centres. People can register

A N D - N D E

Pricey fuel triggers Opposition protest

Members in both Houses call for a debate on issue

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Multiple adjournment motions marred the working of the Rajya Sabha on the first day of the second part of the Budget session, with Opposition leaders demanding a debate on the "huge and frequent" increase in petrol, diesel and LPG prices. The Lok Sabha, too, saw disruptions on the demand for a separate discussion on the issue.

The first adjournment in the Rajya Sabha came at 10 a.m. after House Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu rejected the Opposition's demand to suspend the day's business to conduct a debate on fuel prices. Mr. Naidu said there would be many opportunities to discuss the issue in the course of the session, including a debate on the Appropriation Bill.

"You are well aware, pe-



Heavy stir: Opposition leaders staging a protest in the Rajya Sabha during the Budget session on Monday. •PTI

trol prices are nearly ₹100 per litre and diesel prices are more than ₹80 per litre. LPG rates have also increased and all petroleum products [prices] have gone up," said Mallikarjun Kharge, Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha.

Mr. Kharge said the debate on fuel prices cannot be put off for later as the common man was suffering. But the Chairman did not agree to his demand. Following this exchange, the Opposition started raising slogans. Mr.

Naidu called it a "mockery of democracy". When the House re-assembled at 11 a.m., Congress members demanded a discussion again.

After continuing protests, the Rajya Sabha was adjourned for the day at 1.30 p.m.

In the Lok Sabha, after the House reconvened at 5 p.m. after an hour's break due to obituary references on the death of two sitting MPs – Damani and Diu MP Mohan Delkar and Nandkumar Chauhan of Madhya Pradesh

Stir will go on: Congress

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge, said the Congress would continue to protest in the House over fuel prices and inflation.

Speaking to journalists outside the Parliament House, Mr. Kharge said the government had earned over ₹21 lakh crore in the

past six years by way of taxes and duties on petroleum products. "Nobody knows where this money went," he said.

He mentioned the February 21 letter of party chief Sonia Gandhi to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in which she had argued for prices to be brought back to 2014 levels by rolling back additional excise duty.

Speaker Om Birla dismissed adjournment motions on the issue of fuel price hike, resulting in protests by Opposition members.

MPs rush to the Well
Mr. Birla said the Opposition could raise the issue as part of a discussion on the supplementary demand for grants, but the MPs did not agree.

Congress, Trinamool and Shiv Sena MPs also protested in the Well of the House. Mr. Birla said women MPs

had asked for a Calling Attention motion on women's empowerment and that should be discussed.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi appealed for calm and asked for the discussion on women's empowerment to start, but protests went on. Mr. Birla then adjourned the House till 7 p.m.

After resuming, the Lok Sabha was adjourned for the day in about 30 minutes as protests over rising fuel prices continued.

'Only half of govt. schools, anganwadis have tap water'

Standing Committee submits report before Lok Sabha

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Only half of government schools and anganwadis have tap water supply, despite a 100-day campaign for 100% coverage being launched by the Jal Shakti Ministry in October 2020, according to information provided to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Water Resources.

Less than 8% of schools in Uttar Pradesh and 11% in West Bengal have it, while it is available in only 2-6% of anganwadis in Assam, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Bengal.

At a time when schools and anganwadis are just starting to reopen after a year-long shutdown, COVID-19 safety protocols require repeated handwashing by students and teachers. In its report on the demand for grants submitted to the Lok Sabha on Monday, the Standing Committee urged the Ministry to take up the matter with laggard States.

The campaign to provide potable piped water supply for drinking and cooking purposes and tap water for washing hands and in toilets

Basic need unmet

While seven States in the country have 100% tap water coverage in schools, three have abysmally low coverage of less than 15%

States with 100% tap-water coverage



Least coverage

State	% of schools with tap water supply
Andhra Pradesh	7.93
Goa	10.89
Tamil Nadu	12.99
Haryana	12.99
Himachal Pradesh	12.99
Telangana	12.99
West Bengal	12.99
Jharkhand	12.99

water management structures and ashramshala or residential tribal school was also constructed in schools and anganwadi centres. "However, some States/UTs have indicated that they need more time to complete the task and sustain the efforts. Therefore, the campaign has been extended till March 31, 2021," the Ministry said.

Seven States – Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Punjab – achieved 100% coverage. A number of other States also made significant progress in that time, and 1.82 lakh grey

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Let's have Men's Day too for gender parity: Sonal Mansingh

Rajya Sabha reserves Zero Hour for women members

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Noted classical dancer and nominated Rajya Sabha member Sonal Mansingh left the Upper House members bemused with her demand to institute a 'Men's Day' as a mark of gender equality.

Many names are doing the rounds as a replacement for Mr. Rawat including State Education Minister Dhan Singh Rawat, Mr. Baluni, Union Minister Ramesh Pokhrayal Nishank and Lok Sabha MP Ajay Bhat. But the question of whether he will be replaced at all remains.

On being asked directly whether the Chief Minister would be replaced, Mr. Chauhan said the BJP followed certain rules where the Parliamentary Board decides on these issues. "The process of consultation happens as it's a workers based party and is democratic," he added, avoiding a direct answer.

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IN BRIEF



'75% quota a ploy to hide BJP-JJP govt's failures'

CHANDIGARH Haryana Congress chief Kumari Selja on Monday accused the BJP-JJP government of "hiding its failures" under the garb of providing 75% reservation in the private sector to job seekers from the State. "Neither the youth nor people running industries are happy with the decision," she said.

Now, single 139 railway helpline for all queries

NEW DELHI The railways on Monday announced the integration of all railway helplines into a single number – 139, for all train travel related queries and complaints, including speaking with a call centre executive, security and medical assistance, fare enquiry, meal booking, and status of complaints.

Plea to NHRC on refugees in Mizoram

GUWAHATI A New Delhi-based rights group has asked the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to process the asylum or refugee claims of Myanmar nationals who fled the military coup-affected country and had taken shelter in Mizoram. Over 50 people from the Chin ethnic group have taken shelter in Mizoram.

U.P. man gets death for rape, murder of minor

LUCKNOW A local court in Uttar Pradesh's Jaunpur district on Monday awarded the death sentence to a man, just seven months after he was booked for the rape and murder of a 11-year-old Dalit girl. Special POCSO Judge Ravi Yadav convicted the accused Balgovind of rape and murder, among other charges, and sentenced him to death.

CISCE examinations rescheduled

NEW DELHI The Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations on Monday revised the exam schedule for classes 10 and 12, with no exams on May 13 and 15, officials said. The Class 10 Economics (Group II Elective) exam will be held on May 4 and Art Papers 2, 3 and 4 on May 22, 29 and June 5.

Iran denies links with blast near Israel Embassy

'Allegations aimed at spoiling relations'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI The Iranian Embassy denied any connection between the Quds Force, an arm of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), and the Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blast outside the Israeli Embassy in Delhi in January.

In an official statement on Monday, the embassy "strongly repudiated" the allegation carried in a news report that suggested that the National Investigation Authority (NIA) had "concluded" that the attack on January 29 had been carried out by an Indian proxy group on the orders of the Quds force, in retaliation for the deaths by U.S. drone of Quds force Chief General Qasem Soleimani and top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh last year.

"While respecting the honourable government and authorities of India in their endeavour to thoroughly investigate and probe into the [January 29] incident in order to identify the orchestrators of such actions and to bring them to justice, this embassy strongly repudiates any unsubstantiated allegations or irresponsible comments in this regard," the statement said, adding that the allegations of an Iranian hand were aimed at "spoiling" bilateral relations. "[It] is the presumption that this act must have been conducted by third parties who are angry and

COVID-19 cases climb in eight States

Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat and T.N. cumulatively account for 86.25% of them

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India reported 18,599 new COVID-19 cases, 14,278 recoveries and 97 deaths in the 24 hours up to 8 a.m. on Monday, a release issued by the Union Health Ministry said.

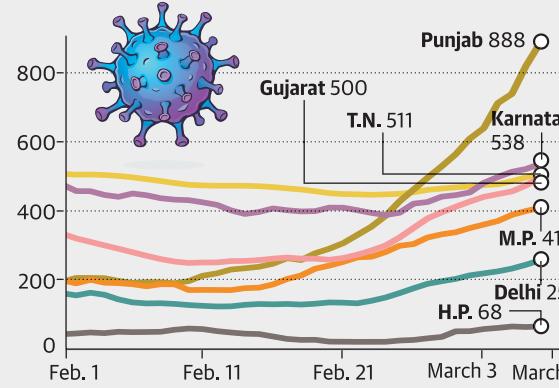
The country now has 1,88,747 active cases, with a cumulative death toll of 1,57,853, total cases of 1,12,29,398 and total recoveries of 1,08,82,798. Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Haryana and Gujarat were displaying an upward trajectory in new daily cases, the Ministry said.

Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu cumulatively accounted for 86.25% of the new cases reported in the 24 hours. Maharashtra reported the highest at 11,141, followed by Kerala with 2,100 and Punjab 1,043.

The Ministry said the Centre was regularly holding high-level review meetings

Worrying trend

Apart from Maharashtra, COVID-19 cases are on a rising trend in seven other States/U.T. The graph depicts the average number of cases since February 1 in these States/U.T.



with the States and Union Territories showing a surge in new daily cases. The Health Secretary was also holding weekly review meetings as part of the Centre's efforts to engage continuously with those reporting a higher caseload of active cases and those showing a rise in new daily cases.

Recently, the Centre

rushed high-level public health teams to Maharashtra and Punjab to assist in control and containment measures. It had deputed teams to Maharashtra, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Punjab, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Jammu and Kashmir to support them in the fight against the

pandemic.

These teams interact with authorities of the States and Union Territories and get a first-hand understanding of the challenges and issues being faced by them so as to strengthen their ongoing activities and remove bottlenecks, if any.

The cumulative tests conducted in the country have surpassed 22 crore (22,19,68,271). The national cumulative positivity rate currently stood at 5.06%.

Maharashtra, Kerala, Chandigarh, Goa, Punjab, Sikkim, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh have a weekly positivity rate more than the national average (2.29%). Maharashtra has the highest weekly positivity rate of 11.13%.

The nation reported 97 deaths in the 24 hours, with seven States accounting for 87.63% of them. Maharashtra saw the highest of 38, followed by Punjab with 17 and Kerala with 13.

