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\*AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2020

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21 STATES IN  
INDIA\*

30

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The Kalyan Jewellers India Limited is proposing, subject to receipt of requisite approvals, market conditions and other considerations, an initial public offering of its equity shares and has filed a red herring prospectus dated March 09, 2021 ("RHP") with the Registrar of Companies, Ernakulam. The RHP is available on the websites of BSE Limited and National Stock Exchange of India Limited at [www.bseindia.com](http://www.bseindia.com) and [www.nseindia.com](http://www.nseindia.com) respectively, SEBI at [www.sebi.gov.in](http://www.sebi.gov.in), and Axis Capital Limited, Citigroup Global Markets India Private Limited, ICICI Securities Limited, SBI Capital Markets Limited and BOB Capital Markets Limited at [www.axiscapital.co.in](http://www.axiscapital.co.in), [www.online.citibank.co.in/rhtm/citigroupglobalscreen1.htm](http://www.online.citibank.co.in/rhtm/citigroupglobalscreen1.htm), [www.icicisecurities.com](http://www.icicisecurities.com), [www.sbiCAPS.com](http://www.sbiCAPS.com) and [www.bobcaps.in](http://www.bobcaps.in), respectively. Investors should note that investment in equity shares involves a high degree of risk and for details refer to the RHP, including the section titled "Risk Factors".

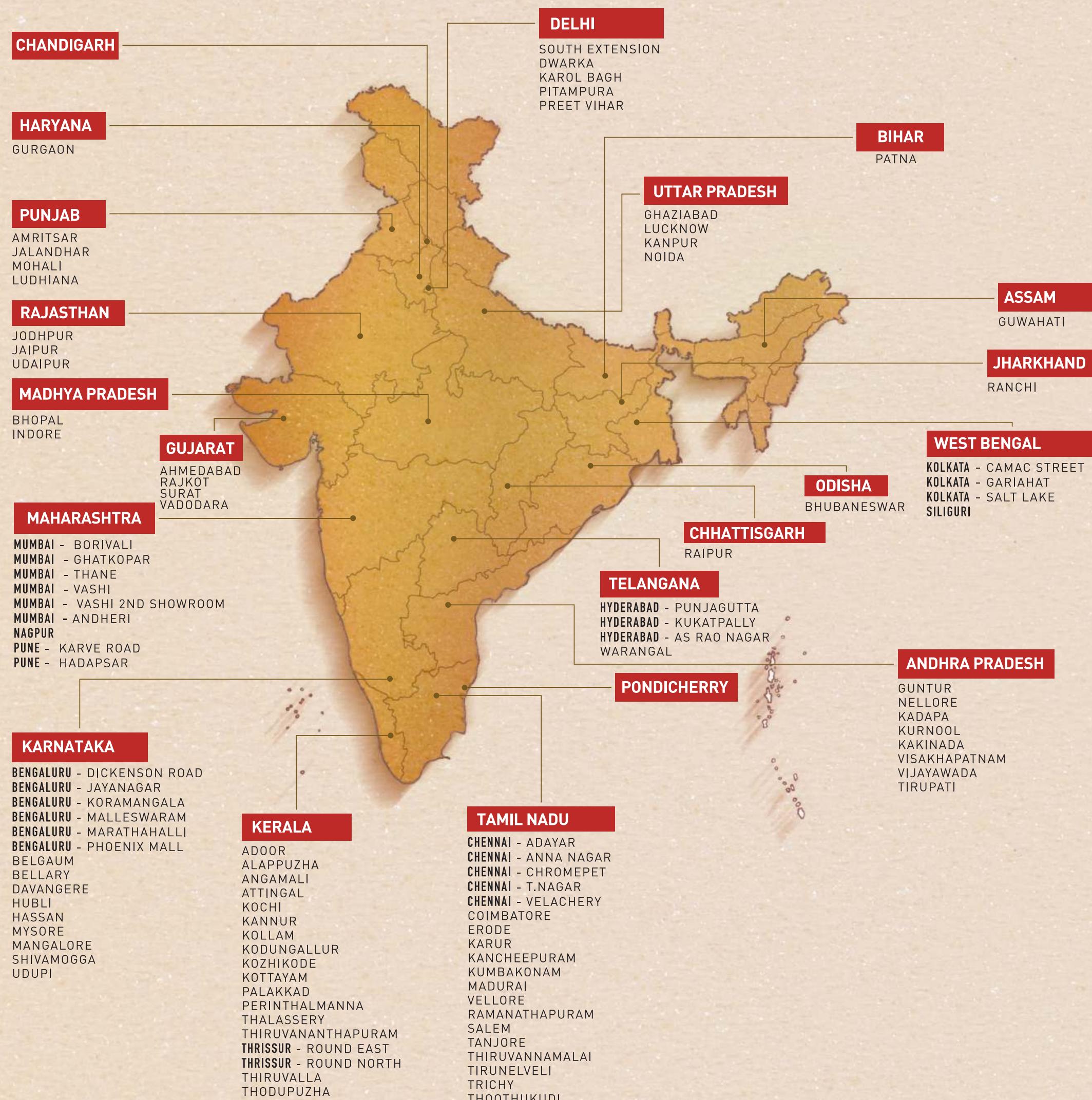
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**REFER TO THIS MAP AS:-**

1:18 million plain Outline Map of India.

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1. © Government of India. Copyright 2021.
2. The responsibility for the correctness of internal details rests with the publisher.
3. The territorial waters of India extend into the sea to a distance of twelve nautical miles measured from the appropriate base line.

SHOWROOM CENTRE PRESENCE ACROSS INDIA AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2020. [MAP IS NOT TO SCALE]

4. The administrative headquarters of Chandigarh, Haryana & Punjab are at Chandigarh.
5. The interstate boundaries amongst Arunachal Pradesh, Assam & Meghalaya shown on this map are as interpreted from the "North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971," but have yet to be verified.
6. The external boundaries & coastlines of India agree with the Record/Master Copy certified by Survey of India

7. The state boundaries between Uttarakhand & Uttar Pradesh, Bihar & Jharkhand & Chattisgarh & Madhya Pradesh have not been verified by the Governments concerned.
8. The spellings of names in this map, have been taken from various sources.
9. The administrative boundaries of J&K UT and Ladakh UT shown here are yet to be authenticated by concerned authorities.

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#### Mamata injured during campaign, alleges plot

KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday suffered injuries to her left leg while campaigning in Nandigram and was rushed to Kolkata for treatment. Ms. Banerjee alleged four or five people surrounded and pushed her.

NEWS ► PAGE 9



#### LS passes National Capital Territory Bill

NEW DELHI  
The Lok Sabha on Wednesday passed the National Capital Territory of Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Second (Amendment) Bill, 2021, that seeks to regularise unauthorised colonies that existed in the National Capital Territory of Delhi as of June 1, 2014.

NEWS ► PAGE 10

## Tirath Singh Rawat is new CM of Uttarakhand

A long-time BJP member, he was the dark horse for the post



Taking over: Uttarakhand CM Tirath Singh Rawat, left, with his predecessor, Trivendra Singh Rawat, in Dehradun. — PTI

NISTULA HEBBAR  
NEW DELHI  
Garhwal MP Tirath Singh Rawat on Wednesday took oath as the Chief Minister of Uttarakhand at the Raj Bhavan in Dehradun after the BJP Legislature Party elected him its leader.

His predecessor, Trivendra Singh Rawat, resigned on Tuesday.

The meeting of the BJP Legislature Party was held under the supervision of the party's central observers – former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Raman Singh and Rajya Sabha member Dushyant Gautam.

**U.P. to Uttarakhand**  
Mr. Tirath, 57, who was the Uttarakhand BJP chief from 2013 to 2015, was a member of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council, before the creation of Uttarakhand, during the period 1997-2002.

He was an MLA in Uttarakhand from 2012 to 2017, and previously held the post of Education Minister

from 2000 to 2002.

Speaking to presspersons, he thanked legislators and party leaders for the opportunity. He asserted that he would "carry forward the work done by former Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat".

A long-time member of the BJP, Mr. Tirath was the dark horse for the Chief Minister's post, where the only thing clear was that the choice would devolve on a

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

person from the Rajput community.

#### Low-profile person

A low-profile person, Mr. Tirath is considered close to Union Home Minister Amit Shah and was his close aide during the latter's *vistarak* programme of organisational strengthening in 2016-17 held over 120 days.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

## Haryana government defeats no-trust vote

MLAs vote along party lines to defeat Congress motion by 55 votes to 32

#### ASHOK KUMAR CHANDIGARH

The no-confidence motion moved by the Congress against the Bharatiya Janata Party-Janayak Janta Party coalition government in Haryana on Wednesday was defeated by 55 votes to 32.

#### Independent MLAs

The legislators voted along party lines with two Independents – Meham MLA Balraj Kundu and Dadri MLA Sombir Sangwan – supporting the vote of

no-confidence.

In the 90-member Assembly, the BJP and the JJP have 40 and 10 MLAs respectively, besides the support of five Independents.

Lone Haryana Janhit Party MLA Gopal Kanda, representing Sirsa, also voted in favour of the government.

The Congress has 30 MLAs. Two Assembly seats of Elle-nabab and Kalka had fallen vacant earlier this year.

Moving the no-confidence motion against the Manohar Lal-led govern-

ment, Leader of the Opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda said the coalition government had completely lost the confidence of the people.

**Minimum Support Price**  
Mr. Hooda said both parties in government had promised Minimum Support Price to farmers in their manifestos, but forgot about it after coming to power. He also raised issue of unemployment.

Mr. Hooda, however, said he won't talk about the three farm laws since they were outside the ambit of the Assembly.

Opposing the motion, JJP leader and Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala said "the BJP was his party's natural ally".

Mr. Lal, in his reply, said the Congress had the culture of "lack of confidence". He took a dig at factionalism in the Opposition party saying that they did not trust even their own leaders.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

#### PRISCILLA JEBARAJ NEW DELHI

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education has recommended that all government schools start providing free breakfast in the coming academic year as part of an expansion of the mid-day meal scheme envisaged by the National Education Policy. However, Education Ministry officials say a severe funding crunch is likely to delay the initiative.

#### Fund crunch

Free breakfasts would involve an additional budget of ₹4,000 crore, according to senior officials, but the School Education Department has seen a budget cut of almost ₹5,000 crore this year.

In its submission to the panel, the Department said it had proposed two new components to the mid-day meal scheme during 2021-22 – an expansion of coverage from the current Class 1-8 students to include pre-primary students as well, and the provision of breakfast.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

#### Breakfast in schools plan faces delay

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## Kerala HC restrains Centre on IT rules

Online legal news portal challenges regulations

#### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT KOCHI

The Kerala High Court on Wednesday restrained the Centre from taking coercive action against Live Law Media Private Ltd., which owns a legal news portal, for not complying with Part III of the new IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

**Bone of contention** The new IT rules introduce a three-tier structure for ensuring observance and adherence to the code of ethics by digital media publishers, and addressing the grievances made in relation to the publishers

**Level I** - Self-regulation by the publishers

**Level II** - Self-regulation by the self-regulating bodies of the publishers

**Level III** - Oversight mechanism by the Central government

time till March 24 for complying with the rules.

The petition said Part III of the rules imposed an unconstitutional three-tier complaints and adjudication structure on publishers.

**'Chilling effect'** This administrative regulation on digital news media would make it virtually im-

possible for small or medium-sized publishers, such as the petitioner, to function. It

would have a chilling effect on such entities, the petition said.

The creation of a grievance redressal mechanism, through a governmental oversight body (an inter-departmental committee constituted under Rule 14)

amounted to excessive regulation, it contended.

The petitioner pointed out that Rule 4(2), which makes it mandatory for every social media intermediary to enable tracing of originators of information on its platform, purportedly in furtherance of Section 69 of the IT Act, violated Article 19(I) (a) (freedom of speech and expression).

It also deprived the intermediaries of their "safe-harbour protections" under Section 79 of the IT Act.

The petition also added that the rules obligating messaging intermediaries to alter their infrastructure to "fingerprint" each message on a mass scale for every user to trace the first originator was violative of the fundamental right to privacy of internet users.

## Stick to code, Karnataka HC tells media

#### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT BENGALURU

The Karnataka High Court on Wednesday ordered issue of notices to the Centre and the State government and 70 media platforms, including newspapers, on a petition filed by a lawyer and BJP

member, seeking a direction to the authorities to take steps to safeguard the right to privacy of individuals and ensure that media outlets don't invade the privacy of individuals by breaching law.

A Bench of Justice P.S. Di-

nesh Kumar, in an interim order, directed that any broadcast in the media, governed by the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995, should be strictly in conformity with the terms of "Programme Code" defined under this Act.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

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## IN BRIEF

## CISF celebrates its 52nd Raising Day in Ghaziabad

NEW DELHI

The CISF celebrated its 52nd Raising Day at Ghaziabad on Wednesday. Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla was the Chief Guest. DG, S.K. Jaiswal, said: "It was a matter of great pride for us that we have completed 52 years in securing the most sensitive and critical infrastructure of the country." On this occasion, 1,489 Assistant Sub Inspectors have been promoted to the rank of Sub-Inspectors, Mr. Jaiswal also said.

## International conference on modern media held

GREATER NOIDA

KCC Institute of Legal and Higher Education, Greater Noida, organised a two-day international conference on March 5 and 6. The theme of the conference was 'Modern Media and Communication Technology'. It covered topics like, blue journalism, data storytelling, open-source technology, collaborative human networks, fact-checking and debunking, AI-generated synthetic media. The institute also felicitated meritorious students.

## Plaint seeks FIR against Kangana

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

A court here on Wednesday sought a status report from Delhi Police on a plea seeking lodging of an FIR against actress Kangana Ranaut over tweets allegedly aimed at defaming and inciting hatred towards the Sikh community.

Metropolitan Magis-

## Two more arrested in Red Fort violence case

One is settled in the U.K. and another resides in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Two more persons have been arrested for their alleged involvement in Red Fort violence in January, said a senior police officer on Wednesday.

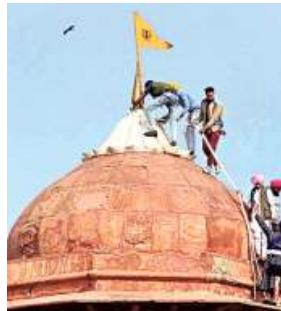
Maninderjit Singh, (23), and Khempreet Singh (21), who were actively involved in the violence at Red Fort, were arrested on Tuesday.

## Forged documents

According to the police, Maninderjit, a Dutch national settled in Birmingham, U.K., was arrested from Indira Gandhi International Airport while he was trying to flee from India on forged travel documents and posing himself as Jarmanjot Singh.

Khempreet is a resident of Swaroop Nagar, who the police said had assaulted personnel on duty inside the well area of Red Fort with spear. He was absconding and wilfully evading his arrest.

As per his plan, he was going to fly to Nepal from Delhi and then head to the U.K. A



Violence ensued at the Red Fort on Republic Day this year. ■ FILE PHOTO

look out circular was also issued by the police against him in connection with the case and he is previously involved in two criminal cases, the police said.