Eighteen States and Union

Territories, including Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Chandigarh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, Puducherry, Rajasthan, Sikkim and Tripura, did not report any deaths.

Vaccination figures

Nearly 17 lakh COVID vaccine doses were administered till 9 p.m. on Monday, making it the highest single-day coverage since the beginning of the drive in January, said figures released by the Health Ministry.

Total 16,96,588 vaccine doses were given till 9 p.m. today, the 52nd day of nationwide COVID-19 vaccination. Out of which, 14,30,954 beneficiaries were vaccinated for first dose and 2,65,634 health care workers (HCWs) and frontline workers (FLWs) received second dose of vaccine as per the provisional report," the release said.

The Ministry said the cumulative number of doses administered in the country had crossed 2.26 crore.

rat and also the glow of modern India. He said it should reflect the light of the spirituality of the sages and also the talent and strength of our scientists. He said it will also showcase our achievements of these 75 years to the world and also give a framework for resolution to us for the next 25 years," a government statement said.

Mr. Modi said the stories of the lesser-known freedom fighters should be publicised.

The statement said Union Home Minister Amit Shah said the suggestions made by members would be looked into. Among those who gave suggestions were former President Pratibha Patil, former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, former Lok Sabha Speakers Meira Kumar and Sumitra Mahajan and BJP president J.P. Nadda, according to the statement.

Five themes for 75th year celebration of freedom

Modi calls for people's participation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said the celebrations of the 75th anniversary of Independence would be based on public participation and revolve around five themes – the freedom struggle and ideas, achievements, actions and resolve at 75.

Mr. Modi addressed the first meeting of the national committee chaired by him for the commemoration of the anniversary next year, starting with events this month. Speaking via video-conferencing with Governors, Chief Ministers, prominent artists and others who form the 259-member committee, Mr. Modi said the anniversary should be marked as a festival with the spirit of the freedom movement and tribute to martyrs being highlighted.

"He said this festival should embody the glimpse of the glory of Sanatan Bhagwan," the statement said.

6 share 100th percentile in JEE-Main first round

Top girl candidate Komma Sharanya score 99.999

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The National Testing Agency (NTA) on Monday announced the results of the first round of the JEE-Main held last month.

The six toppers from the February exams were – Saket Jha from Rajasthan, Pravar Kataria and Ranjim Prabali Das from Delhi, Guramrit Singh of Chandigarh, Siddhant Mukherjee from Maharashtra and Ananth Krishna Kidambi from Gujarat, the NTA said.

As NTA scores are percentile scores, these six students scored in the 100th percentile for each of the six sessions of the first round of the exam, held between February 24 and 26.

The top girl candidate was Komma Sharanya from Telangana, who received an NTA score of 99.999, while Vishwadev from Haryana



Students appearing for the first round of JEE-Main at an examination centre in Vijayawada. ■ FILE PHOTO

was the top scorer among candidates with disabilities.

The JEE-Main is an entrance test for admission to undergraduate engineering courses at the National Institutes of Technology (NIT) and other Central, State and private institutions, and is also used as an eligibility test for JEE-Advanced, which is an entrance examination for

the elite Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT).

Exam being held 4 times The examination is being held four times this year, once each in February, March, April and May.

Students are free to attempt the examination as many times as they want, with each candidate's best score being taken into consideration for the final ranking.

All-India rankings and cut-off scores for JEE-Advanced eligibility will only be calculated after all four rounds of the examination are over.

In the February session, more than 6.2 lakh students attempted the examination, including 4.35 lakh boys and 1.85 lakh girls. For the first time, the examination was conducted in 13 different languages.

Panel for tweak in rail passenger fares

Parliamentary Committee for resumption of services to boost revenues

YUTHIKA BHARGAVA
NEW DELHI

A parliamentary committee has recommended that the Railway Ministry should undertake "prudent adjustment" of passenger fares to reduce the burden on freight segment, while highlighting that the Railways' operating ratio, which helps determine the financial health of the national carrier, has regularly deteriorated after 2015-16.

The committee, in its report tabled in Parliament on Monday, also said the actual earnings of the Railways have fallen short of projected earnings for all years since 2016-17, indicating that either unrealistic projections were made or the Ministry's efforts to actualise the accruals were not sufficient.

Noting that revenues from passenger services had deteriorated due to suspension of operations during COVID-19, the panel, headed by former Union Minister Radha Mohan Singh, asked Railways to consider resuming

Facing losses: The Railways' revenues from passenger services fell due to suspension of trains due to COVID-19. ■ FILE PHOTO

passenger services to boost their revenues.

No to cross subsidies

"...the tariff policy of the Indian Railways has traditionally followed the principle of cross subsidisation in order to offset the losses incurred in the heavily subsidised passenger and other coaching services through additional revenue from freight movement..." The Committee feels that both passenger fares and freight rates have to be demand-cum-market driven

and fixed differently for different segments," it said, recommending that the Ministry undertake a "prudent adjustment" of passenger fares to reduce the burden on freight segment.

On the net revenues, the panel noted that over the past five years, Budget Estimates for revenues are being drastically reduced at Revised Estimate stage, and even the reduced targets nowhere matched the actuals.

Noting the regular dete-

rioration in Railways' operating ratio, the panel added that "Railway finances should be monitored and managed prudently by keeping a close and constant tab on the undesirable/unproductive expenditure so that the operating ratio (OR) may reach at acceptable level in the near future".

Operating ratio indicates how much the Railways spend to earn a rupee. For example, an operating ratio of 98.36% for 2019-20, indicates that to earn ₹100, the Railways will have to spend ₹98.36. "The Committee observed that for the fiscal year 2015-16, the Railways Operating Ratio was 90.5%. In contrast in the succeeding years the Operating Ratio has regularly deteriorated."

For 2016-17, the operating ratio rose sharply to 96.5%. Subsequently, the OR was 98.4% in 2017-18, 97.29% in 2018-19. For 2020-21, it is estimated to be 131.4%, while for 2021-22, Railways is targeting OR of 96.15%.

NIA takes over Mumbai explosives case

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has taken over from the Maharashtra Police a case pertaining to an explosives-laden car that was found abandoned near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's mansion, Antilia, in Mumbai on February 25.

The car's immediate owner, Mansukh Hiren, a resident of Thane, was found dead under suspicious conditions in a creek last week.

The NIA said that it has received orders from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to investigate the case.

Lawyers move SC on hybrid physical trial

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) moved the court on Monday to quash the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for hybrid physical hearing of cases from March 15.

It said the SOP was evolved without a discussion with lawyers. The SOP involved limited entry into courtrooms in tune with physical distancing norms and allowed judges on the Bench to decide whether a case should be held virtually or physically.

Rape accused dies after being beaten by villagers

'It is an attempt to divide us, we would advise govt., MLAs to refrain from it'

ANUJ KUMAR
GHAZIABAD

As the news of Bharatiya Janata Party MLA Umesh Malik taking a delegation of khap leaders to meet Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath spread, some khap leaders reacted strongly to it. "It is an attempt to divide us and we would advise the government and our political representatives to refrain from it," said Shayam Singh, the Thamba Chaudhary of a dozen villages of Gathwala khap.

The person, identified as Subodh Bajpai, was booked for rape after a woman living in the same village lodged a complaint against him on March 5. The locals caught Bajpai the next day from outside the village and handed him over to the police station, said Superintendent of Police (Rural) Kanpur Brijesh Kumar Srivastava. The locals allegedly thrashed him before handing him over.

After a medical examination, the accused was sent to jail under judicial remand, said the officer.

While no one had been injured in the attack, the proximity of the IED to the high security zone where the Israeli embassy is located was seen by the police as an indication of the seriousness of the threat. Requesting not to be identified, a police official told *The Hindu* that while the investigation continues, they had narrowed suspicions on two individuals who hired a taxi to the Israeli embassy on the Abdul Kalam Road, and are believed to have had links with a "foreign national".

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

Multi-billion deals for 30 armed drones from the U.S. and six advanced submarines under Project-75I are likely to be taken by the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) in April for approval, a government official said.

India has been looking to procure 30 armed drones, 10

for each service, from the U.S. but the process has been repeatedly delayed over the last couple of years. While the Navy has a pressing requirement for the High Altitude Long Endurance drones, there have been questions on their utility for the Army and Air Force, given the high cost.

The three Services have since finalised the Qualitative

Requirements and the all the processing has been completed. The case is now ready to be put up before the DAC, an official said.

Last November, the Navy inducted two MQ-9B Sea Guardian unarmed drones procured from the U

DIVYA KALA BHAVANI

While Poornima Seetharaman grew up in a tiny village in Palakkad, Kerala, her father was working in the city. The village's orthodox outlook reflected in Poornima, until her father gave her a pair of jeans. As soon as she put them on, other girls in the village followed suit. It is a memory the now 36-year-old Poornima continues to be empowered by, and every bit of pride is felt over a call with her, as Women's History Month 2021 kicks off.

Treading a path

The lead game designer at Zynga Game Network first fell in love with video games through Dungeons and Dragons, which catapulted her from gamer to programmer and designer. "Whatever I missed out on or liked, I wanted to create." Fast forward 15 years, and her journey has seen some remarkable turning points: in 2020, she was the first Indian inducted into the Women in Games – Global Hall of Fame, was one of the winners of the Special Recognition Award 2020, and was one of the runners-up of Mentor of the Year 2020 by WomenTech Network.

There is still a novelty of being a "female game designer". Poornima, however, tunes out these reactions, "It is beyond being old or annoying; it has become background noise. Some people do ask about it from a point of genuine curiosity. And, of course, there are the people who continue to mock you - even after 15 years!"

Higher education sees more women signing up for game design as a full-time course - a departure from its former status as a casual elective as an extra credit. Poornima, who happens to be a visiting faculty at National Institute of Design, explains, "Families and parents should also be made aware of the career growth that can come in game development. Like acting or fashion, there will be some hesitation to invest in education but we need to have more awareness studies for parents, too."

Female gamers and designers alike are now able to challenge the notion that women are not competitive, preferring coopera-



Grab the world by the joystick

Poornima Seetharaman is fast becoming every gamer girl's role model owing to her perseverance and professionalism in the entertainment industry

tion within their game-play. Poornima believes in a "broad-minded spectrum of player types." It varies from player to player, she says, as well as game experience. For example, Tetris - one of the most casual games out there - has world championships. Poornima insists, "Women can get competitive, let everyone play what they want. This elitism in gaming is annoying."

Poornima is grateful for her journey so far. She started as a game programmer and progressed to game designer in the same company. In one of her job interviews, she was asked about her love for Warcraft III but the interviewers were not convinced. "They asked me to write the story of Warcraft to make sure I was actually a fan and a gamer!" A man would never have been set a simi-

lar task. "It happens even after experience."

Never back down

Poornima does not back down from tough talk. At a gaming conference where she was part of a panel on women in video gaming, when the topic veered towards misogyny, Poornima says some panelists were hesitant to talk about their experiences. "I re-

fused to stay quiet. Of course, we have faced gender inequalities. For the women attendees in the audiences who are new in the industry or are even gamers, if they do not hear about our experiences, they may wonder if they are the ones doing something wrong; I don't want that. Having said that, it is because of good men, that I continue to be here and have seen this growth. We have to talk about the positives and negatives."

Diversity at these conversations is not just gender; a lot of gaming panels see mainly white

Female gamers and designers alike are now able to challenge the notion that women are not competitive, preferring cooperation within their game-play

In control Poornima Seetharaman at her home set-up; with her Hall of Fame award ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The hiring game

Gamers like to feel represented not just in game-play but at the creator level too. Is there anything audiences can do to encourage diversity within the hires? "Many companies have diversity initiatives, but in India, it is hard to find a female game designer at certain levels. We need more female leaders in gaming. There is a shortage in the resource pool and a general lack of talent in the country since many feel that the opportunities are greater abroad."

This drives Poornima to do more. "I have had to work twice as hard as a man to get a promotion." She looks back on a time she was employed in her early years and her colleagues assumed she was merely a diversity hire. "After a few months, one of the developers came up to me and said, 'I am sorry but when you were hired, I thought you were hired just for diversity. They had picked you over one of my better friends who is a great game designer. Having worked with you, I realise it is your skill and not your gender.' That was a turning point; when someone is courageous enough to admit they are wrong, and make a change." She admits, she will not hire a woman just for the sake of gender. There should be potential to scale up that person's skillset. "I said this at a panel, I don't want to engage in tokenism. We must also understand that there needs to be some equity to attain true equality. Finding the right balance is critical."

women. Women of colour in these events are very few, agrees Poornima, who recognises the efforts made by some women leaders. "A lot of the women ambassadors often start communities and funding channels to help game developers from minority communities to scale up. Diversity does come from socio-economic backgrounds and a lot of them cannot afford a gaming system to even get started."

We are missing out on incredible talent if we do not create these pools, and get these people seen, trained and funded!"

Without these conversations, the pattern would continue - men playing games created for and by men. "If we are able to make a change in a single thought process, it is better than none," she points out, keeping in mind there is a world of progress ahead for the gaming industry.



Back to basics

DIVYA KALA BHAVANI

'Connecting During COVID-19,' a study by Natalie Pennington, a UNLV communication studies professor and social media expert, slated for publication in March 2021 in the journal *Human Communication & Technology*, found that older technologies like voice calls and emails were more effective at easing pandemic loneliness and stress than newer options such as video chats, social media, and interactive video games.

Here are the 10 takeaways from the study:

1. The most used and most important types of communication were phone calls and texting.

2. Phone calls were associated with decreases in stress, loneliness, and relationship maintenance difficulties.

3. Video chats, on the other hand, were associated with increased levels of stress, loneliness, and relationship difficulties.

4. Social media posting, commenting, and sharing was the modality most strongly associated with stress. Early research during the pandemic highlighted an increase in 'doomscrolling.'

5. Those in a romantic relationship reported less loneliness and stress compared to those who were not. However, people in romantic relationships were also more likely to experience stress related to social media posting.

6. Being sheltered in place created a greater perception of loneliness and stress, and more difficulty with relationship maintenance.

7. At the same time, living alone was unassociated with loneliness and maintenance difficulties, suggesting having someone in the house doesn't always help.

8. Older and middle-aged adults were able to make use of email as a way to decrease loneliness, while young adults (under 29) experienced increased loneliness alongside the use of email.

9. Online gaming was associated with greater stress and more relational maintenance challenges. They perhaps felt more challenges in their day-to-day communication.

10. Nothing can replicate face-to-face interactions - people who engaged in face-to-face interactions were the least stressed and lonely.

GAMESPOT



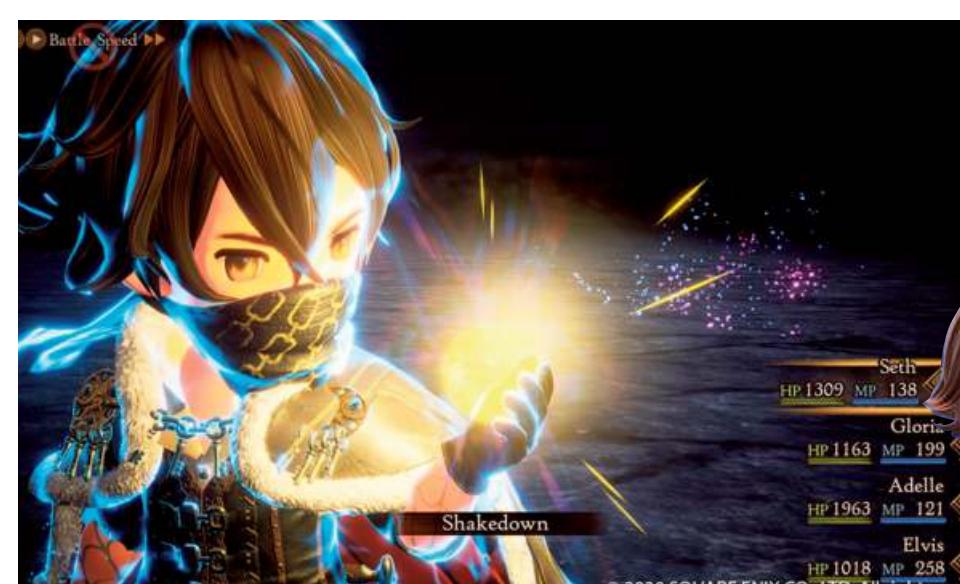
A nod to stylised gaming

Bravely Default 2 has an ordinary storyline but the nostalgia it evokes should please fans of the JRPG genre

JULIAN ALMEIDA

The Japanese role playing game (JRPG) has been fighting to stay relevant in the era of Witcher 3 and Skyrim. While games like Persona and Final Fantasy managed to break through, many have not. A handful of them evoke the nostalgia of early games in the genre. Bravely Default 2 is one of them.

Much like the plot of the first Final Fantasy, Bravely Default 2 centres around four heroes of light, who have set out to save the world from an ultimate evil. Given that it has Square Enix's name on it, there are crystals involved too. The game is not to be confused



BRAVELY DEFAULT 2

DEVELOPER: Claytechworks

PUBLISHER: Square Enix, Nintendo

PRICE: ₹3,499 on

Nintendo Switch

with Bravely Second, which was a sequel to Bravely Default. The story, the world and heroes of Bravely Default 2 are different. So, it is not a prerequisite you play the earlier games. But those who have, will be pleasantly surprised at the nods to the earlier games. The story itself is ordinary. It follows the tropes you would have seen in many other

JRPGs, there is nothing really new here. It almost feels like one of the shows my daughter watches on Netflix. It is a far cry from the narrative of the first Bravely Default game. The rich world building in the continent Excellent (not a typo) salvages the game though. Bravely Default 2 urges you to travel, vi-

Ready for combat The battle system is so good, you will find yourself jumping into fights often ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



sit towns, meet new people and delve deep into its world.

Fun fights

The endless quests, bad pacing and repetition will test your patience. If, however, you are someone who likes to grind through games, you will like it. The people in the game's world give the most mundane tasks to the heroes of light. The activities yield decent loot and the battle system is good; you will find yourself jumping into fights often.

Bravely Default 2 leverages that same turn-based battle system, which is the norm in JRPGs. It comes with a twist. During your turn, you can opt

for Default to save up on Brave points and take reduced damage. Then, you can unleash multiple attacks with your Brave points at opportune moments.

It is fun when you turn the tide of a losing battle with a series of Brave attacks, keeping your party alive with the perfect combination of strategy and team set-up.

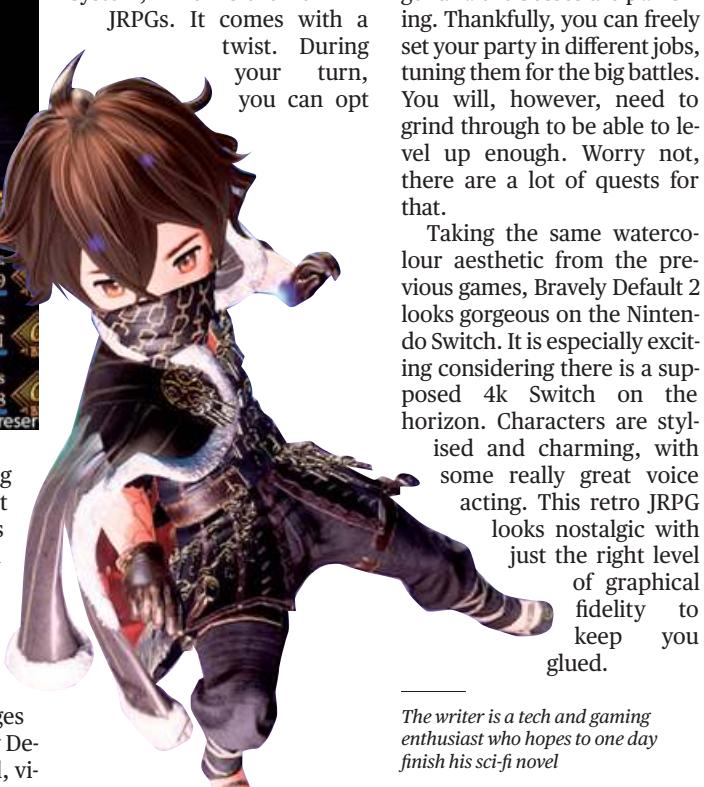
Again, taking a page out of Final Fantasy, Bravely Default 2 has a Job system, which lets your character assume certain classes, which unlocks particular skills.