Khempreet is a resident of Swaroop Nagar, who the police said had assaulted personnel on duty inside the well area of Red Fort with spear. He was absconding and wilfully evading his arrest.

As per his plan, he was going to fly to Nepal from Delhi and then head to the U.K. A

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Monika Bhardwaj said the presence of Maninderjit at Red Fort was established through electronic evidence.

There are video footage on record, which shows his presence alongside the unlawfully assembled unruly riotous mob at Red Fort carrying spear during farmers agitation on January 26, the police said.

The police said Maninderjit is settled in Birmingham and is employed as a labourer in a construction field. In December 2019, he visited India and due to the lockdown in 2020, he could not return. He was produced before the court and a four-day police custody remand has been taken.

Khempreet, who stays in Swaroop Nagar here, is a close accomplice of arrested accused Maninder Singh, they added.

## Protesting farmers make their 'homes' green

Singhu border beautified with potted plants; garden with shaded seats built

SHINJINI GHOSH

NEW DELHI

After installing semi-permanent structures on the highway, several protesting farmers at the Singhu border have now started beautifying the perimeters of their "homes" by placing potted plants, among other things.

Farmers have been camping at the Capital's borders for over three months now, demanding a legal guarantee of minimum support price and a repeal of the three controversial agriculture laws brought in by the Centre last year.

The protesting farmers have maintained that they will not vacate the various highways unless their demands are met and that they are ready for a long haul.

With the onset of summer and the mercury rising, among other provisions, like installing semi-permanent structures on the highway, several of the units are now bordered with potted plants.

The flowers, farmers say, are equivalent to beautifying



People said they worked for over two weeks to transform the area into a garden. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

their "homes" which is now at the border.

Manjeet Singh, a farmer from Punjab's Fatehgarh Sahib district, said: "We have tried to adapt with the changing circumstances. With each passing day, it is becoming evident that our struggle will be a long one. Now that we have to live here indefinitely, we thought of beautifying the place as well, which is similar to what we would have done back in our villages."

A garden with shaded seats has also been built by some of the farmers near the main stage at Singhu Border with the aid of NGO United Sikhs. It will be made open for the public over the next week.

## Plants from Murthal

Sarabjit Singh, a 70-year-old farmer from Punjab's Ludhiana district, said:

"Around 10-15 of us worked for over two weeks to help transforming this area into a garden. Three trolleys were put to use and we brought soil from around 4km away. The plants were brought

from Murthal."

"We have even installed generators and lights over here. While the garden has not been opened yet for the public, as the grass needs to grow a little more, we hope that in another 10 days, people can come and sit over here," said Mr. Singh.

Balgovind, a volunteer with United Sikhs, said: "This area had earlier become a dumpsite of sorts. The waste water from the 'langars' was getting accumulated over here and with the changing weather it had started emitting a foul smell. It was then that it was decided to transform the place."

Volunteers said that while this was the first such project, other such parks can also be created if there is availability of requisite space on the highway.

"This is the first such project but if other farmers, who are further down the highway, want such a facility, then we will make similar ones for them too," said Mr. Balgovind.

## 1,353 flats allotted under DDA housing scheme

Waiting list of 338 applicants also drawn up

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) on Wednesday conducted the draw for allotment of flats under this year's housing scheme.

According to the urban body, 1,353 flats were allotted against 22,752 applications received this year.

The housing scheme, launched in January this year, offered flats under four categories - High Income Group (HIG), Middle Income Group (MIG), Low Income Group (LIG) and Economically Weaker Section (EWS) categories.

The flats offered are in various locations, including Vasant Kunj, Dwarka and Jasola.

"The draw was conducted based on random number generation technique. Allotment of flats through the draw was made to 1,353 applicants based on their preference or choice of localities," the DDA said in a statement issued.

Officials added that a waiting list of 338 applicants were also drawn up.

"The waitlisted applicants

**C**The draw was conducted based on random number generation technique. Allotment of flats through the draw was made to 1,353 applicants based on their preference or choice of localities

DELHI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

would be allotted flats in case of cancellation or surrender of the flats by the main allottees. Registration money of all unsuccessful applicants, including the waitlisted applicants will be refunded within 15 days. The surrendered or cancelled flats will be allotted to the waitlisted applicants through the same draw process, if they give their consent for allotment and deposit the registration money again and when demanded by the DDA before the draw," the land-owning agency said.

This was the first time when the entire process of the scheme - application, payment, issue of demand letter to successful applicants, cancellation and refund of money - has been made online.

## Gurugram employees up in arms for pay parity

They have been seeking redress for 2 yrs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GURUGRAM

Around 160 employees of an engineering firm here have been running from pillar to post for the past two years seeking pay parity and benefits at par with fellow regular workers, but to no avail.

The aggrieved employees, working as seniors

inspectors, inspectors and assistant inspectors at Sunbeam Lightweighing Solutions Private Limited, have allegedly been denied pay and other benefits at par with the regular workers of the company.

Mukesh Sharma, president of Sunbeam Lightweighing Solutions Workers Unions, told *The Hindu* that the salaries and other benefits of the regular workers were increased twice over the past five years as per the agreements reached with the management in 2015 and 2018, but the same benefits and salary hike were denied to these 160-odd employees.

"The job profile of these 160-odd employees is the same as other regular workers. We have raised the matter with the management on several occasions, but to no avail. The management argues that the employees don't fall in the category of the workers, but are the staff members," said Mr. Sharma.

The workers' unions also made a complaint to the Labour Department in this regard in 2019, and the Assistant Labour Commissioner, Circle-4, Gurugram in his report on October 9 last year said that these employees fell within the definition of the "workers" and were entitled to the benefits as per the agreements.

The unions' advocate Monu Kuhar said that these employees were all set to move

labour court seeking relief, but it was delayed since the judge retired and no new appointment was made.

The company's human resource vice-president Gunjan Tiwari did not respond to repeated calls and messages to seek his response in this matter.

## Search warrant against advocate Pracha stayed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Wednesday stayed the operation of search warrants issued against advocate Mehmood Pracha, who is representing some of the accused in the cases related to the riots that took place in Delhi last year.

Mr. Pracha's office was raided by the Delhi Police on Tuesday in connection with an FIR alleging that the advocate tutored a witness to initiate a false riot case.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Pankaj Sharma, who passed the directions on an application filed by Mr. Pracha, said: "Till the pendency of this application, the search warrants issued against the applicant is stayed." The court reserved its order for March 12 on the advocate's plea, which has also sought a direction to the police to retrieve only the relevant information from his hard disk in the presence of a Magistrate.

## Provide cover to homosexual woman, court directs police

Petitioner said she was forcibly married in 2019

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday directed the police to provide protection to a 23-year-old homosexual woman, who on Sunday escaped from her marital home in the Capital after her parents tried to conduct experimental "cure" for her sexual orientation.

The woman, in her plea, said that she was forcibly married to a man in 2019 despite her on many occasions apprising her parents about her sexual orientation and about her identification as a homosexual. She said her parents and extended family refused to acknowledge, accept and respect her sexuality and instead kept insisting that homosexuality is an illness of which she needs to be cured.

In her petition, filed through advocates Vrinda Grover and Soutik Banerjee, she said her previous attempts to put an end to the marital relationship with her husband were not successful. "The marriage was never consummated. On some pretext or the other, the petitioner's husband delayed breaking this news to his family and the petitioner continued to live in the misery of which she needs to be cured.

She approached an NGO Act Now for Harmony and Democracy (ANHAD), seeking a safe house. The NGO then informed the local police station that she has left her matrimonial home on her own accord and approached their office for help.

The petition stated that the police, "in brazen breach of law and their statutory obligations, leaked the information of the petitioner's escape/departure from her matrimonial home and also leaked the contact details of the activists of ANHAD NGO to the petitioner's father and other family members".

Taking note of the plea, Justice Mukta Gupta directed the police that no NGO members are harassed or harmed for helping her. The court also issued notice to the Delhi government on the petition.



will bring disgrace to them in the society.

On March 7, her mother called her up to inform her that she has contacted a religious guru, who will "cure" her of her sexual orientation. "Fearing for her safety, the petitioner decided on the same day to leave her matrimonial home so that her family cannot find her and force her to undergo dehumanising rituals and ceremonies," the plea said.

She approached an NGO Act Now for Harmony and Democracy (ANHAD), seeking a safe house. The NGO then informed the local police station that she has left her matrimonial home on her own accord and approached their office for help.

The petition stated that the police, "in brazen breach of law and their statutory obligations, leaked the information of the petitioner's escape/departure from her matrimonial home and also leaked the contact details of the activists of ANHAD NGO to the petitioner's father and other family members".

Taking note of the plea, Justice Mukta Gupta directed the police that no NGO members are harassed or harmed for helping her. The court also issued notice to the Delhi government on the petition.

We are taking all necessary COVID 19 Precautionary Measures

# SHIRT TROUSER & JEANS SALE

Wedding Collection

ARROW ColorPlus PARK AVENUE LOUIS PHILIPPE

• PUNCHKUAN ROAD, Garwal Bhawan, (Near Jhandewalan, Gole Chkr.)  
 • WAZIRPUR A-5, Near Richi Rich Banquet (Opp. Shalimar Bagh)  
 • JANAKPURI B-1/2, Main Najafgarh Road, Opp. Metro Pillar 543  
 • NOIDA, Nirula's Sec-2, Near Metro Station, Sec-15, Noida, UP  
 • LAJPAT NAGAR, 49, Main Ring Road, Adj. Haldi Ram, Near Moolchand Crossing

GOVERNMENT OF JHARKHAND  
 OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER  
 DRINKING WATER & SANITATION DIVISION NO.-2, GIRIDIH  
 Very Short Term E-Procurement Notice (2nd Call)  
 PR No-241793  
 Tender Notice Reference no. - DWSD/GIRIDIH/38/2020-21  
 Dated : 10-03-2021

1	Name of the Department	Drinking Water and Sanitation Department, Jharkhand, Ranchi.
2	Name of the Advertiser	Executive Engineer, Drinking Water & Sanitation, Division No.-2, Giridih
3	Date of publication of Tender on Website	12.03.2021/ 5.00 PM
4	Last date / Time for receipt of Bid	18.03.2021/4.00 PM
5	Last date / Time for receipt of Earnest Money & Cost of B.O.Q.	19.03.2021/ 2.00 PM
6	Name of office where receipt of Earnest Money & Cost of B.O.Q.	Office of the Executive Engineer, D. W. & S. No-2, Giridih Office of the Superintending Engineer, D. W. & S. Circle, Dhanbad
7	Date of opening of Tender	19.03.2021/ 4.00 PM
8	Contact no. of Procurement office	7292898986

Sl. No.	Particulars	Group No.	Nos. of Tube Well	Estimated Cost (In Rs.)	Earnest money (In Rs.)	Cost of BOQ (In Rs.)	Time of Completion
1	Construction of Gravel tube well of 300 x 125mm dia. x 60 Mtrs.(av.) depth Complete (by Mechanical Rotary Rig machine with mud pump mounted on truck) and D.T.H Rig Machine with installation of L.M-II hand Pump. Turn Key Basis under 5+5 T/wells in each Phasor under State Plan in villages of GIRIDIH district under State Plan of D.W. & S. Division No.-2, GIRIDIH for the year 2020-21.	GPT-12	27	3462899.00	69500.00	5000.00	3 Months
2							

Note:- No Claim shall be entertained because of disruption of internet service being used by the bidders. Bidders are advised to upload their bids well in advance to avoid last minute technical snags.  
 Further details can be seen on website <http://jharkhandtenders.gov.in>  
 Estimated cost may be increase or decrease.

Executive Engineer  
 Drinking Water & Sanitation  
 Division No.-2, Giridih  
 PR 243573 Drinking Water and Sanitation (20-21)\_D

Timings  
**DELHI**

THURSDAY, MAR. 11	
RISE 06:36	SET 18:27
RISE 05:33	SET 16:33
FRIDAY, MAR. 12	
RISE 06:34	SET 18:28
RISE 06:10	SET 17:32

SATURDAY, MAR. 13

RISE 06:33 SET 18:29

RISE 06:43 SET 18:28

**Delhi Weather** max min

Delhi City 33 18

Safdarjung 33 18

Palam 32 19

**Delhi Palam Today**

33°C Cool misty/hazy morning and warm day likely. Sky would turn partly cloudy and chances of thunderstorm towards night.

**Delhi Palam Tomorrow**

32°C One or two spell of rain and thunderstorm with gusty winds likely at some places.

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**Air Quality of Delhi-NCR**

Delhi	175	Gurugram	122
Ghaziabad	221	Faridabad	163
Noida	152	Greater Noida	239
■ Good	■ Satisfactory	■ Moderate	
0-50	51-100	101-200	
■ Poor	■ Very Poor	■ Severe	
201-300	301-400	>400	

Air Quality Index at 4 p.m., yesterday (Average of past 24 hours) | Source: CPCB

# CM promises free trips to Ram Temple

Kejriwal says AAP's six-year rule an attempt at replicating an ideal 'Ram Rajya', takes potshots at BJP

JATIN ANAND  
NEW DELHI

Patriotism gave way to devotion for Lord Ram a day after the 'Deshbhakti Budget' was passed at the Delhi Assembly with Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal promising free trips to Ayodhya's Ram Temple to senior citizens and terming the AAP's six-year rule in Delhi an attempt at replicating an ideal 'Ram Rajya'.

The Chief Minister also attacked the BJP and the Congress accusing both of deliberately keeping the people of the country "poor and illiterate" so they could be "hired" for political rallies and events, demarcated into votebanks and incapable of questioning their government.

The BJP, on the other hand, sought to corner the government for seeking to steal credit from the Centre for its achievements on the management of the pandemic and social welfare sector during the lockdown.

"All of us worship Lord Rama. Personally, I worship

Lord Hanuman who was a devotee of Lord Rama. Hence I am a devotee of both. Lord Rama was the emperor of Ayodhya. During his rule, people were content as they had access to all basic facilities. This was called the 'Ram Rajya'...we have been constantly striving to establish this model of 'Ram Rajya' in Delhi for the past six years," Mr. Kejriwal said in his address to the House.

The AAP government's efforts at implementing the 'Ram Rajya' were based on 10 principles, including rights related to food, electricity, water, education, health, employment, houses, respect for women and the elderly, Mr. Kejriwal said.

People belonging to various castes, class, and religious backgrounds were equal for the AAP government just like in the Ram Rajya where equality was the main principle with no tolerance for discrimination, he said.



Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal with Finance Minister and Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

"After the judgment of the Supreme Court, a magnificent temple is yet to be constructed and I would like to put forth in front of the senior citizens of Delhi that once the temple is constructed, I would ensure that all of you are able to visit the Ayodhya temple free of cost," he added.

In the past 70 years, the country was primarily ruled by "two different parties at the Centre", he said in reference to the Congress and the BJP, both of which had "conspired" to keep the education system in a "dismal" state.

The revolution in Delhi's education system in the past six years has shaken the very roots of both the parties. In

the previous Assembly elections, Congress could not win even a single seat and in the recent byelections that the BJP did not win any," Mr. Kejriwal said.

"If the people of this country are educated, both these parties would have to face the same fate throughout the country," he also said.

Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, however, termed it "sad and unfortunate" the failure of the Delhi government to mention the "massive contribution" of the Narendra Modi-led Centre, including a COVID-19 relief package for Delhi.

"Everyone knows the Delhi government mishandled the situation and were reprimanded by the courts. The cases were rising and had reached a peak when the Central government stepped in and under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, provided relief to the people of Delhi," Mr. Bidhuri said.

But since there was an opening balance or surplus of ₹5,900.94 crore at the beginning of the financial year, the overall budget will still be in surplus, but the amount is likely to be reduced to ₹5,645.03 crore.

Mainly due to the effect of the pandemic, the government expects lesser revenue from taxes on vehicles and excise in the coming financial year.

The expected tax revenue collection from excise was ₹6,300 crore in the 2020-21 budget, but it has been brought down to ₹6,000 crore in the 2021-22 budget.

Similarly, the taxes on vehicles have got ₹2 crore each. After Delhi, Punjab is the State where the AAP has had the most success and the party is the main Opposition in the State.

Most of the other academies have got ₹2 crore each. But the Delhi government has increased the Annual Budget 2021-22 to ₹69,000 crore from ₹65,000 crore in 2020-21.

Allocation for police has decreased to ₹67.47 crore from ₹355.82 crore.

## Punjabi Academy gets highest share in budget

It gets ₹40 cr, Hindi Academy ₹18 cr.

**NIKHIL M BABU**  
NEW DELHI

Among the 20 odd language academies, Punjabi Academy has been allocated the highest share – ₹40 crore – in the 2021-22 budget, followed by ₹18 crore to Hindi Academy and ₹15.5 crore to Urdu Academy.

Through language academies, the AAP government reaches out to different communities and promotes their language.

Most of the other academies have got ₹2 crore each.

But the Delhi government has increased the Annual Budget 2021-22 to ₹69,000 crore from ₹65,000 crore in 2020-21.

Allocation for police has decreased to ₹67.47 crore from ₹355.82 crore.

## Committee seeks release of G.N. Saibaba, cites his health

Former DU professor had tested positive on February 13

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

NEW DELHI

The Committee for the Defence and Release of Dr. G.N. Saibaba on Wednesday said that the former professor of English at Delhi University, currently incarcerated in Nagpur Central Jail, tested COVID-19 positive on February 13 and since then, his health has deteriorated rapidly.

The committee appealed to the Maharashtra government, the Nagpur jail authorities and the National Human Rights Commission to consider steps to release him immediately in light of his precarious condition.

"Over the last two weeks, his blood pressure has dropped to dangerous levels. Besides symptoms of COVID-19, the long-term effects of the virus on a person



(From left) Dr. G.N. Saibaba's wife Vasantha with writer Arundhati Roy, CPI leader D. Raja, and other dignitaries at a press meet in New Delhi on Wednesday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

with over 90% disability following post-polio paralysis and other co-morbidities are life-threatening," the panel said.

They said it is crucial that Dr. Saibaba be examined for all his medical issues at the earliest and his immediate family should be allowed to release all prisoners vulnerable to COVID-19.

## 'BJP councillor exposes own party over graft'

Rachhoya complains about North body

**STAFF REPORTER**

NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Wednesday alleged that a BJP councillor has sent letters to the Lieutenant Governor, Chief Minister and others about corruption in the North Delhi Municipal Corporation, where the BJP is in power.

The party also released the alleged letter.

"Jyoti Rachhoya has written an official complaint on her own letterhead exposing her own party members. She has marked the letter to L-G Anil Baijal, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, National Scheduled Caste Commission Chairman Vijay Sakala," AAP chief spokes-

## Light rain brings respite from soaring mercury

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

NEW DELHI

Delhiites woke up to a pleasant morning on Wednesday after light rain on Tuesday night brought down the temperatures slightly.

The relief in the form of a drizzle and wind in some parts of the Capital managed to provide some relief from the rising maximum and minimum temperatures that were both five degrees above normal.

On Wednesday, the maximum and minimum temperatures settled at 33 degrees

and 18.2 degrees Celsius respectively, which was four degrees above normal. The official weather reading of the Capital taken at the Safdarjung weather station showed that 1 mm of had been recorded.

Thursday's forecast reads "partly cloudy sky with possibility of very light rain/thundershowers accompanied with gusty winds towards evening/night. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to stay between 34 and 17 degrees Celsius."

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Rajaji Nagar 1st Block Bangalore-560010.  
Tele Fax : 080-22024000  
No.KRDCL/IFB/2020-21/21  
**INVITATION FOR TENDERS (On e-procurement basis)**

Karnataka Road Development Corporation Limited (KRDC) proposes to take up the work of **Upgradation & Maintenance of 12 High Traffic Density Corridors (HDC) in Bengaluru City** in the State of Karnataka on using two cover system.

1. The IFT notified earlier **No.KRDCL/IFB/2020-21/17 Dt.04-12-2020 and 06-01-2021** are here with cancelled due to unavoidable reasons.

2. The details of works proposed to be taken up for implementation are here under with modification and Re-invited through E-portal.

Sl. No.	Package Details	Approximate Length of the HDC corridor (In Km)	Amount put to Tender (Rs.In Crore)			EMD Amount (as per GO Dt. 22.12.2020)	Period of completion (including monsoon)
			Initial Improvement Cost	Annual Maintenance Cost for 5 years	Total amount		
1	PACKAGE-I Upgradation and Maintenance of High Traffic Density Corridors in Bengaluru Metropolitan Region for [HDC No.1 Bellary Road, HDC 2: Old Madras Road, HDC No.12B Outer Ring Road from Gorguntepalya to Old Madras Road] (KRDCL/2020-21RD/WORK_INDENT36)	44.55	86.48	128.15	214.63		
2	PACKAGE-II Upgradation and Maintenance of High Traffic Density Corridors in Bengaluru Metropolitan Region for [HDC No.3: Old Airport Road, HDC 4: Sarjapur Road, HDC 12C: Outer Ring Road from K.R. Puram to Silk Board] (KRDCL/2020-21RD/WORK_INDENT360)	42.40	64.50	119.65	184.15	EMD Declaration to be provided by Tenders as per the Annexure provided in this IFT	60 Months
3	PACKAGE-III Upgradation and Maintenance of High Traffic Density Corridors in Bengaluru Metropolitan Region for [HDC 5: Hosur Road, HDC 6: Bannerghatta Road, HDC 7: Kanakapura Road, HDC 12D: Outer Ring Road - from Silk Board to Mysore Road.] (KRDCL/2020-21RD/WORK_INDENT359)	49.45	39.35	120.34	159.69		
4	PACKAGE-IV Upgradation and Maintenance of High Traffic Density Corridors in Bengaluru Metropolitan Region for [HDC 8: Mysore Road, HDC 9: Magadi Road, HDC 10: Tumkur Road, HDC 12A: Outer Ring Road from Mysore Road to G						

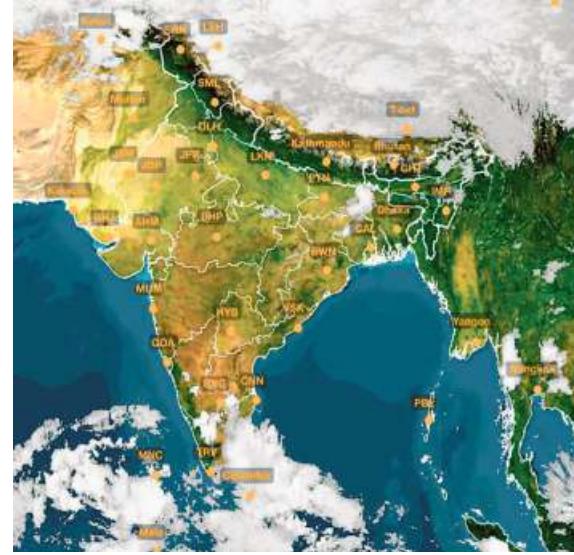


# ASSEMBLY POLLS

DELI THE HINDU | THURSDAY, MARCH 11, 2021

## WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE &amp; AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY

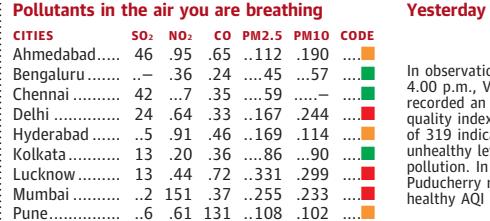


TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)

**Forecast for Thursday:** Heavy rainfall/snowfall likely at isolated places over Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh and Muzaffarabad. Thunderstorm with lightning/hail/gusty winds likely at isolated places over Delhi, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala and Lakshadweep.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...30.7	23.3	19.0	Kozhikode	...30.5	26.5	21.0
Ahmedabad	...37.6	18.2	13.0	Kurnool	...37.5	22.1	19.0
Aizawl	...26.7	10.7	8.0	Lucknow	...35.1	19.1	13.0
Allahabad	...35.4	19.0	13.0	Madurai	...36.2	25.2	21.0
Bengaluru	...33.0	19.5	14.0	Mangaluru	...36.2	22.6	18.0
Bhopal	...36.4	16.6	12.0	Mumbai	...33.5	22.0	18.0
Bhubaneswar	...35.6	22.5	18.0	Mysuru	...33.8	18.0	13.0
Chandigarh	...32.4	18.4	13.0	New Delhi	...33.0	18.2	13.0
Chennai	...33.7	24.9	19.0	Patna	...34.4	18.8	13.0
Coimbatore	...34.8	23.1	18.0	Port Blair	...32.6	23.7	18.0
Dehradoon	...30.8	14.8	10.0	Puducherry	...33.2	23.4	18.0
Gangtok	...3.16.2	10.2	5.0	Pune	...36.4	19.9	13.0
Goa	...33.0	24.6	19.0	Raipur	...34.8	19.4	13.0
Guwahati	...30.2	18.4	13.0	Ranchi	...32.2	13.7	10.0
Hubballi	...35.0	19.0	14.0	Shillong	...32.2	13.7	10.0
Hyderabad	...35.0	21.2	16.0	Shimla	...31.9	10.8	10.0
Imphal	...30.2	13.1	8.0	Srinagar	...12.1	5.0	3.0
Jaipur	...34.2	21.7	16.0	Thiruvananthapuram	...33.6	24.1	18.0
Kochi	...33.0	25.0	20.0	Tiruchi	...35.8	24.6	18.0
Kohima	...2.4	21.4	10.8	Vijayawada	...36.2	22.4	18.0
Kolkata	...32.0	24.3	18.0	Visakhapatnam	...31.0	24.0	18.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)



**Yesterday**

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Vatva, Gujarat recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 316. It was an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Puducherry recorded a healthy AQI score of 22.

**Air Quality Code:** ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

**SO<sub>2</sub>:** Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

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

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

**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

## Assam: 281 candidates file papers for first phase

Among prominent names entering the electoral ring are Chief Minister Sonowal and AJP chief Lurinjyoti Gogoi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
GUWAHATI

Altogether 281 candidates have filed their nominations for 47 Assembly seats in Assam going to polls in the first phase on March 27, a release issued by the CEO's office said on Wednesday.

The last date of submission of nominations for the first phase was Tuesday.

Among prominent candidates who filed nominations were Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal from Majuli, sitting BJP MLAs Angoorlata Deka from Batadroba, Ashok Singh from Dhekaijuli, Minal Saikia from Khumtai and Padma Hazarika from Soota, besides former Ministers Ajanta Neog from Golaghat and Bismita Gogoi from Khamtai, the State's Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) said in the release.

Other candidates who filed their nominations include Speaker Hitendra Nath



BJP candidate Jayanta Malla Baruah from Nalbari constituency, along with party leader Himanta Biswa Sarma, on his way to file his nomination papers on Wednesday. PTI

Goswami from Jorhat on BJP ticket, AGP Ministers Atul Bora from Bokakhat and Keshab Mahanta from Kalibari, BJP Ministers Ranjit Dutta from Behali, Naba Kumar Doley from Jonai and Sanjoy

Kishan from Tinsukia, and

Nazir Hussain of the party from Rupohihati.

Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president Ripun Bora filed his nomination from Gohpur, Congress Le-

gislature Party leader Deba-brata Saikia from Nazira and AICC secretary Bhupen Borah from Bihupuri.

Among others who filed their nominations were former Ministers Bharat Na-

rah from Naobicha, Pranee Phukan from Naharkatiya and Rakibul Hussain from Samaguri, besides sitting MLAs Rupjyoti Kurmi from Mariani, Rana Goswami from Jorhat, Roselina Tirkey from Sarupather.

Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) chief Lurinjyoti Gogoi filed his nominations from both Duliajan and Naharkatiya constituencies while the party's general secretary Jagadish Bhuyan filed his nomination from Sadiya.

Jailed Rajior Dal leader Akhil Gogoi will also contest in the first phase from Mariani and Sibsagar seats as an Independent candidate, as the party is yet to be recognised by the Election Commission.

Former AGP Minister Brindababu Goswami has filed his nomination as an Independent candidate from Tezpur.

Scrutiny will be held on March 10 and the last date of withdrawal is March 12.

## BJP names 3 more for second phase

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
GUWAHATI

The BJP on Wednesday announced the names of three candidates, all fresh faces, for the second phase.

Controversial sitting BJP MLA from Hojai, Shiladitya Dev, known for making provocative remarks against immigrant Muslims and at times against his own party members, has been denied ticket and replaced by Ramakrishna Ghosh.

Former Assam Sahitya Sabha president Parmananda Rajbongshi has been fielded from Sipajhar. The party has also nominated Milan Das from Hailakandi constituency.

## Poll awareness



Mascots of South 24 Parganas district pose for photographs during a poll awareness programme in Kolkata on Wednesday. PTI

## Provide separate queue for transgenders, Assam CEO told

442 from the community figure in the State's electoral roll

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI

Assam's Transgender Welfare Board has sought a separate line for the "vulnerable and marginalised community" at polling booths in the coming three-phase Assembly elections.

The board, under the Social Welfare Department, has also advised a meeting for addressing a few issues, including the possibility of transgender voters being turned away for mismatch of photo in the voter identity card and present

appearance.

According to the data provided by the State election office, 442 out of a total of 2,31,86,362 voters in the State are transgender or third gender.

"...we haven't seen any concrete steps being taken towards the transgender community... the most vulnerable and marginalised community, always neglected and side-lined by the authorities," said Swati Bidhan Baruah, the board's associated vice-chairperson and the first transgender la-

wyer in the Northeast, wrote in the letter to Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Nitin K.S. Khade on March 8.

### 'Taunting, bullying'

Ms. Baruah said members of the transgender community faced issues such as taunting and bullying when they went to cast their votes, justifying the board's demand for a separate line for transgenders at the voting centres.

The board advised sensitisation of booth-level officers on transgenders.

## U.P. panchayat bans half pants for boys and jeans for girls

If villagers do not follow the passed order, they could be punished socially'

ANUJ KUMAR  
GHAIKABAD

At a panchayat called by Bhartiya Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan in Charthawal area of Muzaffarnagar, its national president Thakur Pooran Singh said boys should refrain from wearing half pants and girls should not wear jeans in villages. "If they do not follow this order, they could be punished socially," he said, while addressing the meeting at Peerpalshah village on Tuesday.