The enemies you will come across will be stronger and the bosses are punishing. Thankfully, you can freely set your party in different jobs, tuning them for the big battles.

You will, however, need to grind through to be able to level up enough. Worry not, there are a lot of quests for that.

Taking the same watercolour aesthetic from the previous games, Bravely Default 2 looks gorgeous on the Nintendo Switch. It is especially exciting considering there is a supposed 4K Switch on the horizon. Characters are stylised and charming, with some really great voice acting. This retro JRPG looks nostalgic with just the right level of graphical fidelity to keep you glued.

The writer is a tech and gaming enthusiast who hopes to one day finish his sci-fi novel



Pick your style (Clockwise from right) Coffeeza's kitchen pour; a kitchen coffee shelf with coffee maker, cubes and capsules; Wacao Nanopresso • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT, GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK



HOME BREWING FOR BEGINNERS

AEROPRESS With the AeroPress maker, coffee is steeped for upto 50 seconds and then forced through a filter by pressing the plunger.

CLEVER DRIP Clever drip uses the technique of pour over along with French press and is extremely easy to use.

CHEMEX COFFEE The Chemex coffeemaker uses the drip method. It is a manual pour-over style glass coffeemaker

the top. Rahul Aggarwal, Coffeeza's Founder & CEO, says, "Lovers of cafe-style coffee can finally enjoy great coffee at home." Coffeeza claims its machines and capsules allow coffee aficionados to brew cafe-style beverages like espresso, cappuccino, latte and more within seconds.

Something Brewing says it sold over 200 machines within a few months and also noticed about 20 odd smaller roasters setting up their shop.

A thought for the planet There is a growing clientele for plant-based coffee that claims to be vitamin-enriched. Rage Coffee's small-batch crystallisation process, instead of bulk production, keeps the caffeine quotient intact and potent. Each serving seems to be a confluence of aroma, notes, and nutritive value sourced from six vitamin-abundant plants.

Bharat Sethi, who founded Rage Coffee in 2018, says, "The best bit? We are gluten-free, vegan-friendly and Nature-considerate. Our proprietary, ready-to-mix coffee vials/shots are easy to carry and biodegradable in their entirety. We also offer high-quality natural flavourings to suit your palate without being bland, bitter, or taxing on your calorie count."

The brand has exotic flavours: original, Irish hazelnut, crème caramel, sparkly orange, and dark chocolate, chai latte, mint mocha, vanilla punch and butterscotch delight."

Not every coffee lover is a fan of techniques and gadgets. Some like to savour their coffee in the most non-messy, simple way. The coffee cube – a compressed form of instant coffee that only requires milk or water to be added – is proving to be an easy option for the lazy connoisseur.

Caffeine explorations

Coffee lovers are swamped by a sea of options to make cafe-style coffee at home with ease

PRABALIKI M BORAH

Did you know that coffee's flavour wheel has over 5,000 notes, whereas wine has only 2,000? Clearly coffee is a complex beverage, and an extremely sensitive one at that.

Coffee drinkers are now focussing more on identifying hidden flavour notes, learning how to appreciate provenance by honing their coffee-making techniques.

The lockdown became a good time for coffee lovers to learn more about the bean and how to brew it. If some explored single estate coffees, others tried out different grinders and techniques. A lot of coffee was consumed, and a lot was discovered as well.

The right tool

Seeing the rise in in-

terest in café-styled coffee, Abhinav Mathur, CEO of Something Brewing put his knowledge of coffee and coffee machines to use on the platform for home brewers.

Abhinav says, "Fortunately, most of the coffee machines and brewing tools used by the FNB industry commercially are sold by our first company Kaapi. Whether for roasting beans or the espresso machine, we are the biggest commercial supplier, so we established 'Something Brewing', an e-commerce platform dedicated to coffee targeting home needs.

He adds, "The genesis of the idea for this platform stems from the movement and trends during lockdown wherein coffee took centre stage and people started recreating their café-related memories within the comfort of their own homes. Home Brewing has turned into a passion for a whole new generation and has made socialising synonymous to coffee drinking."

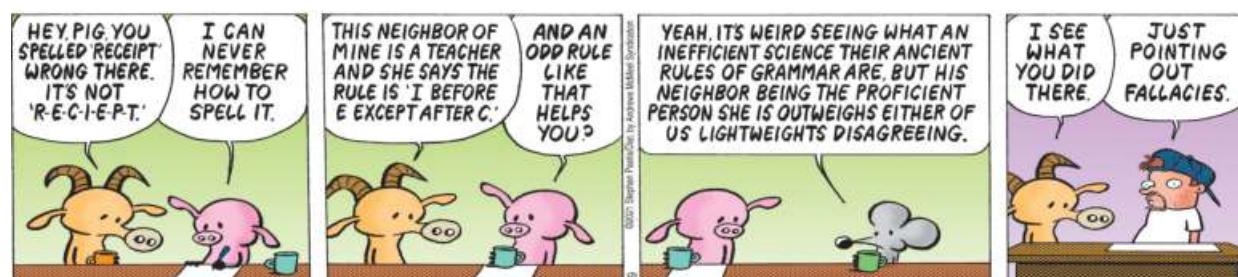
The Finero is designed to extract coffee at superior 20 bar pressure (similar to cafés) which results in richly extracted coffee with indulgent layers of cream on



POOCH CAFE



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



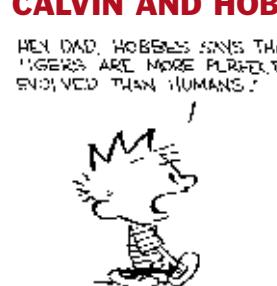
PEANUTS



TIGER



CALVIN AND HOBBES



When Aahana met a microphone

Aahana Kumra and Mantra Mugdh chat about creating the chilling paranormal podcast I Hear You

DIVYA KALA BHAVANI

For years, Aahana Kumra faced a lot of rejection when she auditioned for voice-acting, so the actor steered clear of such projects. Then radio personality and producer Mantra Mugdh reached out to her with a possible collaboration. Shaking her head during a video call, Aahana recalls, "I went over, looking forward to a casual chat, but he suddenly put me straight into the recording room!" Mantra, who believes Aahana has a great voice, explained that the project was like an audio web-series. After a little direction here and there from Mantra, Aahana was ready to start podcasting for the paranormal-thriller podcast I Hear You. The podcast, which is available in both English and Hindi, is currently in its first season, with one episode (made of two parts) per week, for 13 weeks, says Mantra.



Immersive experience Aahana Kumra turns voice artist for I Can Hear You • SPOTIFY INDIA

tra. "The first time Mantra put me in front of the microphone, it was very overwhelming because it wasn't just dubbing. I had to imagine spaces and objects which you can act out in front of a camera," says Aahana.

Given this is Aahana's first foray into the audio space, getting into the skin of the character required a different approach. "With the closed environment of the studio, your imagination can run wild when it is just audio," Aahana explains, "it is such a new world and space for me. I have the best in the business, Mantra, to hold my hand through it. He understands where I come from. As actors, we think we are good at performing in front of a camera, but we do not think of other mediums."

Liberating medium
The power of the microphone was leveraged big time for I Hear You, say Aahana and Mantra.

"Aahana is unofficially our casting director (laughs)," jokes Mantra, "because after doing one episode, she goes and tells

all her friends. Then she comes the next day with a couple of friends who want to be a part of it. I've seen a lot of television and film actors end up being very uncomfortable in front of a microphone; this is where they find out the power of dialogue and projection."

Speaking of theatre and its very hands-on approach to any sort of acting, Mantra and Aahana were keen to bring on theatre actors to guest star in the podcast. "I'm part of a few theatre groups, and these actors always want to venture into different mediums, because they want to see what they can do with different voices," says Aahana.

"Aahana is officially our casting director (laughs)," jokes Mantra, "because after doing one episode, she goes and tells all her friends. Then she comes the next day with a couple of friends who want to be a part of it. I've seen a lot of television and film actors end up being very uncomfortable in front of a microphone; this is where they find out the power of dialogue and projection. They say 'you're sorted if the camera loves you,' but here, if you're friends with the microphone, that's special."

Are Mantra and Aahana open to expanding to a television medium? Mantra simply concludes that the power of listening would not get the same desired effect if a visual component was present. The 'limitation' of audio podcasts is actually liberating and, ultimately, can propel new ways of storytelling.



A ND-NDE

'Hong Kong fully welcomes poll reforms'

The central authorities have exercised constitutional powers to address loopholes in system, says Lam

ASSOCIATED PRESS
HONG KONG

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam on Monday said the city's government "fully welcomes" changes to the city's electoral system that will substantially increase central government control over Hong Kong politics and exclude critics of Beijing.

Chinese authorities have said the draft decision before China's National People's Congress would mean the largely pro-Beijing committee that elects Hong Kong's leader would also choose a large part of the legislature to ensure the city is run by "patriots." The Election Committee would also have the right to vet candidates for the Legislative Council, weeding out any people suspected of being insufficiently loyal to China and the ruling Communist Party.

Currently, half of Hong Kong's legislature is directly



In control: Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam, left, speaking to a military delegate at the NPC in Beijing on March 5. •REUTERS

elected by voters, although the mass resignation of opposition legislators to protest the expulsion of four of their colleagues for being "unpatriotic" means the body is now entirely controlled by Beijing loyalists.

"There are loopholes in the electoral systems, there are also flaws in the systems in Hong Kong," Ms. Lam said

at a news conference after she returned from the Na-

tional People's Congress in Beijing. "I fully understand that this is not a matter that can be addressed entirely by the government." "I'm glad that the central authorities have, again, exercised their constitutional powers to help address this problem for Hong Kong," she said.

She declined to elaborate on the views she had shared with the central authorities regarding electoral reforms,

and said many pieces of legislation in Hong Kong would have to be amended. The NPC, China's ceremonial legislature, will all but certainly endorse the draft decision, though it may not take immediate legal effect.

The planned electoral changes have drawn criticism in Hong Kong and abroad, including from the United States.