As the news spread, Mr. Singh said his intention was to preserve the village culture. "We have no problem

My only concern is that at home we should celebrate our traditional wear

THAKUR POORAN SINGH  
Chief of Bhartiya Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan

with girls wearing jeans when they are on job in cities but when they come to their village, they should follow the rural tradition and not bring the western influence to the village," said Mr. Singh, who is also the face of the Thakur community in the region.

He told *The Hindu* that he

was all for girl education and girls working in sectors where they are required to wear western outfits. "Our girls work in the police. They also go to schools where they wear skirts as part of the uniform. My only concern is that at home we should celebrate our traditional wear," Mr. Singh said.

**Only counselling**  
Agreeing that crime against women had nothing to do with what they wear, he said by the punishment he only meant counselling of such families who didn't follow the panchayat's advice.

Mr. Singh took on the media that it didn't highlight that he also appealed at the same meeting that during the panchayat elections people should not vote for candidates who seek their vote by distributing free liquor.

Mr. Singh, who led a march against the BJP government's agriculture policies in the past, is also keen on farmers and the government returning to the table to sort out the issue on the contentious farm laws. "It is fine if the government amends the laws as long as it comes up with a law guaranteeing the MSP," he said.

## Call to protect people from second-hand smoke

Cancer victims, doctors and restaurateurs in Assam ask the Centre to amend Act

RAHUL KARMAKAR  
GUWAHATI

Doctors, cancer victims and restaurateurs in Assam have asked the Centre to amend the COTPA 2003 for removing designated smoking rooms in hotels, restaurants and airports to protect people from second-hand smoke.

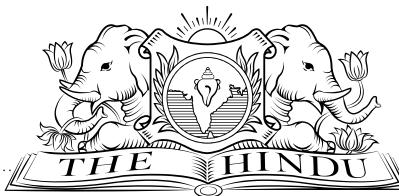
COTPA expands to Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003. "There is growing evidence that smoking is a risk for COVID-19 infection. Smoking worsens lung function and reduces immunity. Smokers who develop COVID-19 infection have more complications and greater risk of fatality," Munindra Narayan Barua, managing director of North East Cancer Hospital

Appreciating the government for initiating the process to amend COTPA 2003, they sought immediate removal of a current provision that permits smoking areas to make India 100% smoking-free environment. Most of these designated smoking areas rarely comply with COTPA requirements and are actually putting our public at great health risk from exposure to second-hand smoke," he added.

Section 4 of the COTPA 2003 prohibits smoking in any place to which the public has access. But the Act allows smoking in designated smoking areas of certain public places such as restaurants, hotels and airports.

Anti-tobacco activists said exposure to passive smoking happens in hotels, restaurants, bars, pubs and clubs, risking the lives of thousands of non-smokers.

"As cigarette smoke seeps from smoking areas to common areas, COTPA needs to be amended to not permit smoking on any premises. Second-hand smoking is as harmful as smoking and designated smoking areas facilitate the spread of COVID-19 infection as smokers cannot socially distance or wear masks and are trapped in close proximity in a smoke-filled environment," Guwahati-based anti-tobacco activist and lawyer Ajoy Hazarika said.



## Uphill rescue

The top change in Uttarakhand is indicative of the limits of running a State from New Delhi

**F**our days short of four years after he was sworn in, Trivendra Singh Rawat was asked by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) central leadership to make way for Tirath Singh Rawat as Chief Minister of Uttarakhand. The new CM was sworn in on Wednesday. The outgoing Mr. Rawat failed to keep the house in order; party workers and MLAs had distanced themselves from him. In fact, his very selection as CM in 2017 had less to do with his popularity or leadership skills than the central leadership's liking for him. He was seen as an imposition from above. Far from building bridges with the BJP workers and MLAs, his style of functioning further alienated him from the party ecosystem. Party leaders felt ignored in decision making, and power was increasingly concentrated. While party functionaries were sidelined, governance fell more into the hands of bureaucrats. The BJP has 57 MLAs in the 70-member Assembly and at least half of them had turned against the outgoing CM. Allegations of corruption hastened his downfall, but the determining factor was his singular failure to hold the party flock together. The State goes to elections next year and the BJP could not have afforded to let him lead it. Success or failure will now be in the kitty of the incoming Mr. Rawat.

The change of guard in a State, giving up on its hand-picked person, is uncharacteristic of the BJP leadership, and hence marks discontinuity. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity continues to be the key driver of BJP politics, and he has held tight control over the party, including on State units and Chief Ministers. Leaders with an autonomous political base have been seen as rivals, at best tolerated and rarely encouraged or promoted. But this model has proven costly in Haryana, Maharashtra and Jharkhand, where the party's setbacks were attributed to the style of functioning of former CMs. Therein lies the paradox and dilemma of the BJP's approach to leadership. The party's rise as a behemoth has been advanced in significant measure by regional satraps and Mr. Modi himself was one. Since 2014, the BJP and Mr. Modi became synonymous, and the party's national profile is now built on the notion of a strong leader. In States where leaders project strength without corresponding skills and popularity, the disenchantment brews in the ranks. On the other hand, leaders with limited mass appeal have helped the party maintain balance among rival social groups within its camp. Uttar Pradesh, where CM Yogi Adityanath is building his own style of strong leadership, is a notable exception. The change in leadership in Uttarakhand is indicative of the limits of running a State from Delhi.

## Regulation redux

An environmental regulator can work only if governments see the value of nature

**T**he Supreme Court's notice to the Centre on a public interest plea to set up a national environmental regulator under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 revives an issue that successive governments have preferred to ignore, in spite of specific orders passed by the same court more than nine years ago. There is no consensus on what a new regulator can achieve, since official policy privileges ease of doing business. The draft Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification 2020, which seeks to advance that goal, makes no effort to disguise the desire to virtually eliminate civil society's role. It does not encourage the public to voice its views and report violations, while independent scrutiny of proposals is weakened. In fact, the EIA process, especially after the notification in 2006, has been heavily critiqued for conflicts of interest - the proponent of a project is responsible for producing the EIA report - while clearances under forest, wildlife, air and water quality laws are heavily weighted in favour of promoters. Rather than reform the system, in 2011 and 2014, the Centre rebuffed the apex court on the question of forming an independent regulator, contending that its orders in the Lafarge mining case were only in the nature of a suggestion, and later sought time but decided not to act. The current PIL is forcing the government to come up with a fresh explanation on why it has been sitting on its hands all along. Yet, for a national regulator to work, the government must recognise the limits to extractive growth, respect a neutral body and preserve the integrity of the environment.

A key issue raised by the PIL is the lack of credibility of the EIA process, leading to reports that are often produced with the help of dubious expertise and manipulated data. In most cases, the proponents also ignore the views of communities that would be displaced, and are ill-equipped to assess the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services such as clean air, water and farm productivity. The Centre and States must acknowledge the conflict arising from pressure on scarce land and ecosystems from polluting projects, which has already created clusters of industrial locations that are doing badly on the CPCB's Comprehensive Environmental Pollution Index. It is striking that this did not stop approvals for further polluting activity in some of these places, such as large coal-based power plants cleared in recent years in Kanpur, Cuddalore, and Angul in Odisha. What should concern the Centre is the laggardly pace at which multiple departments process project proposals, raising transaction costs and resulting in the clamour to dispense with regulation. The remedies lie in administrative reform. It is eminently feasible, for instance, to produce a whitelist of lands for industry, reclaiming polluted areas. What India cannot afford to do is further degrade its forests, rivers, wetlands and air, whose health is vital for its large population.

# Tectonic turbulence in Dravidian politics

The power vacuum in Tamil Nadu has opened up its politics to an opportunity for change, which voters must examine



NARAYAN LAKSHMAN

**T**hough every State (and one Union Territory) of India that will have Assembly elections this year represents a uniquely eclectic matrix of power across the contesting parties and challenges to *status quo*, nowhere has a sea change in ground realities swept across the political landscape more than in Tamil Nadu. For the first time in half a century, the land of the Dravidian movement is joining the democratic fray sans the towering personalities of leaders in both the major parties that have historically ruled it - the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). The passing of M. Karunanidhi (DMK) and Jayalalithaa (AIADMK), respectively, the heads of these two parties, who had delivered multiple victories at the hustings and set the template in terms of an autocratic style of managing the cadres, has created a power vacuum that has opened up the politics of the State to a historic opportunity for change. To better understand this opportunity, it is instructive to examine the vectors of change.

### Inheritance of leadership

First, retaining our focus on the DMK and the AIADMK, there has been a dramatic shift in the fundamental nature of leadership. It is true that the DMK has had a more successful 'business continuity plan.' Its current president, M.K. Stalin, was the duly appointed successor to step into his father's shoes after Karunanidhi's passing. Karunanidhi's final gift to his party, the orderly transition of the mantle of leadership to his son, helped swiftly off an early chal-

lenge to Mr. Stalin from older sibling and southern-region强man, M.K. Alagiri. However, despite Mr. Stalin's many years of experience in Tamil Nadu as the Mayor of Chennai, MLA, Minister for Rural Development and Local Administration, Deputy Chief Minister, Leader of the Opposition and, since August 2018, the President of his party, he is yet to deliver a single State Assembly election victory.

Karunanidhi led the DMK to victory in elections no fewer than 10 times. By comparison, there remain unanswered questions about whether Mr. Stalin could rise to the formidable standards of his father in terms of organisational shrewdness and personal charisma - at least in the realm of State politics. It augurs well for Mr. Stalin that he presided over the DMK's thumping victory in the parliamentary election in 2019, with the DMK and its allies capturing 38 out of 39 seats in play. But will voters be convinced by Mr. Stalin's promise of leadership to the extent that they will vote the same way in 2021 as they did two years ago?

Contrarily, the AIADMK, as it remained after the passing of Jayalalithaa, was a pale shadow of its former self. The responsibility for that rests squarely on the shoulders of the late leader herself, for it was Jayalalithaa who systematically degraded at least four rungs of potential future leaders beneath her within the party organisation. It was Jayalalithaa who institutionalised a culture of abject servility and compulsory public displays of fealty and subservience to her persona, among every member of her party, high or low. More than that, she formalised an unapologetically dictatorial style of decision-making within the party, and within the government when the AIADMK was in power, making a mockery of whatever party and administrative structures were in place.

July 2013, enhanced entitlements (covering two-thirds of the country's population), this naturally pushed up the States' drawal. Based on an improved version of the targeted Public Distribution System (PDS), the law requires the authorities to provide to each beneficiary 5 kg of rice or wheat per month.

For this financial year (2020-21) which is an extraordinary year on account of the COVID-19 pandemic, the revised estimate of the subsidy has been put at about ₹4.23-lakh crore, excluding the extra budgetary resource allocation of ₹84,636 crore. Till December 2020, the Centre set apart 94.35 million tonnes to the States under different schemes including the NFSR and additional allocation, meant for distribution among the poor free of cost.

Importantly, the government has decided to abandon the practice of extra budgetary resource allocation and include in the food subsidy amount itself, arrears in loans outstanding of the FCI drawn through the NSSF. Even in the figure of revised estimates for 2020-21, the arrears constitute a portion.

**Issue prices and politics**  
It is against this backdrop that the Survey has hinted at an increase in the Central Issue Price (CIP), which has remained at ₹2 per kg for wheat and ₹3 per kg for rice for years, though the NFSR, even in



However, the past four years of leadership under the AIADMK have seen the survivors of this unipolar period in their party's politics pull themselves together and deliver a measure of what could genuinely be described as 'good governance' to the people of the State, whether in terms of flood management, negotiating with the Centre regarding funds to fight the COVID-19 pandemic or allowing industries more space to operate rather than extorting them out of business. That they did so despite the rumblings of dissatisfaction and dissent within their ranks in the early post-Jayalalithaa days is nothing short of remarkable. What was considered a fragile peace between Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami and Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam at the start has turned out to be surprisingly robust.

The looming question that this analysis begs is this: will Tamil Nadu voters recognise and reward good governance of this sort, or will other factors determine their election preferences?

### Reading the voter

Voters in this State have periodically proved that they have a penchant for putting into power at the State level a different party to the one that swept up a majority of seats in the parliamentary elections. A close review of this split in voting preferences suggests that a pattern may have emerged: since the start of the 21st century, the DMK and the AIADMK have, respectively, cornered a majority of seats in the parliamentary and State Assembly elections for 15

years each.

It would not be unreasonable to surmise that this points to a collective belief on the part of voters in the State that the AIADMK is a party with strong governance credentials at the State level, whereas the DMK has proven its mettle as a bulwark against a heavy-handed central government. Yet, given the dramatic change in the balance of power and prevailing political ideologies in Tamil Nadu over the past few years, even this assumption now stands on wobbly ground. A signpost hinting at potential election outcomes this time is the C-Voter survey, which has most recently indicated a sweep by the DMK.

### Impending ideological clash

This brings us to the second major change in the political landscape - the growing national footprint of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its brand of muscular Hindutva politics, which is now attempting to storm the bastions of the southern States and West Bengal.

To understand the position that the BJP occupies in the pantheon of political parties in Tamil Nadu, it is necessary to go back to the very roots of the Dravidian movement. What began as an aggressively anti-Brahmin, anti-caste, anti-religion, anti-North Indian, anti-Hindi imposition policy orientation in the early days of the Dravida Kazhagam under Periyar E.V. Ramasamy and the DMK under C.N. Annadurai, was transformed through the 1970s and beyond, under the pressure of political competition from the rival AIADMK, into a far more inclusive, accommodationist bent of leadership.

As many additional lower and middle-castes were integrated into the broad Dravidian agenda as fronted by both the DMK and the AIADMK, the priorities shifted from the "assertive populism" capitalising on hostility toward the central government and its tenets to the entrenchment of "paternal-

istic populism" comprising a charismatic but self-enriching authoritarian distributing mass welfare goods.

While some of the historical elements of assertive populism have faded away as the populace has adjusted to the socio-economic realities of post-liberalisation India, a persistent echo of Tamil exceptionalism remains deeply embedded within the collective psyche of the common woman and man of this State. Not only does this exceptionalism have to do with the uniqueness of the Tamil language, traditions, cinema, rural subcultures and the complexities of caste politics, but there is also a shared visceral aversion to the idea of the Tamil people genuflecting to the diktats of a distant, Hindi-speaking, upper caste- and Hindu-dominated government in New Delhi.

To an extent, the implied preference for ideologically committed leaders who are exceptionally skilled at managing the party organisation is inconsistent with the quality and tenor of leadership seen in the AIADMK recently. The concern over political arrangements that might dilute the prospects for realising the dream of Tamil exceptionalism is also inconsistent with the AIADMK's election alliance with the BJP. The BJP has done itself few favours in terms of its own political positioning in the State, as it has tried to score points on issues relating to Hindutva politics rather than Dravidianism. If a majority of voters are fundamentally hostile to the Sangh Parivar ideology, why would they care?

Ultimately, the notion of perceived exceptionalism bolstered by a strong preference for regional politics capable of pushing back against overzealous, homogenising ideologies of national parties, could be the wind beneath the wings of the DMK at the hustings next month.