U.S. criticism

On Friday, State Department spokesperson Ned Price denounced them, saying, "These are a direct attack on Hong Kong's autonomy, Hong Kong's freedoms, and the democratic processes, limiting participation, reducing democratic representation, and stifling political debate in order to defy the clear will of the people of Hong Kong and to deny their voice in their own government and governance."

Unconfirmed reports say the legislation will expand the size of the Legislative Council from 70 to 90 and the Election Committee from 1,200 to 1,500. Seats on the committee now reserved for directly elected district counsellors will be eliminated, further cementing Beijing's control over the body.

Toll from military camp blasts in E. Guinea rises to 30: report

'Stubble-burning by locals, negligent supervision to blame'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MALABO

The death toll from accidental explosions at a military camp in Equatorial Guinea rose to 30 on Monday, media reports said, after 10 more bodies were found in the ruined site.

Six hundred people were injured in the blasts, which also flattened homes near the camp on the outskirts of the economic hub of Bata, State television TVGE said, adding that it expected the toll to rise. It showed images akin to a war zone, in which rescue workers and civilians

struggled to remove bodies from smoking ruins.

Three children aged three and four were brought out alive and taken to hospital.

A string of four huge explosions occurred in mid-afternoon on Sunday, hitting the Nkao Ntoma camp, which houses special forces and gendarmes and their families, as well as homes nearby.

President Teodoro Obiang Nguema, who has ruled the small central African state for 42 years, has blamed the accident on stubble-burning by local

farmers and on "negligent" supervision of the camp's munitions depot.

"My uncle, who is an officer at the camp, has just called to say that this morning he found the bodies of five members of his family, which were totally burned," a Bata resident said.

"Anyone living in a radius of two to four km of the explosions has been unable to return home."

Bata is home to 8,000 of E. Guinea's 1.4 million people, most of whom live in poverty despite the country's oil and gas wealth.

After historic visit, Pope leaves Iraq for Rome

He called on Iraqis to embrace diversity

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BAGHDAD

Pope Francis on Monday wrapped up his historic whirlwind tour of Iraq that sought to bring hope to the country's marginalised Christian minority with a message of coexistence, forgiveness and peace.

The pontiff and his travelling delegation were seen off with a farewell ceremony at the Baghdad airport.

At every turn of his trip, Pope Francis urged Iraqis to embrace diversity — from Najaf in the south, where he held a historic meeting with powerful Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, to

Nineveh to the north, where he met with Christian victims of the Islamic State group's terror and heard their testimonies of survival.

In Iraq's south, the Pope convened a meeting of Iraqi religious leaders in the deserts near a symbol of the country's ancient past — the 6,000-year-old ziggurat in the Plains of Ur, also thought to be the birthplace of Abraham, the patriarch revered by Jews, Christians and Muslims. The gathering brought religious representatives across the country rarely seen together, from Muslims, Christians, Yazidis and Mandaeans.

"...just didn't want to be alive anymore. And that was a very clear and real and frightening constant thought," she told Ms. Winfrey, describing the impact of a torrent of vitriol from hostile tabloids and social media.

Asked if she had had suicidal thoughts while pregnant, Ms. Meghan replied

"Yes. This was very, very clear." Recalling how she felt at the time, she said that "I'm scared, because this is very real."

On Archie's skin tone

Ms. Meghan, 39, also told of royal "concerns" about "how dark" her son's skin would be, saying Prince Harry revealed to her official conversations over Archie's appearance, as well as the security he would be entitled to, ahead of his birth on May 6, 2019.

"In those months when I was pregnant... we have in

Meghan says she thought of suicide, alleges royal racism

She explains the couple's exit from royal life in interview

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NEW YORK

Prince Harry's wife Meghan Markle on Sunday said she contemplated taking her own life after joining the royal family, and raised allegations of racism in the monarchy during an explosive television interview.

Explaining the couple's dramatic exit from royal life, Ms. Meghan said she was denied help during her mental health crisis, was targeted by lies, and that there was official concern about the skin colour of her unborn son.

Ms. Meghan, whose father is white and mother is Black, spoke out in an interview with Oprah Winfrey that immediately became one of the most extraordinary chapters in recent royal history and was set to rock the British institution.

"...just didn't want to be alive anymore. And that was a very clear and real and frightening constant thought," she told Ms. Winfrey, describing the impact of a torrent of vitriol from hostile tabloids and social media.

The two-hour interview with the queen of U.S. television was the biggest royal tell-all since Prince Harry's mother Princess Diana detailed her crumbling marriage to his father Prince Charles in 1995.

Prince Harry, 36, revealed the deep divisions within his family, saying he felt "really let down" by how his father had handled the situation.

But he also said Prince Charles — the heir to the throne — and his older brother William were "trapped" by the conventions of the monarchy.

"They don't get to leave. And I have huge compassion for that," he said.

Ms. Winfrey reportedly

59 migrants from Morocco scale fence to enter Spain

They will be tested for COVID-19: officials

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MADRID

Dozens of migrants stormed into Spain's North African enclave of Melilla on Monday, scaling the high, razor-wire fence that separates it from Morocco, local authorities said.

Over 150 migrants rushed to the border fence and 59 managed to get across, the office of Spain's central government said in a statement. Three police officers and two migrants were lightly injured, it added.

The migrants were taken to a health centre, where they will be tested for the novel coronavirus and they will then have to undergo a quarantine.

Melilla and Ceuta, another Spanish territory in North

Africa, have the European Union's only land borders with Africa, making them popular entry points for migrants seeking a better life in Europe.

But while the overall number of migrants reaching Spain rose last year, the number crossing the land border into Ceuta and Melilla plunged by 72% compared with 2019 to 1,755, according to Interior Ministry figures.

During the first two months of 2021, a total of 389 migrants entered the two territories, compared to 969 during the same time last year. The last major breach of the border fence by migrants occurred in January when nearly 90 migrants made it into Melilla.

Three demonstrators killed in Myanmar

Shops, factories and banks close in Yangon; 9 unions urge people to stop work to reverse coup

REUTERS
YANGON

Three demonstrators were killed in Myanmar on Monday, witnesses said, while shops, factories and banks were closed in the main city Yangon in protests against last month's military coup.

Security forces were also deployed at hospitals and universities, state media said.

Two of the victims died of gunshot wounds to the head in the northern town of Myitkyina, the witnesses said. It was not immediately clear who fired on the protesters although both police and the military were at the scene.

Photos posted on Facebook showed the bodies of two men lying on the street. Witnesses said they were taking part in a protest against



Battle-ready: Protesters wearing protective gear take part in a demonstration against the coup in Yangon. •AFP

the coup when police fired stun grenades and tear gas. Several people were then hit by gunfire from nearby buildings.

One witness, who said he helped move the bodies, said two people were shot in the head and died on the spot. Three people were wounded

media said. Police and military have killed more than 50 people to quell the daily demonstrations and strikes against the February 1 coup, according to the United Nations.

On Monday, demonstrators gathered in Yangon and Mandalay and several other towns.

Protesters in Dawei, a coastal town in the south, were protected by the Karen National Union, an ethnic armed group engaged in a long-running war with the military.

In some places, they waved flags fashioned from hamain (women's sarongs) or hung them up on lines across the street to mark International Women's Day while denouncing the junta. Walking beneath women's

sarongs is traditionally considered bad luck for men.

Call to stop work

Witnesses reported sounds of gunfire or stun grenades in many districts of Yangon on Sunday night as soldiers set up camp in hospitals and university compounds. It was not clear whether anyone was hurt.

At least nine unions covering sectors including construction, agriculture and manufacturing have called on "all Myanmar people" to stop work to reverse the coup and restore Ms. Suu Kyi's government.

Allowing business and economic activity to continue would help the military as they represent the energy of the Myanmar people", the unions said in a statement.

Afghan women leave journalism in droves

'300 women left the industry in recent months, citing wave of targeted killings'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KABUL

Nearly 20% of Afghan women journalists have quit or lost their jobs in the past six months, a media watchdog group said Monday, as a wave of murders targeting the press has intensified in the war-torn country.

The Afghan Journalists Safety Committee said that more than 300 women had left the industry in recent months, citing the "wave of targeted killings" as one of the main reasons — along with financial difficulties caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

The report comes as the world marks International Women's Day and less than a week after three female media workers from Enikass TV were gunned down by militants in the eastern city of Jalalabad in an attack claimed by the local Islamic State



In dire straits: Nearly 20% of women journalists have either quit or lost their jobs in last six months, says a report. •AFP

group affiliate.

Another woman working for the station was murdered in December. On Monday, Enikass said it had asked all remaining women staffers to stay home until security improves.

"I love journalism but I also love to live," Nadia Momand, a presenter at Enikass, said.

The watchdog noted in a statement that "Afghanistan is celebrating International

Women's Day this year at a time where security threats against journalists and media workers, especially women in the media, have intensified".

Rights crushed

Journalists, religious scholars, activists and judges have all been victims of a recent wave of political assassinations across Afghanistan, forcing many into hiding and some to flee the country.

The killings have been acutely felt by women, whose rights were crushed under Taliban rule from 1996 to 2001 — which included a ban on them working.

Intelligence officials have previously linked the attacks against women to demands at ongoing peace talks in Doha — between the Kabul government and the Taliban — for their rights to be protected.

Uighur women stage a march in Istanbul against Chinese camps

BBC report had alleged rape, forced sterilisation of women

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ISTANBUL

Several hundred Muslim Uighur women in Turkey staged an International Women's Day march along the Bosphorus on Monday demanding the closure of mass incarceration camps in China's Xinjiang region.

The protesters chanted "stop the genocide" and "close the camps" as they marched within a few hundred metres of China's walled-off consulate in Istanbul.

The killings have been acutely felt by women, whose rights were crushed under Taliban rule from 1996 to 2001 — which included a ban on them working.

"Rape is a crime against humanity," said one poster, in reference to a BBC report alleging systemic rape and forced sterilisation of women at the camps — which China says are vocational training centres designed to counter extremism.

Rights groups believe at least one million Uighurs and other Muslim minorities have been incarcerated in camps spread out across the vast northwestern region.

But many in the 5,000,000-strong community fear that Ankara's dependence on Chinese investments could jeopardise their future status in Turkey.



In protest: Muslim Uighur women staging an International Women's Day march near China's Consulate in Istanbul. •AFP

MARKET WATCH

	PRICE	CHANGE
Sensex	50441	-0.07
US Dollar	73.25	-0.31
Gold	44114	+0.51
Brent oil	68.64	-0.3

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	748.40	-0.55
Asian Paints	2382.70	-4.40
Axle Bank	743.30	-12.55
Bajaj Auto	3798.75	-54.10
Bajaj Finserv	9839.10	-119.00
Bajaj Finance	5320.65	-124.25
Bharti Airtel	525.70	-7.10
BPCL	466.70	+4.90
Britannia Ind	3463.20	-28.55
Cipla	809.25	+4.10
Coal India	153.15	+2.05
Divis Lab	3507.70	+10.80
Dr Reddy's Lab	4492.25	-0.25
Eicher Motors	2583.25	-4.50
GAIL (India)	154.15	+7.00
Gasim Ind	1344.25	+4.90
HCL Tech.	961.90	+20.40
HDFC	2510.25	-33.65
HDFC Bank	1519.50	-10.50
HDFC Life	722.95	+5.70
Hero MotoCorp	3463.95	+2.25
Hindalco	336.60	-1.25
Hind Unilever	2174.55	-26.55
ICICI Bank	608.05	-1.40
IndusInd Bank	1018.25	-21.65
Infosys	1335.75	+19.05
Indian Oil Corp	103.60	+2.15
ITC	208.00	-0.55
JSW Steel	407.85	+1.45
Kotak Bank	1915.85	-6.65
L&T	1515.20	+51.65
M&M	851.00	+10.60
Maruti Suzuki	7259.50	+10.50
Nestle India Ltd.	16852.45	+69.55
NTPC	110.55	+1.85
ONGC	118.25	+3.30
PowerGrid Corp	220.15	-0.10
Reliance Ind	2191.10	+12.40
SBI Life	923.85	+20.30
State Bank	389.60	+5.95
Shree Cement	27185.05	-663.55
Sun Pharma	614.80	+3.60
Tata Motors	321.25	-3.90
Tata Steel	737.25	+3.95
TCS	3006.95	+1.10
Tech Mahindra	968.50	+8.80
Titan	1456.75	-17.45
UltraTech Cement	6668.15	-142.15
UPL	629.95	+38.40
Wipro	416.90	+3.95

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	73.05	73.37
Euro	86.77	87.18
British Pound	101.15	101.59
Japanese Yen (100)	67.34	67.64
Chinese Yuan	11.19	11.24
Swiss Franc	78.31	78.66
Singapore Dollar	54.21	54.46
Canadian Dollar	57.57	57.85
Malaysian Ringgit	17.77	17.87

Source: Indian Bank

IN BRIEF



Employees' bid for Air India disqualified

The Air India employees' consortium has been disqualified from the privatisation process for Air India, as per an internal mail. Transaction adviser EY wrote to the staff group informing it of the decision. Partnering a Seychelles-based fund, a group of 200 employees had put in a bid.

Natco partner gets nod for anti-cancer drug

HYDERABAD Natco Pharma's marketing partner, Breckenridge Pharmaceutical (BPI), has received final approval for its abbreviated new drug application for Everolimus Tablets from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The product is a generic version of Afinitor and indicated in the treatment of breast cancer and a few other types of cancers.

Cairn wins nod from U.S., U.K., other courts for \$1.4 bn award

Not a question of domestic tax law, but whether India violated international law'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI Courts in five countries including the U.S. and the U.K. have given recognition to an arbitration award that asked India to return \$1.4 billion to Cairn Energy plc – a step that now opens the possibility of the British firm seizing Indian assets in those countries if New Delhi does not pay, sources said.

Cairn Energy had moved courts in nine countries to enforce its \$1.4 billion arbitral award against India, which the company won after a dispute with the country's revenue authority over a retroactively applied capital gains tax.

Of these, the December 21 award from a three-member tribunal at the Permanent



Moot point: The Finance Minister says it is her 'duty' to appeal where India's authority to tax is questioned. ■ AFP

Court of Arbitration in the Netherlands has been recognised and confirmed by courts in the U.S., the U.K., the Netherlands, Canada and France, three people with knowledge of the matter said. Cairn has begun the process to register the award in Singapore, Japan, the Un-

ited Arab Emirates and Cayman Islands, they said.

The registration of the award is the first step towards its enforcement in the event of the government not paying the firm. Once the court recognises an arbitration award, the company can then petition it for seiz-

ing any Indian government asset such as bank accounts, payments to state-owned entities, airplanes and ships in those jurisdictions, to recover the monies due to it, they said. The tribunal had on December 21 ruled that the Indian government had breached an investment treaty with the U.K.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had on March 5 indicated the Centre's intent to appeal against the award when she said it was her 'duty' to appeal in cases where the nation's sovereign authority to tax is questioned.

"The issue at stake is... not a matter of domestic tax law; it is rather whether the fiscal measures taken by the State... violate international law," the tribunal had said.

Banks wrote off ₹1.2 lakh cr. in 9 months'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Banks have written off bad loans to the tune of ₹1.15 lakh crore during the first three quarters of the current fiscal (FY21), the Lok Sabha was informed on Monday.

"As per RBI data, scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) have written off loans of ₹2,36,265 crore, ₹2,34,170 crore and ₹1,15,038 crore during FY2018-19, FY2019-20 and the first three-quarters of FY2020-21, respectively,"

Iran slips record volume of oil into China, taps Asian clients

Key Indian oil refiners plan for imports from Iran in 2021'

REUTERS



although harsh economic measures remain in place.

The sanctions caused a drop in Iran's exports to China, India, Japan and South Korea. Those measures, and output cuts by fellow OPEC+ producers, have led to tight supplies of West Asian sour crude in Asia. "They talked

to us. They said: 'very soon [we] hope to resume oil supplies,'" said a source at an Indian refiner. Restored Iranian supplies to India could lower demand for spot cargoes, which has risen recently after Iraq cut supplies and Kuwait reduced the duration of some contracts. India,

hurting from the sustained recovery in prices, expects Iranian supplies to return to the market in 3-4 months, a government official said.

Another Indian refiner said NIOC officials had told them a formal pact on supply would be signed after Iran's elections in June.

OTTs don't pose a threat: Bijli

As more films line up, PVR to add 30 screens in coming fiscal



Sanjeev Kumar Bijli

say we would be looking at bouncing back at least by Q2," he added.

"The line-up of films is very strong – English, Hindi and regional... I do imagine that with the curve flattening, and the vaccinations going up, people will get more confidence to come and watch new films at the cinemas... so if not Q1, I would

have now been lifted in a majority of the States," Mr. Bijli said. "However, now we've got a great line-up of films starting from March 11, so it's looking very promising, of course, hoping that the numbers don't go up as far as COVID cases are concerned," he added.

On competition from OTT platforms on which some films were released during the pandemic, he said those times 'were over'.

"Movies were sold to OTT because producers didn't have an option as cinemas were shut... But now you see a lot of excitement [from] producers, actors and the whole community to release their films on the big screen," he added.

BBB may get to select infra financier's MDs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

The Banks Board Bureau (BBB) may be entrusted with the job to select MDs and DMDs of a proposed ₹1-lakh crore development financial institution (DFI) being set up to accelerate infrastructure financing, said sources.

The infrastructure financier, to be called the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development, is to anchor the ambitious National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP).

About 7,000 projects have been identified under the NIP with a projected investment of ₹11 lakh crore during 2020-25.

SPORT

West Indies takes series

Allen's penultimate-over pyrotechnics does the trick

SRI LANKA IN WI

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ST. JOHN'S All-rounder Fabian Allen clobbered three sixes off the penultimate over to lead West Indies to a three-wicket win against Sri Lanka in the final T20I here on Sunday.

Chasing a target of 132, the two-time World champion was off to a blazing start as Evin Lewis (21) and Lendl Simmons (26) added 37 in 4.4 overs before the former was dismissed.

The host lost its way thereafter as Chris Gayle (13), skipper Kieron Pollard (0), Dwayne Bravo (0) and Romuald Powell (7) all flopped. Only Nicholas Pooran (23, 18b, 2x6) made a meaningful contribution as the West Indies slipped to 105 for seven in 16.5 overs.

With 20 runs needed off



Cutting loose: Fabian Allen hits the winning runs for the West Indies in the series decider. ■ AFP

12 balls, Allen smashed spinner Akila Dananjaya for sixes off the first, third and sixth deliveries to finish things in style. He remained unbeaten on 21 off just six balls.

The scores:

Sri Lanka 131/4 in 20 overs (D. Chandimal 54 n.o., A. Bandara 54 n.o.) lost to West Indies 134/7 in 19 overs (L. Simmons 26; L. Sandakan 3/29).

Bajrang wins gold and number one rank

WRESTLING

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Olympics-bound Indian wrestler Bajrang Punia pulled off a two-pointer in the last 30 seconds of the gold medal bout to defend his title at the Matteo Pelli-cone ranking series event. The result also pushed him back to the World No. 1 rank.

Up against Mongolia's Tulga Tumur Ochir, Bajrang was trailing 0-2 till the final moments of the 65kg final but managed to level the scores, 30 seconds from the whistle.

Since the last scoring point came from the Indian he was declared winner.

Bajrang was second in the rankings before the event and is now on top of the table with 14 points.

Vishal Kaliramanam too im-



pressed in the non-Olympic 70kg category by winning a bronze with a 5-1 win over Syrbaz Talgat from Kazakhstan.

Meanwhile, Narsingh Pancham Yadav, who recently made a return to competitive wrestling after a four-year doping ban, lost his bronze play-off 5-0 to Kazakhstan's Daniyar Kaisanov.

India returned with seven medals from the first ranking series event in a year.

Wah Ms Zara wins Royal Lancer Plate

HYDERABAD:

Wah Ms Zara (P. Ajeth Kumar astride) claimed the Royal Lancer Plate, the main event of Monday's (March 8) races. The winner is owned by Mr. Sarasam Madhusudan Reddy. N. Ravinder Singh trains the winner. Ajeeth Kumar rode two more winners on the day.