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## A case for a revamped, need-based PDS

There should be political will to take this step, which would reduce the subsidy bill and the scope for leakages



T. RAMAKRISHNAN

**T**he Economic Survey, tabled in Parliament in January, rightly flagged the issue of a growing food subsidy bill, which, in the words of the government, "is becoming unmanageably large."

The reason is not far to seek. Food subsidy, coupled with the drawal of food grains by States from the central pool under various schemes, has been on a perpetual growth trajectory. During 2016-17 to 2019-20, the subsidy amount, clubbed with loans taken by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) under the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF) towards food subsidy, was in the range of ₹1.65-lakh crore to ₹2.2-lakh crore. In future, the annual subsidy bill of the Centre is expected to be about ₹2.5-lakh crore.

### High drawal rate

During the three years, the quantity of food grains drawn by States (annually) hovered around 60 million tonnes to 66 million tonnes. Compared to the allocation, the rate of drawal was 91% to 95%. As the National Food Security Act (NFSR), which came into force in

July 2013, enhanced entitlements (covering two-thirds of the country's population), this naturally pushed up the States' drawal. Based on an improved version of the targeted Public Distribution System (PDS), the law requires the authorities to provide to each beneficiary 5 kg of rice or wheat per month.

For this financial year (2020-21) which is an extraordinary year on account of the COVID-19 pandemic, the revised estimate of the subsidy has been put at about ₹4.23-lakh crore, excluding the extra budgetary resource allocation of ₹84,636 crore. Till December 2020, the Centre set apart 94.35 million tonnes to the States under different schemes including the NFSR and additional allocation, meant for distribution among the poor free of cost.

Importantly, the government has decided to abandon the practice of extra budgetary resource allocation and include in the food subsidy amount itself, arrears in loans outstanding of the FCI drawn through the NSSF. Even in the figure of revised estimates for 2020-21, the arrears constitute a portion.

**Issue prices and politics**  
It is against this backdrop that the Survey has hinted at an increase in the Central Issue Price (CIP), which has remained at ₹2 per kg for wheat and ₹3 per kg for rice for years, though the NFSR, even in



2013, envisaged a price revision after three years.

What makes the subject more complex is the variation in the retail issue prices of rice and wheat, from nil in States such as Karnataka and West Bengal for Priority Households (PHH) and Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AYY) ration card holders, ₹1 in Odisha for both categories of beneficiaries to ₹3 and ₹2 in Bihar for the two categories, according to an official document. Needless to say, in Tamil Nadu, rice is given free of cost for all categories; this includes non-PHI.

The Centre, by stating through the Survey that it is difficult to reduce "the economic cost of food management in view of rising commitment" towards food security, does not want the NFSR norms to be disturbed. But, a mere increase in the CIPs of rice and wheat without a corresponding rise in the issue prices by the State governments would only increase the burden of States, which are even otherwise reeling under the problem of a resource crunch. Political compulsions are perceived to be coming in the way of the Centre

and the States increasing the prices. The politics of rice has been an integral feature of the political discourse. Promises by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in the 1967 Assembly election in Tamil Nadu - three measures (approximately 4.5 kg) at ₹1 - and the Telugu Desam Party during the 1983 poll in Andhra Pradesh - ₹2 per kg - captured the imagination of the voter. One should ponder over the advisability of keeping so low the retail prices of food grains at fair price shops, even after the passage of nearly 50 years and achieving substantial poverty reduction in the country. As per the Rangarajan group's estimate in 2014, the share of people living below the poverty line (BPL) in the 2011 population was 29.5% (about 36 crore).

### Recast the system

In this context, it is time the Centre had a look at the overall food subsidy system including the pricing mechanism.

It should revisit NFSR norms and coverage. An official committee in January 2015 called for decreasing the quantum of coverage under the law, from the present 67% to around 40%. For all ration cardholders drawing food grains, a "give-up" option, as done in the case of cooking gas cylinders, can be made available. Even though States have been allowed to frame criteria for the identification of PHH cardholders, the Centre can nudge them into pruning the num-

ber of such beneficiaries. As for the prices, the existing arrangement of flat rates should be replaced with a slab system. Barring the needy, other beneficiaries can be made to pay a little more for a higher quantum of food grains. The rates at which these beneficiaries have to be charged can be arrived at by the Centre and the States through consultations. These measures, if properly implemented, can have a salutary effect on retail prices in the open market. There are no two opinions about reforms implemented in the PDS through various steps, including end-to-end computerisation of operations, digitisation of data of ration cardholders, seeding of Aadhaar, and automation of fair price shops.

Yet, diversion of food grains and other chronic problems do exist. It is nobody's case that the PDS should be dismantled or in-kind provision of food subsidy be discontinued. After all, the Centre itself did not see any great virtue in the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mode at the time of giving additional food grains free of cost to the States during April-November last year (as part of relief measures during the pandemic). A revamped, need-based PDS is required not just for cutting down the subsidy bill but also for reducing the scope for leakages. Political will should not be found wanting.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to [letters@thehindu.co.in](mailto:letters@thehindu.co.in) must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

### Need for caution

The alarming surge in the number of COVID-19 cases in several States is cause for worry. Although studies have indicated an increase in several novel variants of the virus which is evolving at a rapid rate by mutations and antigenic shift, the single most relevant factor that is contributing to this increase is not the virus, but reckless, irresponsible human behaviour. The fear of the virus has vanished and people have got into an "all is well" mode. Even basic precautions such as physical distancing, hand-washing and mask wearing are being violated. It is indeed shocking to see political leaders trying to outdo each other to gather

massive crowds for their political rallies. Getting vaccinated is being taken as a licence to breach all safety norms even by the elderly and the sick. It is for all to come to terms that the virus is just buying time to transform itself and strike back. Sticking to the basics of pandemic control - test, track and treat - is mandatory.

Ds. Biju C. MATHEW,  
Thiruvananthapuram

**The first dose**  
We had an efficient and kind experience when we went to our neighbourhood hospital (Malleswaram) for our vaccination. Our names were registered, irrespective of whether we had booked earlier or

walked in. We were then given our serial numbers and told it might take an hour. This was useful as we were able to return home for a short break. Within minutes of our going back to the hospital, we began the process of filling in the requisite form and paying the money. Thereafter was the visit to the room for the vaccination. We were given the name of the vaccine, told that it would hurt 'only a wee bit' and then sent to the observation room for half an hour. Throughout we were met with patience, gentleness and cheer.

Usha Mukunda,  
Bengaluru

**My wife and I, both septuagenarians, were**

pleasantly surprised when we could receive our vaccination without any worry at a public health centre at Punnakkad in Pathanamthitta. We went there with a lot of trepidation, but to our utter delight, it was

# Nepal at a crossroads

The myth of communist invincibility has exploded and led to fragmentation of the Left parties



LOK RAJ BARAL

Politics in Nepal took a dramatic turn following two significant decisions made by the Supreme Court on February 23 and March 7, 2021. The first verdict overturned Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli's decision to dissolve the House of Representatives (lower house). The second verdict invalidated the registration of the Nepali Communist Party (NCP).

#### Challenge to Oli

The first verdict reinstating Parliament cast a slur on the Prime Minister who, without respecting the letter and spirit of the 2015 Constitution, dissolved the lower house and called for a general election to be held, which was an irony given the huge majority in his favour. Mr. Oli, in fact, wanted to marginalise his party detractors, especially Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) and Madhav Kumar Nepal, as they were challenging him for his arrogance and flawed style of governance. This was also a conflict between the communist pattern of conducting party affairs, as Lenin did while maintaining democratic centralism, and a multi-party parliamentary system that stresses on accountability and tolerance.

Mr. Oli tried to run the show in his own way maintaining that the huge electoral mandate gained by the party in 2017 was due to his own popular image. Yet, pointing fingers at his party colleagues for not allowing him to function effectively, he opted to dissolve Parliament. There was overwhelming public opinion against this decision, including by former Chief Justices. Hectic political campaigns both for and against dissolution followed, as if the mid-term elections were around the corner. Mr. Oli claimed that the court could not enter into the political domain as this was not exclusively a constitutional issue that needed new interpretation. But to their credit, Mr. Oli and his followers accepted the court's decision with grace.

One positive aspect of the episode was the broad national unity forged



Chairman of the CPN (UML) K.P. Sharma Oli shakes hands with Chairman of the CPN (Maoist Centre) Pushpa Kamal Dahal during a news conference in Kathmandu in December 2017. ■REUTERS

against Mr. Oli's unconstitutional move. Nearly all the political parties, intellectuals, civil society leaders, legal professionals and sections of the media made this a common cause for democratic safeguard. Following a two-track policy towards dissolution, the Nepali Congress (NC), the main opposition party, passed a formal resolution against the dissolution but its President, Sher Bahadur Deuba, wasn't as vocal against the dissolution as his senior colleagues. Mr. Deuba played the role of a reluctant opposition leader because the case was subjudice and also perhaps because he wanted to play an effective role during the elections in case the court ruled in favour of dissolution.

The Janata Samajvadi Party (JSP) also followed a wait-and-watch policy as the NCP was still not legally split into two parties: one led by Mr. Oli and the other by Mr. Prachanda and Mr. Nepal. Thus, when the NC and JSP were approached by Mr. Prachanda and Mr. Nepal for devising a joint strategy against Mr. Oli or for forming a government after reinstatement of the lower House, the leaders of the two parties asked Mr. Prachanda and Mr. Nepal which party they belonged to as the legal status of the NCP would remain unchanged after restoration of Parliament. The Election Commission did not make any decision to determine the status of the NCP in either Mr. Oli's favour

#### Muddled political scenario

What was more surprising was the court's second decision rejecting the existence of the NCP which was formed when the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) came together. The court said the two parties would return to the pre-merger stage with separate identities and symbols. The timing and content of the decision were significant. The verdict, which came on the day the reinstated Parliament was meeting, added confusion and complexity to the already muddled constitutional politics.

Now, Mr. Oli is the chairman of the CPN (UML) and Mr. Prachanda heads the CPN (Maoist Centre). Since many leaders and members of different organs of the integrated party were elected as NCP members, what will be their new party identity? Will Mr. Nepal or any other person belonging to the previous CPN (UML) join Mr. Oli or can the present ministers belonging to the former CPN (Maoist Centre) continue in government

when both parties have legally, if not politically, parted ways?

The alternative is to split the CPN (UML) in order to integrate with the Maoist Centre under a new party name.

#### Possible scenarios

The new developments have offered a few possibilities for coalition politics. First, the CPN (UML) led by Mr. Oli is incapable of forming a government on its own strength of 120 members, which includes members of the Madhav Nepal group. If the NC decides to side with Mr. Oli's CPN (UML), then he or the NC can form the government. Many NC members are not well disposed towards Mr. Oli because of his authoritarian style and past deeds. Although the Madhav group will be under pressure to obey the whip, it seems unlikely that it will support Mr. Oli even under pressure.

An option could be for the NC to form a coalition government with the JSP and the Prachanda group without Mr. Nepal in case the latter continues to be a member of CPN (UML).

Another scenario would be for the NC (60+), CPN (Maoist Centre) (53), JSP (34) and four members of other smaller parties and individuals to form the government with the NC heading it.

If Mr. Oli steps down from the prime minister's post or from the party chairmanship, another senior leader, probably Mr. Nepal, may form the government with the support of the previous Maoist Centre. If this course is followed, it may help the process of reintegration of both parties. However, Mr. Oli's obduracy may stand in the way as Mr. Nepal continues to be Mr. Oli's bête noire.

Nepali politics is always full of surprises and uncertainty. The myth of communist invincibility and stability has exploded in less than three years. This has led to fragmentation of the Left parties. Some other parties also suffer from this malaise but not to the extent of the Left parties. The conflict of political cultures inherited by the various Left groups have contributed to political instability to a great extent. The recent political crises are also the fallout of intolerance and Mr. Oli's failure to manage his own party.

Lok Raj Baral is Professor of Political Science and former Ambassador of Nepal to India

# Towards peace on the border

India's new policy of proactive diplomacy together with strong ground posturing is working



RAM MADHAV

Things seem to be looking up for India in the neighbourhood. China has withdrawn its troops in eastern Ladakh across the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Pakistan has voluntarily come forward for a ceasefire across the Line of Control (LoC). The new U.S. administration has been issuing positive statements.

#### Shift in strategy

This is the second time in the last few years that China has been forced to make a reassessment of its ground strategy. Earlier in 2017, at Doklam where there was a 72-day stand-off, mobilisation of Indian forces led to the withdrawal of Chinese equipment and troops from the disputed area. It took almost 10 months for this to happen in Ladakh. It began at Pangong Tso; Depsang Plains and Hot Springs are yet to see the withdrawal.

This can be attributed to a conspicuous shift in India's strategy. Prior to 2014, India used to engage in diplomacy and close matters through a quiet give and take in such conflicts along the LAC. In 2013, India was allegedly forced to dismantle some military structures as a part of the resolution process when China encroached into Depsang Valley. Indian troops used to generally avoid a face-off. That was the kind of peace we managed to maintain along the LAC.

But under the new policy, the Indian forces practice active engagement on the ground while their leadership engages in negotiations with their counterparts. This revised strategy of 'proactive diplomacy together with strong ground posturing' seems to be working well with our northern neighbour. Long ago, Chairman Mao Zedong had conveyed an important message to India through his Premier, Zhou Enlai. In August 1962, Mao had asked his army commanders to prepare for war with India. Zhou, a good friend of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, reminded Mao about the Panchsheel Treaty signed by the two countries, which mandated 'peaceful coexistence' as the core principle. Mao told Zhou to convey to Nehru that India and China should practice 'armed coexistence'. This must always be remembered in dealings across the LAC.

The LoC too has seen some pleasant manoeuvres. In a sudden development, the Director Generals of Military Operations (DGSMO) of India and Pakistan decided on February 22 to strictly implement the 2003

ceasefire agreement. Coming after one of the worst years of ceasefire violations across the LoC (more than 5,000) and just before summer, this decision must be a greatly reassuring one for peace. On its part, India has always demonstrated its commitment to peace. A similar agreement was reached between the two DGSMO in 2018 too. However, there were violations by Pakistan, including the Pulwama attack. Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan insisted that there would be no engagement with India until the status quo was restored in Jammu and Kashmir. All that seems passe now. There seems to be equal enthusiasm in Pakistan over the ceasefire.

Just as China's withdrawal cannot be second-guessed, Pakistan's climbdown too cannot be explained conclusively. The FATF sword is still hanging over Pakistan's head, the economy is in precarious condition, COVID-19 has impacted exports, and there is a repayment crisis. China is helping its friend, but it looks unhappy about the uncertainty over the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Political pundits predict that when besieged from all sides, Pakistan has a propensity to spread terror and violence in India. India has enough experiences to appreciate Pakistan's potential for mischief. That is why India has reiterated that there will be no let-up in counter-terror operations. But there is discernible change in General Qamar Javed Bajwa's tone and tenor. Moed Yusuf, Special Adviser on National Security in Pakistan, cryptically told journalists: "Do you think this could happen without pressure?"