1. LUCKY SCOT PLATE (1,200m, (Terms) Maiden, 3-y-o only (Cat. II); FATUMA (Ajeeth Kumar) 1, Bold Bidding (Ak

New India revels again in an impressive triumph of the collective

Series win over England at home had several agents of victory; neither the absence of injured stars nor the underperformance of some big names proved an obstacle

ENGLAND IN INDIA

AMOL KARHADKAR
AHMEDABAD

Four of India's top five batsmen didn't fire consistently. The pacers hardly had any role to play. But it didn't matter eventually. India still bounced back in style after a hiccup in the opening Test to roll England over and seal its spot in the World Test Championship final against New Zealand.

The best thing to emerge from the 3-1 series triumph, from India's perspective, was that, just like in Australia, several cricketers put their hands up in crunch situations. It wasn't just one or two big players carrying the team. Thanks to the multitude of contributors, the team dazzled.

Sweeping success

Rohit Sharma set the ball rolling with his sweeping success en route 161 in the second Test in Chennai. As captain Virat Kohli admitted later, the opener's knock was instrumental in turning the tide in India's favour. Even



Another one goes! Kohli's men had a lot to cheer about in the series against England.

though Rohit couldn't muster runs of a similar scale in Ahmedabad, his knocks in the final two Tests proved crucial in setting the platform for India's victories.

With Cheteshwar Pujara, Kohli and Ajinkya Rahane being unable to deliver consistently with the willow, the onus was on Rishabh Pant, R. Ashwin, Axar Patel and Washington Sundar to rise to the occasion. And they did

so in style. Ashwin may have been adjudged the 'Player of the Series' for his all-round performance, but Pant arguably had the biggest impact on the series.

The left-handed batsman carried his form from Australia and unsettled England's spinners, especially Jack Leach, in the series-opener. After an unbeaten fifty in the second Test, the final Test offered a glimpse of his matur-

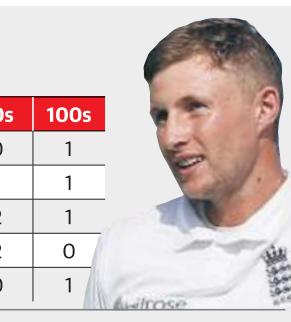
ity as a batsman. After being patient until India closed in on England's first-innings total, Pant turned belligerent to stun even the likes of James Anderson and Ben Stokes and take the game away from the tourists. His glove-work improved drastically as the series progressed, justifying his claim to being the country's top wicketkeeper-batsman. While Pant was pounding

the England bowlers, the Tamil Nadu duo of Ashwin and Washington nonchalantly stamped their authority with the willow. Washington, especially, underlined his utility as a batting all-rounder. He may have run out of partners to be deprived of a deserving hundred twice in the series, but his contribution indicated that he will have many more opportunities to reach the milestone in

the future.

Ashwin, the off-spinner, yet again flummoxed a hapless England line-up. His 32 scalps, which helped him surpass the 400-wicket mark along the way, were a testament to his artistry and his desire to strive for excellence all the time. He had a surprising but able ally in Axar.

The Gujarat left-arm spinner ended with 27 wickets in just three Tests in his debut



WTC final in Southampton: Ganguly

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

India will play its inaugural World Test Championship final against New Zealand at Southampton's Ageas Bowl Stadium from June 18-22, BCCI president Sourav Ganguly confirmed on Monday.

Initially, the final was supposed to be held at the Lord's but Southampton – with a five-star facility inside the stadium – will make it easier for both the ICC and the England and Wales Cricket Board to create a bio-bubble for the two teams.

"The final will be held at Ageas Bowl," Ganguly replied to a query from PTI.

India qualified for the marquee clash after beating England 3-1 in the Test series recently.

The BCCI president, who has been on a medical break, is expected to travel to UK to watch the final match.

Top performers

BATTING

	M	I	R	HS	Avg.	50s	100s
Joe Root	4	8	368	218	46.00	0	1
Rohit Sharma	4	7	345	161	57.50	1	1
Rishabh Pant	4	6	270	101	54.00	2	1
Ben Stokes	4	8	203	82	25.37	2	0
R. Ashwin	4	6	189	106	31.50	0	1

BOWLING

	M	I	Wkts	BBI	Avg.	SR	5W/10W
R. Ashwin	4	8	32	6/61	14.71	35.2	3/0
Axar Patel	3	6	27	6/38	10.59	28.3	4/1
Jack Leach	4	7	18	4/54	28.72	53.6	0/0
Moeen Ali	1	2	8	4/98	28.25	45.7	0/0
James Anderson	3	4	8	3/17	15.87	49.3	0/0



Time to fire: The Indians will be keen to put behind them the reverse in the opening game. ■ BCCI

India women look to regroup after the drubbing in first ODI

Harmanpreet promises a team effort as Mithali's side takes on South Africa in the second match today

SA IN INDIA

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
LUCKNOW

Harmanpreet Kaur is often identified as the one who played the spectacular knock of 171 against Australia.

Her 100th ODI, against South Africa on Sunday, however, was not so memor-

able as India slipped from a position of strength to defeat.

It will be unfair to blame the 32-year-old Harmanpreet for causing the U-turn in the match with that lofted drive when she was in full flow during a classy essay of 40.

It was a collective failure, to consolidate on the foun-

dation. The beautiful playing conditions in the afternoon made the Indian bowling look toothless.

Having dominated South Africa in the past, the Indians know how to get back into the driver's seat in the next four ODIs, all to be played at the Atal Bihari Vajpeyi Ekana Stadium.

Vice-captain Harman-

preet said after the match that the players needed to be "pricey" with their wickets and have good partnerships to render justice to the team's ability. "Next match we will try to play long," said Harmanpreet.

Considering the resolve, it will be interesting to see the response from the team to the challenge of getting

even, in the second ODI on Tuesday.

If anything, the reverse for the host has ignited a lot more interest in the women's series, which should augur well for the game.

The temptation could be to chase, on winning the toss, from the way things unfolded in the opener. How the pitch behaves henceforth

would also be watched with keen interest.

South Africa, finding itself in good competitive rhythm, would attempt to consolidate on the gains from the eight-wicket victory.

"We will try to do what best we can do as a team," assured Harmanpreet. You can expect the Indian team to lift itself and play hard.

MCFC pips Goa on penalties

After a goalless draw, the former wins 6-5 in shootout

ISL 2020-21

SPORTS BUREAU

Fortune favoured a rusty Mumbai City FC side as it beat FC Goa 6-5 on penalties after a goalless draw to reach the final at the GMC Stadium in Bambolim on Monday. It will be Mumbai City's maiden appearance in the sum-

mit clash. Captain Amrinder Singh was the hero for the Islanders as he produced six crucial saves before being substituted by Phurba Lachenpa after extra-time.

In the shootout, the Goa players missed four spot-kicks, three of which were not even on target. Substitute goalkeeper Naveen Ku-

mar's three penalty saves went in vain for Goa.

Mumbai dominated possession in the first half. However, the Gaurs shifted gears and came close to scoring in the 27th minute.

Noguera got the ball from Saviour Gama, dribbled past an opposition player and took a shot. Amrinder produced a decent save, and when Redeem Tlang fired the ball coming off the rebound back on target, Ranawade put his body on the line to save it.

Mumbai didn't attempt a single shot on target all game. Despite Hernan Santana, Hugo Boumous and Ahmed Jahouh missing from the spot, Rowlin Borges netted the winner for the side. **The result:** Mumbai City FC 0 drew with FC Goa 0. Mumbai won 6-5 in penalty shootout.

Tuesday's match: Second semi-final, second leg: ATKMB vs NEUFC, 7.30 p.m.

Toast of Mumbai: Rowlin Borges is mobbed by teammates after putting the team in its maiden final. ■ SPORTZPICS/ISL



Toast of Mumbai: Rowlin Borges is mobbed by teammates after putting the team in its maiden final. ■ SPORTZPICS/ISL

Novak's reign



■ This will be Djokovic's 311th week at the top of men's ATP singles rankings, going past Federer's record of 310

■ After becoming World No. 1 for the first time on July 4, 2011, this is Djokovic's fifth stint at the top of the pile

36
weeks until now,
starting from
Feb. 3, 2020
(1 Major - 2021
Aus Open)

52
weeks from Nov.
5, 2018 to Nov. 3
2019 (2 Majors -
Aus Open 2019 &
Wimbledon 2019)

122
weeks from July 7, 2014 to
Nov. 6, 2016 (5 Majors - Aus
Open 2015 & 2016, Wimbledon
2015, US Open 2015, French Open 2016)

48
from Nov.
5, 2012
to Oct. 6, 2013
(1 Major - Aus Open
2013)

53
weeks from July 4, 2011
to July 8, 2012
(2 Majors - US
Open 2011, Aus Open
2012)

■ In 2020,
Djokovic became
the oldest man
to clinch the
year-end World
No. 1 ranking, a
record previously
held by Nadal

■ Djokovic has
six year-end
No. 1 finishes, a
record he shares
with Sampras

SUDOKU

6	3	1	8	5			
			6	7	8		
8	7					4	
3							
5	1						
4							
9	2	8					
7	6	2	1	4			

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to puzzle 13189

C	I	V	E	L	I	S	E	S	C	A	P	E
A	I	A	E	A	A	E						
ANG	ST	R	O	E	P	E	N	T				
G	C	I	D	T	I							
CO	M	E	W	E	A	R	T	H				

TV PICKS

Champions League: Sony Ten 1, 2 & 3 (SD & HD), 1.30 a.m. (Wednesday)

India vs South Africa: 2nd ODI, Star Sports 2 (SD & HD), 9 a.m.

Vijay Hazare trophy: Star Sports 1 (SD & HD), 9 a.m.

ISL: Semifinal, Star Sports 1, 2 & 3 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.

ATP 250: Chile Open, Eurosport (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.