#### Biden administration's approach

Pakistan must be under pressure from India, the new U.S. administration as well as China. There are indications that the Biden administration will adopt a nuanced approach with China. In its own economic and strategic interest, China would prefer to give that a chance. It probably wants Pakistan also to fall in line. Contrary to fears, the Biden administration seems to be largely siding with India in its South Asia policy. "We are concerned in Beijing's pattern of ongoing attempts to intimidate its neighbours. As always, we will stand with friends, we will stand with partners, we will stand with allies," a State Department official stated recently on the border stand-off. In another statement, the U.S. State Department said it "welcomes" the steps taken to return Jammu and Kashmir to "full economic and political normalcy consistent with India's democratic values". India should seize this opportunity moment. Taking a leaf out of Vajpayee's statesmanship in 2003 may not be a bad idea.

Ram Madhav is Member, Board of Governors, India Foundation

# Diagnosing gestational diabetes

There is low awareness among the public and low capacity for testing and providing care

V. BALAJI

tional diabetes are also at very high risk of obesity, Type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases.

Thus, addressing gestational diabetes has an impact at three levels: it will help lower maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality; reduce the risk of future diabetes and cardiovascular diseases in women with gestational diabetes; and possibly break the chain of 'diabetes begetting diabetes' by addressing the issue of trans-generational transmission.

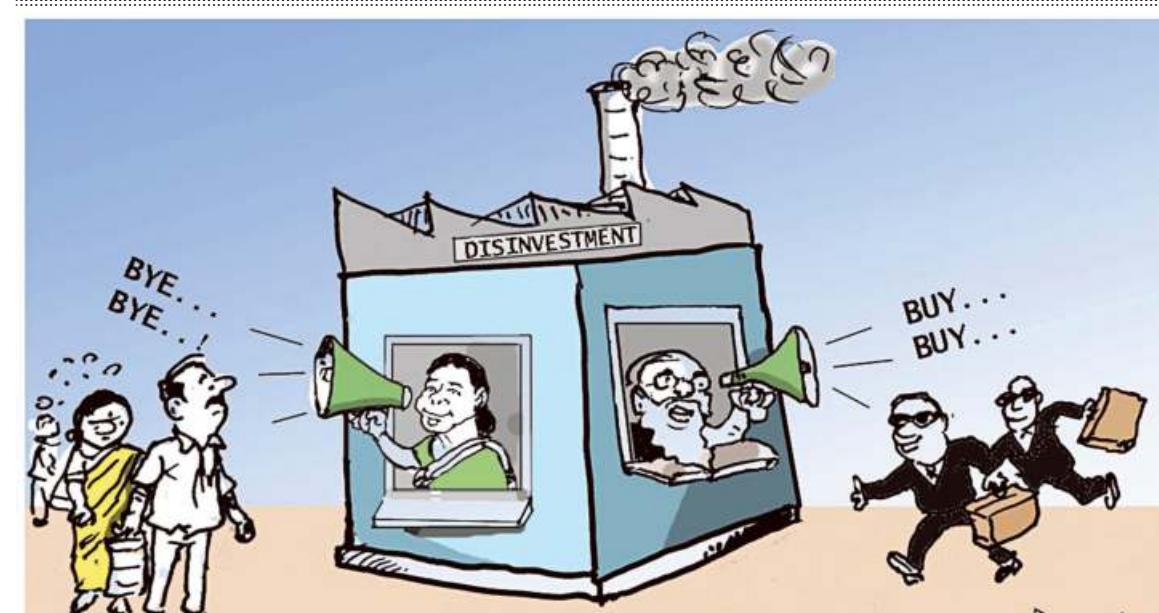
#### Test procedure

However, there is lack of public awareness about gestational diabetes as well as low awareness and capacity within the health systems for testing and providing care. This is despite the availability of national guidelines and diagnosis and management of gestational diabetes by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. Professor Dr. V. Seshiah, a pioneer in the field of diabetes and pregnancy, along with the Diabetes in Pregnancy Study Group of India, suggested a single test procedure which is economical and doable. The World Health Organization, the IDF and the International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics have also approved this test procedure.

#### A recommendation

Being conceived by healthy parents and born to a mother in good health is the best gift a child can receive as this provides a health advantage. To build a healthy future for the nation, this becomes very important. Several academic associations such as the Diabetes Study Group of India, the Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Societies of India and the South Asia Initiative for Diabetes in Pregnancy have recommended that we observe a National Gestational Diabetes Awareness Day on March 10, which is Dr. V. Seshiah's birthday, in recognition of his service and contribution to the field of diabetes and pregnancy for more than 40 years.

V. Balaji is the founder secretary of Diabetes in Pregnancy Study Group of India and senior consultant Diabetologist



#### DATA POINT

## Good, bad & ugly of the latest spike

In the past 20 days, COVID-19 cases have significantly increased in eight States/UTs: Maharashtra, Delhi, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, and Tamil Nadu. These States/UTs are responsible for 75% of India's cases in the past 10 days. While some of them such as Delhi, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka have adjusted their testing levels relative to their increasing outbreak size, others such as Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Punjab have not. By Vignesh Radhakrishnan and Suman Sen

**2. TESTS PER CASE |** The table lists the number of new tests conducted to find a positive case (TPC). For instance, Maharashtra conducted nine tests to find a positive case in T6. The higher the TPC, the better. The TPC decreased across all States/UTs in the latest period. This means the States/UTs are not conducting enough tests relative to their out-break size in general.

**3. POSITIVES PER 100 TESTS** The table lists the number of positive cases identified per 100 tests (TPR). For instance, 111 positives were identified for every 100 tests in Maharashtra in T6. The lower the TPR, the better. The TPR increased across all States/UTs except Karnataka in the latest period (T6). This points to the need to ramp up testing to capture more positives.

The following tables depict cases and tests across 10 equal periods between January 9 and March 9

**1. ON THE RISE |** The table lists the no. of new cases in a particular time period. For instance, Maharashtra recorded 91,621 cases in T6. All the States recorded a sudden increase in cases in the latest period

T1: Jan. 9 to Jan 19 ... T6: Feb. 28 to Mar. 9

State	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6
Delhi	3,308	1,934	1,511	1,280	1,777	2,568
Gujarat	5,769	4,199	2,878	2,590	3,448	5,040
Himachal	696	378	540	400	302	641
Karnataka	6,564	5,501	4,585	3,936	4,276	5,311
M.P.	4,446	2,614	1,902	1,935	3,070	4,124
Maharashtra	30,708	25,730	25,658	32,022	70,684	91,621
Punjab	2,243	1,877	2,040	2,462	4,489	9,050
Tamil Nadu	6,547	5,495	4,979	4,683	4,583	5,183

T1: Jan. 9 to Jan 19 ... T6: Feb. 28 to Mar. 9

**OBSERVATIONS**

**Good:** A relatively higher TPC and a lower TPR in Delhi, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu show that the testing levels of these regions are better compared to others. Testing levels did not reduce much even during the latest period when cases rose rapidly.

**Bad:** The TPC and TPR levels in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh were not up to the mark to start with and worsened significantly in the latest period.

**Ugly:** Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Punjab started off with a relatively poor TPC and TPR. These have reached alarming levels in the latest period

Source: covid19india

#### The Hindu

#### FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 11, 1971

Aus PM votes himself out of office

Mr. John Gorton was replaced to-day [March 10] as Prime Minister of Australia by the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, Mr. William McMahon, after a crisis meeting of the party here [Canberra]. Mr. Gorton's Press Secretary, Mr. Tony Eggleton, told reporters that Mr. McMahon had been elected leader of the Liberal Party in the Government. He said Mr. Gorton was defeated in a confidence motion at the Liberal Party meeting. Mr. Gorton is the new Deputy Leader. The bombshell decision rocked Parliament House after almost three hours of tension. Mr. McMahon was sworn in as Prime Minister later in the afternoon. Mr. Gorton was elected leader of the Liberal Party and Prime Minister on January 9, 1968, after former Prime Minister Harold Holt disappeared while swimming. Mr. Gorton faced a confidence motion moved by Victorian Liberal, Mr. A. Jarman. A secret ballot resulted in a tie with 33-all without Mr. Gorton's vote. He then declared he no longer had the support of the party and cast his vote against himself to make it 34-33.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 11, 1921

The Trichur outbreak

Our Cochin Correspondent writes to us that a public enquiry into the recent disturbances at Trichur has not yet been taken up in earnest. The Durbar, we are told, has not instituted any investigation apart from that of the Police Department. The accounts of the outbreak that have found their way to the Press trace its origin to causes which, while they vary and conflict, implicate some of the high officials of the State as being of the fray. The Hindus and Muhammadans appear to hold that the Christians started the aggression and had the connivance of the police and magistracy, these being under Christian officers. The Christians in their turn pose as victims of Non-Co-operation and caste. The Diwan is reported to have attributed the whole thing to the tyranny of caste exclusivism and there are people who say that official attempts at hasty social reform must be held responsible. There is yet another reading of the occurrence which interprets it as but one incident of a general upsurge that has been gathering for some time throughout Malabar and has evidenced itself in the series of recent temple-burnings in Travancore and Cochin. Perhaps the Trichur outbreak is innocent of these alleged deeper connections and may be purely a local madness.

## FROM PAGE ONE

**Tirath Singh Rawat is new CM of Uttarakhand**

In 2017, he was prevented from getting ticket by a camp led by his predecessor after which Mr. Shah appointed him national secretary with the charge of handling party affairs in Himachal Pradesh. He was also given the prestigious Garhwal seat to contest from in the Lok Sabha polls, a sign that the central leadership felt he had been cheated out of Assembly ticket. He is the kind of man who doesn't have an entourage of staff and most often answers his own phone," a senior leader said. It is being hoped that this more low-key, amiable appointment would heal some of the ruptures within the State unit, which caused a revolt against Mr. Trivendra Singh Rawat.

Sources said that one of the first things that the new Chief Minister has been tasked to do by the party's

central leadership is to roll back two unpopular decisions of his predecessor—that of the Chardham Devasthanam Management Board Act that sought to extend the government control over 51 Hindu shrines, including Badrinath and Kedarnath, sparking massive protests by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and other Hindu outfits, and that of the setting up of the Gairsain Commissionerate, amalgamating Almora from Kumaon, and the Badrinath and Kedarnath sub-divisions from Garhwal, again sparking massive resentment.

Uttarakhand will go to the polls in February next and while it is late in the day to be changing leadership in the State, the BJP is hoping that people may instead take the change as a sign that the party is responsive to public criticism of its leaders and had taken action.

**Breakfast in schools plan faces delay**

"The Department in its written submission also informed that a number of States have started providing breakfast to the students in the mid-day meal scheme. The Committee recommends that under the schemes all schools should start providing breakfast [for] the students in the next academic session as envisaged in NEP, 2020," said the panel's report, submitted to the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

"The Centre's current expenditure on the scheme is about ₹11,000 crore for 11.8 crore students. We were hoping to start providing breakfast from April when the new session starts, but we estimate it will cost us another ₹4,000 crore. There have been major budget cuts, so the plan has been delayed by several months now," a senior Ministry official said.

The School Education Department saw an 8% cut in allocation from the 2020-21 budget estimate of ₹59,845 crore to ₹54,873 crore in the coming year. The Department's revised estimates for last year were lower as schools were shut to prevent

**Stick to code, Karnataka HC tells media**

Citing instances of video clips purportedly showing Karnataka MLA and former Minister Ramesh Jarkiholi getting intimate with an unidentified woman flooding the media, the petitioner, Atma V. Hiremath, said "he feared that media platforms may, in fact, get hold of some of his private moments and may air them with total disregard to his right to privacy under Article 21 of the Constitution".

The petitioner also cited media reports about claims made by social activist Dinesh Kallahalli that he had many CDs containing "explicit contents of other persons belonging to the BJP".

The petitioner sought a direction to the authorities to prohibit and restrain 70 media platforms from publishing, circulating, disseminating any content either visual or in any other form, which is in violation of right to privacy enshrined under Article 21, and in violation of the provisions of CTN (Regulation) Act.

"The petitioner apprehends that if the media plat-

forms are not restrained... his right to live with dignity may get trampled like that of other leaders belonging to his political party," the petition said.

Citing provisions of the CTN (Regulation) Act, the Information Technology Act, 2000, and the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986, the petitioner alleged that media platforms had been on a daily basis showing certain visuals wherein a woman was being represented in an indecent way.

**'Failed to take action'** The statutory authorities, the petitioner alleged, have miserably failed to take any action either to restrain these media platforms or prosecute them.

"With private lives of the citizens being splattered over the media be it through social networking sites or spy cameras, protection is needed so that citizens can function in a way they want to and not think of others before their actions," the petitioner said.

**Bengaluru schools revert to online exam format**

TANU KULKARNI  
BENGALURU

Private school managements here that had decided to conduct the 2020-21 academic year-end examinations on campus are having second thoughts given the steady rise in the num-

ber of COVID-19 cases in Karnataka. Many have decided to revert to the online examination format.

Earlier this month, two schools in Karnataka were sealed after students and teachers tested positive for the virus.

R. Arun and T. Karthikyan were elected vice-presidents; S. Martin Thomas was elected joint secretary and P. Jayarathinam as treasurer of the union. Mr. Martin Thomas and Mr. Jayarathinam, too, won the elections for the fifth term.

The election was officiated by M. Muthukumar and K.R.T. Ramanujam.

**Cong. leader Chacko quits party**

**'BJP is winning due to weakness of the Congress'**

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Senior Congress leader P.C. Chacko has quit the party ahead of the Kerala Assembly election on April 6, blaming factionalism in the party's State unit and a lack of "proper" leadership at the national level.

Speaking to presspersons at his Delhi residence, Mr. Chacko said he had been mulling over it for a while and sent in his resignation to party president Sonia Gandhi out of frustration.

**Alleged factionalism**

Mr. Chacko expressed despair over the alleged factionalism in the party's State unit. "In Kerala, there is no Congress party. There are two parties – Congress (I) led by Ramesh Chennithala and Congress (A) led by



Today in Kerala, one cannot be a Congressman, you can only be faction I or faction A member. So, I decided to call it a day after 50 years of being in active politics

P.C. CHACKO,  
FORMER CONGRESS LEADER

Oommen Chandy," he said. Mr. Chacko had flagged this issue many times to the central leadership, but to no avail.

The Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) was a powerless entity and it was these two factions that decided the working of the party, he said.

"No names came up before the State election committee of the KPCC. Only Chandy and Chennithala decide who will contest from their respective factions. This is disturbing and disappointing. Today in Kerala, one cannot be a Congressman, you can only be faction

I or faction A member. So, I decided to call it a day after 50 years of being in active politics," Mr. Chacko said.

The BJP, he noted, was winning not on its own strength, but because of the Congress's weakness.

"It is unfortunate that despite her ill health, Soniaji has to step in. The Congress has been functioning for one-and-a-half years without a proper president," Mr. Chacko said.

**Refused to sign**

The G-23 had contacted him at the time of writing the first letter, which sought internal reforms. But he refused to

sign the letter.

"I did not want to question the leadership of Sonia Gandhi or Rahul Gandhi. The G-23 is also not questioning their leadership qualities, it is only saying that there should be elections to the post of president and the Congress Working Committee. All they are saying is that the party affairs should be put in order as per the party's constitution," Mr. Chacko observed.

**Says no to BJP**

As of now, he had not thought about his future plans, he stated. He ruled out joining the BJP who, he said, had failed to move the Kerala voters despite spending huge amounts of money.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah are visiting Kerala frequently. But they cannot change the mindset of Malayalis, who cannot accept a communal party," Mr. Chacko added.

**Five Ministers, Speaker dropped from CPI(M) list****33 new faces for Kerala election**

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and six of his Cabinet colleagues have been fielded by the ruling CPI(M) for the April 6 Assembly election. There are 33 new faces on the candidate list.

Party acting State secretary A. Vijayaraghavan on Wednesday released a list of 83 of its candidates, including nine CPI (M)-supported Independents. The party will announce the candidates for Manjeswaram and Devikulam later.

Health Minister K.K. Shylaja, Labour Minister T.P. Ramakrishnan, Power Minister M.M. Mani, Devaswom Minister Kadakkamally Surendran, Fisheries Minister J. Mercykutty Amma and Local Self-Govern-

ment Minister A.C. Moideen are trying their luck once again. Mr. Vijayan will contest from Dharmadam in Kannur district.

**Not contesting**

Thirty-three incumbent legislators will not contest this time. Five Ministers – T.M. Thomas Isaac, E.P. Jayarajan, C. Ravindranath, G. Sudhakaran and A.K. Balan – and Speaker P. Sreeramakrishnan have been denied the ticket.

M. Govindan, K. Radhakrishnan, P. Rajeev and K.N. Balagopal are the State secretariat members who are contesting.

As many as 12 women and 4 youngsters below the age of 30 are among the candidates. Twenty-eight lawyers and 25 candidates below the age of 50 figure in the list.

**TV channels warned against violating code**

Bengaluru police chief issues order on HC directive

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
BENGALURU

Acting on the directions of the Karnataka High Court, Bengaluru Police Commissioner Kamal Pant has issued a general order prohibiting all television channels from airing programmes that are not in conformity with the "Programme Code" notified under the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995.

The court, on a petition filed by Atma V. Hiremath, had on March 6 directed that any broadcast on the cable television network should be strictly in conformity with the terms of the "Programme Code". The State government had assured the court that the Commissioner of Police, the "authorised of-



**Strict rules:** The code states that no programme should be aired that contains anything obscene or defamatory or is false.

ficer" for Bengaluru city under the Act, would take the necessary steps.

The order, passed by Mr. Pant on March 9, under Section 19 of the Cable TV (Regulation) Act, also states that any violation of the order is liable for prosecution under Section 16 of the Act.

The law prescribes imprisonment up to two years or fine up to ₹1,000 or both for the first offence, and im-

prisonment up to five years and with fine up to ₹5,000 if any media governed under the CTN Act violates the provisions and the "Programme Code".

The code, which contains an elaborate list of don'ts for cable TV channels, states that no programme should be aired that contains anything obscene, defamatory, false, and suggests innuendos and half-truths.

**Zomato delivery person accused of assault, held**

In a video, customer shows cut nose

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
BENGALURU

The Electronics City police here on Wednesday arrested a 35-year-old food delivery executive with Zomato for allegedly punching a customer and fracturing her nose after the two got into an argument.

The complainant, Hitesha Chandrane, a makeup artist, posted a video online describing the alleged attack, which occurred on March 9. It showed a deep gash on her nose. She filed a complaint with the police, who arrested the accused Kamaraj. "He has been charged for causing grievous hurt and intentional insult, and remanded in judicial custody," said a police officer.

In the video, Ms. Chandrane said she had ordered food around 3.30 p.m.. When the food did not arrive, she called the firm's customer care number to

lodge a complaint. The accused landed at her door when she was on the phone, she said. An altercation broke out as she was speaking to the customer care centre to cancel the order. The delivery partner took objection to being made to wait, she added.

In his statement, Kamaraj told the police that the customer was rude and verbally abused him.

Zomato said it had delisted the delivery partner.

**Tiger that triggered panic captured in Kerala**

A tiger that triggered panic among residents in the Ozhakkudy, Muthiriy and Makkilikkary areas near Tavinhal under the North Wayanad forest division in Kerala was captured from a human settlement on Wednesday morning. The tiger, aged about 10 years, had triggered panic for the past three days after it killed a cow.

**'Almost 15 MLAs want Balachandra in Ministry'**

BENGALURU  
BJP MLA Mahesh Kumathali has said 15 to 16 MLAs from the ruling party have appealed to Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa to give a ministerial berth to Balachandra Jarkiholi, the younger brother of Ramesh Jarkiholi, who has quit the Ministry following the CD scandal.

**57 students test positive for COVID-19 in Tirumala**

Fifty-seven students studying in the S.V. Veda Patasala at Dharmagiri in Andhra Pradesh reportedly tested positive for COVID-19. They tested positive when the authorities conducted RT-PCR tests on Tuesday. The authorities took them to Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Sciences hospital in Tirupati.

**Work on floating solar power plant in final stages**

The unit at Ramagundam is set to be commissioned by May-June next

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD

The country's biggest floating solar power plant till date, by generation capacity, which is being developed by the NTPC in the reservoir



TELANGANA

of its thermal plant at Ramagundam in Peddapalli district, Telangana, is set to be commissioned by May-June next.

Work on the 100 megawatt plant is in the final stag-

es of completion. This will be one of the re-newable (solar) energy

plants being developed by the NTPC with an installed capacity of 447 MW in the southern region and the entire capacity will be commissioned by March 2023.

Except for the 230 MW ground-mounted solar power plant at Etayapuram in Tamil Nadu, the remaining 217 MW capacity was to be commissioned by May-June this year, Regional Executive Director (South) of NTPC C.V. Anand said here on Wednesday.

Going green: The 100 MW floating solar power plant at Ramagundam. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

**Kanimozhi re-elected president of The Hindu employees' union**

Kamalanathan gets fifth term as the general secretary

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI

Six office-bearers have been elected to head The Hindu Office and National Press Employees' Union.

Lok Sabha member Kanimozhi has been elected president of the union for the second time and M. Kamalanathan was re-elected general secretary for the fifth consecutive time in the election conducted on Tuesday.

R. Arun and T. Karthikyan were elected vice-presidents; S. Martin Thomas was elected joint secretary and P. Jayarathinam as treasurer of the union.

The election was officiated by M. Muthukumar and K.R.T. Ramanujam.

**High Court order**

The entire election process was overseen by Mohideen Pichai, retired district judge, following an order of the Madras High Court.

The following have been elected members of the executive committee: V. Premanand, K. Ramesh, J. Kathiresan, S.A. Karthikeyan, C. Chandran, R. Girish, E. Sugnuttuvan, K. Gopal, G. Rajendran, P. Kumaravel and P.S. Venkobabao.

**Kodiyeri's wife skips quizzing by Customs**

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOCHE

Vinodini Balakrishnan, wife of former State secretary of the CPI(M) Kodiyeri Balakrishnan, did not turn up for before Customs officials on Wednesday.

The Customs officials had issued her a notice to appear before them on the day regarding the reported possession of an iPhone, which Santhosh Eapen, the managing director of Unitech Builders, had allegedly handed over to Swapna Suresh, the accused in the diplomatic channel gold smuggling case. The summons for Ms. Vinodini was issued by post. As she has not turned up for interrogation, fresh notice would be issued to her, Customs officials said.

**Karnataka forms SIT to probe Jarkiholi CD**

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BENGALURU

The Karnataka government late on Wednesday announced a Special Investigation Team (SIT)

## IN BRIEF



Mamata Banerjee files papers from Nandigram

KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday filed her nomination from Nandigram for the Assembly election. She was accompanied by Trinamool Congress State president Subrata Bakshi to the office of the Sub-Divisional Officer, Haldia.

## Cong. releases 26 names for Assam second phase

NEW DELHI  
The Congress released a fresh list of 26 names late on Wednesday for the second phase of Assembly poll in Assam. The party has already declared 43 seats for the first two phases since last Saturday. The party has named candidates for some of the key seats in Barak Valley of south Assam that have been a bone of contention between it and its ally, Badruddin Ajmal-led All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF). Prominent names include former Minister Siddeque Ahmed from Karimganj South.

## Assam poll observer tests COVID-19 positive

GUWAHATI  
The Election Commission of India has replaced a central observer after he tested positive for COVID-19, officials said on Wednesday. General observer Manjeet Singh Brar tested positive and has been replaced by P.A. Siddiqui, a West Bengal cadre IAS officer. Mr. Brar had on Tuesday reached Jorhat by road after landing at Dibrugarh from Punjab on Monday. "He is stable and under home isolation," Jorhat Deputy Commissioner said.

## Modi to flag off Dandi March in Ahmedabad

AHMEDABAD  
Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off the Dandi March or Salt March on March 12 in Ahmedabad to celebrate the 75th anniversary of India's Independence. The Salt March, which took place from March to April 1930, was an act of civil disobedience led by Mahatma Gandhi to protest against the British rule in the country.

## Militants cornered, encounter on in Kashmir

Srinagar  
An encounter broke out between hiding militants and security forces on Wednesday in south Kashmir's Anantnag district. "An encounter has started with militants at Kandipora in Bijbehara area of Anantnag. The police and security forces are on the job," a police spokesman said. According to the police, two or three militants could be hiding at the site.

Gender discrimination alleged in NDA admission  
SC issues notice to government, UPSC

## Mamata injured during campaign, alleges plot

West Bengal CM says four or five people pushed her

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA  
West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday suffered injuries to her left leg while campaigning in Nandigram and was rushed to Kolkata for treatment. A visibly distressed Ms. Banerjee alleged that she was greeting people when four or five people surrounded and pushed her.

"There were no local police personnel. Even the Superintendent of Police was not there... There is lot of swelling... I am in pain and have to return to Kolkata," Ms. Banerjee told journalists. Asked whether there was some conspiracy, Ms. Banerjee said, "It is a conspiracy. They did it purposefully."

The Chief Minister was brought to the SSKM Hospital. She was returning from a religious event in Nandigram to her temporary residence in Rayapara and stepped out of her vehicle to greet people, when the incident occurred.

Sukhendu Sekhar Ray, Trinamool Congress MP who



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was injured during her campaign in Nandigram on Wednesday. ■ PTI

was in Nandigram with Ms. Banerjee, said, "At about 6.15 p.m., when she was about to leave Birulia Anchal after performing puja in a temple, a few unknown persons pushed her to the car and forcibly shut down the door, as a result of which she sustained injuries in her left leg and also suffered severe pain in the waist."

The Trinamool Congress leadership condemned the development and called it "most unfortunate".

While a section of the BJP leadership wished her a speedy recovery, party leaders like Kailash Vijayvargiya and Arjun Singh and State Congress president Adhir Chowdhury alleged she was trying to "gain sympathy".

## Both Houses manage to pass one Bill each amid din

Government refuses to hold debate on farmers' protest

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI  
For the third day in a row, both Houses of Parliament could barely do any business, with the government refusing to concede the Opposition's demand of holding a debate on the farmers' agitation.

Each House managed to pass one Bill each amidst din. The Lok Sabha passed the National Capital Territory of Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Second (Amendment) Bill and the Rajya Sabha cleared the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill, 2021.

In the Rajya Sabha, motion began early on, with the first adjournment coming in just 17 minutes after the session began for the day. House Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu rejected the notices moved by Congress members Deepender Hooda, Pratap Bajwa and Rajiv Satav, along with Tiruchi Siva of the DMK and Manoj K. Jha of the RJD asking for the suspension of business to discuss the farmers' agita-



Doing business: Rajya Sabha members during the Budget session in New Delhi on Wednesday. ■ PTI

tion. Mr. Naidu said the farm laws were debated in the first part of the session itself.

Speaking outside the House, Leader of the Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge said, "What is stopping the government from allowing a discussion on fuel price and farmers' agitation. The government just doesn't care."

After two successive adjournments the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill, 2021, was passed through a voice vote amid din.

The Lok Sabha was also adjourned twice amidst slogan shouting by the Opposi-

tion benches on the three farm laws. When it resumed, Meenakshi Lekhi started the discussion on Demands for Grants for Railways in 2021-22.

Just as MP Ram Kirpal Yadav started speaking, Congress leader in the House Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury argued that the Opposition had been demanding to raise the issue of farmers' protests. Soon, the Congress members started raising slogans.

When order couldn't be restored, Ms. Lekhi adjourned the House until Monday.

## There are no two groups in Congress: Anand Sharma

Party accuses govt. of stifling Opposition voice in Parliament

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Congress had always stood for internal discussions and there were no two groups within the party as all were fighting under Sonia Gandhi's leadership to defeat the BJP in the coming Assembly elections, senior leader Anand Sharma said on Wednesday.

Mr. Sharma, a key member of the group of 23 dissenters (G-23) who had written a letter to Ms. Gandhi last August to push for a revamp of the organisation, was responding to a question on an allegation of groupism by senior leader from Kerala P.C. Chacko who, earlier in the day, announced his resignation from the party.

The Congress's Deputy Leader in the Rajya Sabha was part of a joint press conference at party headquarters along with Leader of the Opposition in the Army. It dismissed as a "sex stereotype" the view that women were physiologically weaker than men.

of the fundamental right of equality before the law and equal protection of the law," the petition said.

It referred to the Supreme Court's judgment in February last year, which helped women officers gain a level playing ground and compete on a par with their male counterparts for permanent commission (PC).

The Supreme Court had last year upheld a 2010 Delhi High Court judgment to grant PC to women officers in the Army. It dismissed as a "sex stereotype" the view that women were physiologically weaker than men.



Hussain. The Congress leaders were addressing the media about the stalemate in Parliament over fuel price rise, inflation and farmers' protests for the last three days.

While the Congress-led Opposition has been demanding an immediate discussion on these issues, the government is keen to first pass its legislative business.

Mr. Kharge said, "Petrol and diesel have never been this expensive in India's history."

The price of kerosene that used to be sold under the

## Farm unions in Haryana call for boycotting BJP-JJP MLAs

These leaders would have no political future in the State'

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Haryana farm unions have vowed to intensify their boycott of the MLAs who supported the BJP-JJP government in Wednesday's no-confidence motion, saying they would have no political future in the State. At a press conference on Wednesday, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha also laid out its agenda for the rest of the month, including plans for a Bharat Bandh on March 26 to mark four months of the movement.

"The no-confidence motion has clearly exposed who stands with the farmers and workers, and who stands against," said Vikas Sisar, who heads Bharatiya Kisan Sangharsh Samiti.

He said the Haryana unions would decide how to intensify the social boycott

of BJP and JJP leaders who are already not being allowed to enter their own villages.

The Congress's no-confidence motion was defeated 32-55 in the Assembly.

"The anti-farmer face of the JJP, which describes itself as a party belonging to the farming community, has been completely exposed. These MLAs have no political future," said an SKM statement.

## Seeds of opposition

"Farmers have sown seeds of opposition and resistance against these anti-farmer faces, and results will be harvested soon," it added.