IN BRIEF



Damian Lillard does it for Team LeBron

ATLANTA

Damian Lillard nailed a game-ending three-pointer from just inside half-court as LeBron James improved to 4-0 as an NBA All-Star game captain with a 170-150 win over Team Durant here on Sunday night. Giannis Antetokounmpo captured the Kobe Bryant MVP Award with a game-high 35 points. AFP



Joan Laporta back as Barcelona president

MADRID

Joan Laporta returned as Barcelona president on Sunday after winning the club's elections by a landslide. Laporta was last president between 2003 and 2010, which included overseeing the hugely successful appointment of Pep Guardiola as coach and the iconic treble-winning team of 2008-09. AFP

Schwartzman claims Argentina Open title

Buenos Aires

Home favourite Diego Schwartzman beat compatriot Francisco Cerundolo 6-1, 6-2 on Sunday to lift the ATP Argentina Open. It was a fourth ATP Tour title for the World No. 9 and top seed. It was the first time an Argentine had won in Buenos Aires since David Nalbandian in 2008. AFP

Hockey: India finishes tour unbeaten

ANTWERP

Striker Mandeep Singh struck a brace as the Indian men's hockey team eked out a close 3-2 win over Great Britain to end its Europe tour on an unbeaten note here on Monday. PTI

Ishar Singh Deol passes away

CHANDIGARH

Veteran Indian athlete Ishar Singh Deol, has died at the age of 91. Deol had won many medals for the country and the State of Punjab since 1951 and was awarded the Dhan Chand National Award in 2009 for his lifelong contribution towards sports. PTI

Ramkumar loses in first round

DOHA

Qualifier Ramkumar Ramanathan was beaten 6-4, 6-2 by Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan in the first round of the \$890,920 ATP tennis tournament here on Monday.

Delhi Audit, MoF triumph

SEPCIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Ministry of Finance and Delhi Audit won the men's and women's titles respectively in the inter-ministry badminton tournament at the AIIMS Gymkhana. A set of wrong results were carried in these columns on Monday. The error is regretted.

The results (finals):
Men: Ministry of Finance bt Delhi Audit 3-1 (Saurabh Sharma bt Himanshu Saroha 22-20, 8-21, 21-14; Sachin Rawat bt Vijay Sharma 21-11, 21-14; Amarjeet & Shanker lost to Himanshu Saroha & Tushar Sharma 13-21, 11-21; Sidharth Nandal bt Tushar Sharma 21-13, 7-4 retd.)
Women: Delhi Audit bt Ministry of Finance 2-0 (Sheetal Kargetti bt Lalita Dahiya 26-24, 24-22; Sheetal Kargetti & Swati Sharma bt Lalita Dahiya & Sanjeeta 21-19, 21-18).

Samarth, Padikkal make it a no-contest

The two help Karnataka post a huge score that proves too much for Kerala

HAZARE TROPHY

SPORTS BUREAU

Much before the result was formalised, Karnataka's openers firmly shut the door on Kerala and paved the way for an 80-run win at the Air Force Ground, Palam, here on Monday and a place in the semifinals of the Vijay Hazare tournament.

Opting to field in perfect batting conditions proved Kerala's undoing.

Nothing went right for Sachin Baby and his men as R. Samarth (192, 158b, 22x4, 3x6) and Devdutt Padikkal (101, 119b, 10x4, 2x6) laid a 249-run foundation as Karnataka posted a towering 338 for three in 50 overs.

Never in the hunt

In reply, Kerala was never in the hunt. Barring the resistance offered by Vathsal Go-



In good nick: Karnataka openers R. Samarth and Devdutt Padikkal

vind (92, 96b, 6x4, 3x6) and Mohammed Azharuddeen (52, 34b, 5x4, 6x2) during their sixth-wicket stand of 92 runs, there was no bright spot for Kerala.

Medium-pacer Ronit More (5/36) scalped three of the top four Kerala batsmen

– Robin Uthappa (2), Rohan Kannumma (0) and a well-set Vathsal – to ensure the chase was never really on.

Earlier, Samarth and Padikkal dictated the course of the match by punishing the medium-pacers.

Manish Pandey (34 n.o.)



added 249 runs to shut Kerala out of the game. ■ FILE PHOTOS

provided the late flourish.

S. Sreesanth (10-173-0) and Basil Thampi (7-0-67-0) undid all the good work done early on by off-spinner Jalaj Saxena (10-1-34-0) who opened the bowling. Medium-pacer N.P. Basil (8-0-57-3) was the only successful

bowler.

The scores: Karnataka 338/3 in 50 overs (R. Samarth 192, Devdutt Padikkal 101) bt Kerala 258 in 43.4 overs (Vathsal Vinod 92, Mohammed Azharuddeen 52, Ronit More 5/36).

Tuesday's fixtures: Delhi v UP, Mumbai v Saurashtra.

India women to meet England in one-off Test

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

BCCI secretary Jay Shah on Monday announced that the India women's team will take on England in a one-off Test match, which will be held later this year.

The last Test match that Mithali Raj and her team played was against South Africa at Mysuru in December, 2014.

India is currently playing a five-match ODI series against South Africa in Lucknow – after almost 12 months of COVID-19 enforced break.

This series will be fol-

lowed by a T20 series.

Shah took to Twitter to make the announcement on International Women's Day.

"On the occasion of International Womens Day, I'm pleased to announce that TeamIndia, @BCCIWomans will play a one-off Test match against @ECB_cricket later this year. The 'women in blue' will be donning the whites again," tweeted Shah.

Shah did not announce the venue of the Test on the occasion but it is expected to happen during the tour of UK, sometime in June or July.

Jadhav and Deepika are best at the trials

ARCHERY

SPORTS BUREAU

PUNE

Pravin Jadhav and Deepika Kumari emerged as the best recurve archers in the selection trials at the Army Sports Institute, Pune, on Monday.

Interestingly, the second and third place winners among women, Anjita Bhakat and Komalika Bari respectively, were also from Jharkhand and won four matches apiece.

Chance for team quota

The Indian women will get one point apiece for their special contribution.

Jadhav, who secured a grand total of eight points, topped the table ahead of Atanu Das (7.5) and Tarundeep Rai (6). The trio had secured a team silver medal in the 2019 World championships to earn India three quota places in the Olympics.

Deepika had bagged a lone quota place in the women's section in a continental qualification event in Paris from June 18 to 21.

Deepika, Anjita and Komalika will represent the country and if they earn the quota, they, like the men, will take part in the Olympics in the team event as well as in three individual slots.

Top three: Men: 1. Pravin Jadhav (8), 2. Atanu Das (7.5), 3. Tarundeep Rai (6).

Women: 1. Deepika Kumari (9), 2. Anjita Bhakat (7), 3. Komalika Bari (5.5).

Panchal shows the way for Gujarat

The skipper sets up his team's massive win over Andhra

RAKESH RAO

NEW DELHI



Leading from the front: Panchal's century took Gujarat to a

total that proved beyond Andhra's reach. ■ FILE PHOTO

total that proved beyond Andhra's reach. ■ FILE PHOTO

Gujarat skipper and opener Priyank Panchal showed the way with a masterly 134 and set up his team's massive 117-run victory over Andhra in the quarterfinals of the Vijay Hazare tournament at the Feroze Shah Kotla ground here on Monday.

Opting to bat, Panchal's knock off 131 balls was dotted with 10 boundaries and two sixes as his knock took Gujarat to 299 for seven in 50 overs.

In response, Andhra lost wickets at regular intervals and its innings folded at 182 in 41.2 overs.

Ricky Bhui (67) was the only one who showed some resolve on a batting pitch.

Medium-pacer Arzan Nagwaswalla removed the Andhra openers and sent back skipper Hanuma Vihari for a

second wicket with Rahul Shah (36, 3x4), 53 for third wicket with Het Patel (28, 2x4) and another 57 with Rupal Patel (35, 2x4, 2x6) to keep Andhra at bay.

The scores: Gujarat 299 for seven in 50 overs (Priyank Panchal 134) bt Andhra 182 in 41.2 overs (Ricky Bhui 67, Arzan Nagwaswalla 4/30).

BFI to take reality check following virus strike

BOXING

Y.B. SARANGI

KOLKATA

Even as Ashish Kumar recovers from COVID-19 in Spain, the Boxing Federation of India (BFI) plans to adopt a practical approach regarding upcoming exposure trips.

Team back home

The Indian boxers, barring Ashish, have returned home from the Boxam tournament in Spain. According to a BFI source, all of them have tested negative for COVID-19.

It also understands that boxers' performances will drop without quality competition and training in the run-up to the Olympics.

India had to keep up with the competition-training schedule followed by other countries, said R.K. Sacheti of BFI.

"For example, the USA has been participating in various competitions in Europe despite the COVID situation. Everything is driven by the Olympics," he said.

Turkey next

The Indian boxers are scheduled to travel to Turkey for another exposure trip later this month.

The BFI has received other invitations from Europe and America and will take a call soon.

Railway volleyball coach passes away

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

KOCHI

Railway volleyball coach Rajesh Tiwari passed away in his room in the KIIT University hostel in Bhubaneswar on Monday.

Rajesh, a former Railway player who hails from Madhya Pradesh, had come to Bhubaneswar for the ongoing Senior Nationals as the coach of the Indian Railway men's team.

Rajesh, who must be below 50, was found dead in the room in the afternoon, said Bijoy Babu, the assistant coach of the Kerala men's team, from Bhubaneswar.

Railways, the runner-up in the last edition, was scheduled to play Kerala in a men's league match on Monday evening and the match has now been postponed to Tuesday morning.

TENNIS ROUND-UP

Bhosale, 5. Marianna Zakyryuk (Ukr), 6. Emily Webley-Smith (GBR), 7. Zeel Desai, 8. Irina Khromacheva (Rus).

Qualifying results (third and final round): Farhat Aleen

Qamar bt Radhika Yadav 6-1,

6-0; Sravya Shivani bt Renne

Singla 6-1, 6-3; Soha Sadiq bt

Pratyusha Rachapudi 6-3, 6-2;

Shreya Tatavarthy bt Tejasvi

Kate 6-3, 6-1; Nidhi Chilumula

bt Sonashe Bhattacharjee 6-1, 6-0;

Arthi Munian bt Yashika Venu

6-1, 6-1.

Lakshanya ousts Suhitha

DEHRADUN: Lakshanya

Vishwanath knocked out the

fifth seed and last week's

champion Suhitha Maruri

7-5, 6-4 in the girls' first

ATKMB, NEUFC eye maiden final berth

No 'away goal' rule this time, have to focus on the result: Jamil

ISL 2020-21

SPORTS BUREAU

NORTH EAST UNITED FC will

be looking to pick up from where Idrissa Sylla had left off by scoring the equaliser in the added-time against ATK Mohun Bagan, in the first leg of the second semifinal of the Indian Super League.

The Guinean striker