Some SKM leaders attended an election rally against the BJP in Kolkata on Wednesday, calling on citizens to vote against the par-

ty in the West Bengal elections. Senior SKM leaders are expected to address a larger rally on Friday.

Although many union leaders are focussed on poll campaigning this month, they have also laid out a full calendar of events.

"On March 15, we will highlight the rising prices of petrol and diesel and other essential commodities as part of the anti-pratisation and anti-corporates protest with trade unions," said Buta Singh Burjgill, a veteran Punjab leader of the BKU.

Other events include a day-long nationwide strike on March 26, protests in mandis on March 19, youth participation in protests on March 23 to commemorate the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh, and the burning of the three farm laws in Holi fires on March 28.

## Assam MP to sue NGO for doctored video

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI

Maulana Badruddin Ajmal, Assam MP and president of the AIUDF, has threatened to sue a non-governmental organisation for claiming in an alleged doctored video that he made anti-national statements.

"The video I received yesterday (Tuesday) was released by an NGO called LRO with the intention to damage our Assam election prospects. The doctored video says the Mughals ruled India for 800 years and the British ruled it for 200 years, and now Congress-AIUDF will make Assam an Islamic state. This is a 100% fake video," Mr. Ajmal told journalists on Wednesday.

Mr. Ajmal said he was in touch with his lawyers. "Some elements with vested interests are trying to derail the Congress-AIUDF alliance," he said.

## Cabinet clears fund for health care

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nihi (PMSSN), a single non-lapsable reserve fund for health from the proceeds of Health and Education Cess levied under Section 136-b of Finance Act, 2007.

In its release issued on Wednesday the government said the major benefits of PMSSN will be the enhanced access to universal and affordable health care through availability of earmarked resources, while ensuring that the amount does not lapse at the end of the financial year.

In the 2018 Budget, the Central government while announcing Ayushman Bharat Scheme, also announced replacement of existing 3% Education Cess by 4% Health and Education Cess, the released added.

"Proceeds of share of health in the Health and Education Cess will be credited into PMSSN and accruals into the PMSSN will be utilised for the flagship schemes of the Health Ministry," said Mr. Joshi.

Party president J.P. Nadda said the party had pulled together to reach out to people during the pandemic.

The last meeting of the BJP parliamentary party was on March 17, 2020, after which social media requirements led to a suspension of in-person meetings.



## BJP Parliamentary Party meet lauds PM

He was praised for handling COVID-19

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Almost a year after they last met formally and in person, the BJP's parliamentary party met to pass a resolution lauding Prime Minister Narendra Modi's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and were told by Mr. Modi to participate in big numbers in the year-long "Amrit Mahotsav" to celebrate 75 years of Independence. The grand festival will be celebrated at 75 locations across the country for 75 weeks and will start from Sabarmati Ashram from March 12," said Mr. Joshi.

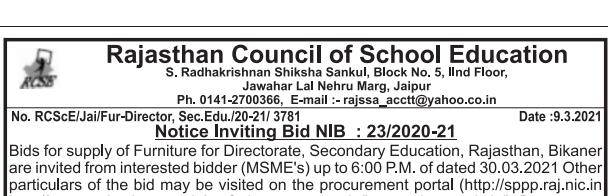
Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Pralhad Joshi, told reporters after the meet that Mr. Modi's handling of the pandemic was lauded by party MPs.

"Prime Minister Modi also gave a clarion call to MPs to reach out to people in helping to carry out the vaccination drive. MPs should act as facilitators in the ongoing vaccination drive by

arranging vehicles for citizens to take them to the vaccination centres, helping in making arrangements at the vaccination centres and other activity," he said. "Prime Minister Modi also asked all public representatives to take part in the 'Amrit Mahotsav' to commemorate 75 years of Independence. The grand festival will be celebrated at 75 locations across the country for 75 weeks and will start from Sabarmati Ashram from March 12," said Mr. Joshi.

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The release added that administration and maintenance of the PMSSN is entrusted to the Health Ministry.

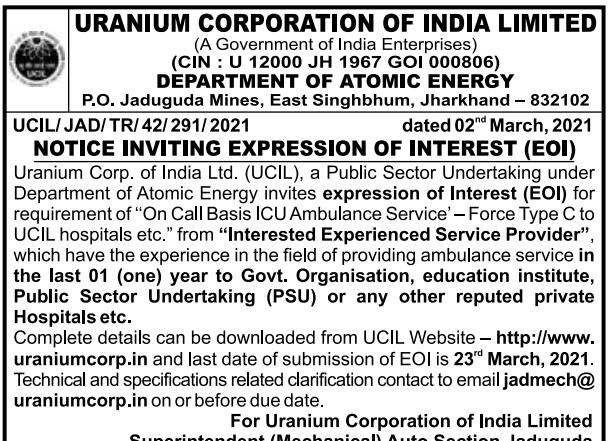


State Project Director



Executive Engineer(Civil) I/C

AIIMS, Bhubaneswar



Superintendent (Mechanical) Auto Section Jaduguda

## No proposal to release caste data: MHA

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Home Affairs informed the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday that there was "no proposal at present to release the report of the caste census" carried out in 2011.

Union Minister of State for Home Nitin Gadkari said the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC), 2011, was conducted by the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) and the then Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (HUPA) in rural and urban areas respectively. The SECC 2011 data, excluding the caste data, had been finalised and published by the MoRD and the HUPA.

Mr. Sharma charged the government with "monumental mismanagement" of the economy, negating parliamentary tradition by denying the Opposition an opportunity to raise questions.

"Convening of Parliament is not meant only for transaction of government business... The Opposition must be given its space and voice," he said, adding that the government was "striking at the very roots of democracy".

Mr. Hooda alleged that the government was insensitive to farmers' issues and claimed that rarely had there been any agitation that had claimed nearly 300 lives over 100 days and yet an elected government remained unmoved.

"The raw caste data has been provided to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE) for classification and categorisation. As informed by MoSJE, there is no proposal to release the caste data at this stage," he said.

## Party accuses govt. of stifling Opposition voice in Parliament

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

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of the fundamental right of equality before the law and equal protection of the law," the petition said.

# Maharashtra continues to lead in daily new cases and fatalities

Active caseload stands at 1.84 lakh, according to a Health Ministry report

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Maharashtra continues to report the highest daily new COVID-19 cases at 9,927, followed by Kerala with 2,316 and Punjab 1,027, said the Health Ministry on Wednesday.

It said 83.76% of the new cases are from Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu. India has reported 17,921 new daily cases in last 24 hours.

The Ministry said Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Gujarat, Karnataka and Haryana continue to display an upward trajectory in daily new cases.

"The active caseload stands at 1.84 lakh [1,84,598]



**Concerted effort:** The cumulative number of vaccine doses administered crossed 2.52 crore on Wednesday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

and samples being tested everyday have followed a continuous upward trajectory. The tests conducted have crossed 22 crores (22,34,79,877)," it said.

India has reported 133 deaths in the last 24 hours and Maharashtra, Punjab,

Kerala, Karnataka and Chhattisgarh account for 77.44% of them.

Maharashtra saw the maximum casualties (56) followed by Punjab (20) and Kerala (16).

The cumulative number of vaccine doses adminis-

tered has crossed 2.52 crore on Wednesday. Of the 9,22,039 vaccine doses given till 7 p.m. on Wednesday, 7,25,930 beneficiaries were vaccinated for first dose and 1,96,109 Healthcare worker (HCWs) and Frontline Workers (FLWs) the second, as per the provisional report.

A total of 2,52,89,693 vaccine doses have been given, as per the provisional report.

These include 71,70,519 HCWs (first dose) and 39,77,407 HCWs (second), 70,31,147 FLWs (first), 5,82,118 FLWs (second), 9,29,359 beneficiaries aged 45 and above with specific co-morbidities and 55,99,143 who are more than 60 years old.

# 'Dialogue with China will go on till friction points eased'

Minister elaborates on diplomatic initiatives by India

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

India will continue dialogue with China till disengagement is achieved from 'all' sectors, Minister of State for External Affairs V. Muraleedharan said in Parliament on Wednesday. To a question, he said China had made several attempts since the spring of 2020 to "unilaterally alter" the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh.

"The government will continue discussions with the Chinese side to achieve the objective of disengagement from all friction points and restoration of peace and tranquillity in the border areas at an early date," Mr. Muraleedharan said.

He elaborated on the di-



V. Muraleedharan

plomatic initiatives by India to solve the confrontation over the past one year.

## Moscow meeting

Following the face-off, External Affairs Minister Jaishankar first had a telephone conversation with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi on June 17. This was followed by a physical meeting on

September 10 in Moscow. "The two Foreign Ministers agreed that the situation in the border areas is not in the interest of either side. They agreed therefore that the border troops of both sides should continue their dialogue, quickly disengage, maintain proper distance and ease tensions," Mr. Muraleedharan said.

He said the two sides had held six meetings of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China border affairs (WMCC) and nine meetings of the senior commanders.

The statement said India had conveyed to the Chinese side that unilateral moves to change the LAC were "unacceptable" to New Delhi.

Nine dead as bus falls into gorge in H.P.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
SHIMLA

Nine people were killed and as many injured when a private bus fell into a deep gorge in Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh on Wednesday, Deputy Commissioner D.C. Rana said.

He said the accident occurred at Colony Morh in Bhanjrau of Churrah tehsil in the morning when the private bus fell into the gorge while going from Bondedi to Chamba.

Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur told the Assembly in the afternoon that he had ordered an inquiry to ascertain the exact cause of the accident.

A total of 18 people were on the ill-fated bus. A relief of ₹20,000 and ₹5,000 has been given to the kin of the dead and the injured.

## IN BRIEF



### Navy inducts third Scorpene submarine

NEW DELHI  
The Navy on Wednesday inducted the third Scorpene class conventional diesel-electric submarine, INS Karanj, into service. It was commissioned into the Navy by former Navy Chief Admiral V.S. Shekharawat, who was the Commanding Officer of the earlier INS Karanj in the 1971 India-Pakistan War, a Navy statement said.

### Central team to help Odisha tackle forest fires

NEW DELHI  
The Centre has deputed a three-member team to help the Odisha government tackle the forest fires in Simlipal. The team consists of Amit Mallick, Inspector-General, Forests, National Tiger Conservation Authority, New Delhi; Subratt Mahapatra, Deputy Director-General, MoF&CC Regional Office, Bhubaneswar, and Arti Chaudhary, Head, Silviculture, Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education.

### Karni Sena chief's son found dead in Ghaziabad

GAZIABAD  
Aniruddh Raghav, son of Karni Sena's national president Surajpal Raghav, was found dead in mysterious circumstances on Tuesday night at his Ghaziabad residence, police said. "Prima facie, it seems like a case of suicide; we are waiting for the post-mortem report," said Nipun Agarwal, SP (City), Ghaziabad.

### 39 protesters held for clash at Srinagar mosque

SRINAGAR  
The police have arrested 39 supporters of Hurriyat chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq for allegedly organising a protest and indulging in stone throwing on March 4 at the Jamia Masjid in Srinagar. A protest broke out on Friday after the Mirwaiz, who is also a chief cleric, was not released from house arrest.

## After Mizoram, Manipur offers help to Myanmar refugees

CM Biren Singh flags humanitarian issue of fleeing people

VIIJITA SINGH  
NEW DELHI

Manipur Chief minister N. Biren Singh said on Wednesday that schools may be arranged by the State government for "refugees from Myanmar" but since it was a bilateral issue, they were awaiting directions from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

Mr. Singh told *The Hindu* on the phone that several persons from Myanmar "attempted to sneak" into India from the Manipur border but returned on seeing the presence of large number of security personnel. Manipur shares a 398 km border with Myanmar.

More than a dozen foreign nationals including policemen and women from Myanmar have fled to neighbouring Mizoram fearing a military crackdown.

"I have requested Home

Minister Amit Shah to tell us what to do. If you ask me it is a humanitarian issue but since it is a bilateral issue between India and Myanmar, I have to speak to the Centre," Mr. Singh said.

### Schools planned

When asked if arrangements have been done to house the people fleeing the Myanmar military, Mr. Singh said, "Schools etc. may be arranged, we are almost ready but awaiting directions."

"We had alerted the border and deployed additional security forces there. There is no exodus so far but we are expecting many people to come here," he said, adding, "We are prepared to give shelter to any civilian."

MHA has refused to comment on the future course of action pertaining to the refugees from Myanmar.

The Mizoram government

has also rued lack of instructions from the Centre on the issue. Mizoram's Environment and Transport Minister T.J. Lalnunthanga had told *The Hindu* on Tuesday, "There is no proper instruction from the Centre, and it is not fair. I am ready to help the people in my individual capacity and from the government on humanitarian grounds."

### Chief Secy in Delhi

Mizoram Chief Secretary Lalmunawia Chuauungo flew to Delhi on Tuesday even though the legislative Assembly is in session. He is likely to have met senior MHA officials.

In an interview to the BBC, police officers from Myanmar who fled across the border into Mizoram said "they escaped, fearing they'd be forced to kill or harm civilians."

## Rape survivor's father killed in 'accident'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
LUCKNOW

The father of a minor girl, who was allegedly gang-raped by three persons, died "in an accident" after being hit by a truck a day after she lodged a police complaint in Kanpur district of Uttar Pradesh, the police said on Wednesday.

The girl's relatives alleged that he was murdered and accused the police of complicity. The father of one of the accused is allegedly posted as a sub-inspector in Kannauj district.

The girl had reached a community health centre in Ghatampur for her medical examination after the FIR, when her father and brother stepped out to drink tea in the morning, said a senior police officer.

The girl's father met with "an accident" involving an unidentified truck, said DIG Kanpur Preetinder Singh.



The derailed Seemanchal Express in Bihar on February 3, 2019. ■ FILE PHOTO

## Railway safety chief flags gaps in report on train accident

Investigation related to derailment of Seemanchal Express

S. VIJAY KUMAR  
CHENNAI

The Commissioner of Railway Safety has formally written to the Railway Board pointing to serious gaps in the inquiry report of a major accident and called for amending the Accident Manual to ensure preservation of clues and evidence. The Railway Board has agreed to the advisory and directed the authorities concerned to make necessary changes in the Accident Manual.

The investigation relates to the accident of Train no. 12487 Seemanchal Express at Sahdai Buzurg railway station in Sonarpur Division, East Central Railway, during the early hours of February 2, 2019, which left six passengers dead and 24 others injured.

"In this accident detailed observations of track and coaches were not done pro-

perly and some gaps were left out which have a bearing on investigation. Railway need to amplify and issue correction slip to para 4.12 to 4.18 of Accident Manual of ECR and all other Railways," the Commissioner of Railway Safety said in his report.

The independent investigating official who comes under the Ministry of Civil Aviation noted that in the note prepared by railway officials who inspected the

## Sachin Vaze moved from Crime Branch

STAFF REPORTER  
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government on Wednesday announced the transfer of Mumbai police officer Sachin Vaze from the Crime Branch Unit after Vimla Hiren, wife of deceased Mansukh Hiren, alleged that he was linked to her husband's death.

Hiren's body was found in the Kalwa creek last week. He was linked to the Scorpio car laden with explosives found outside the house of industrialist Mukesh Ambani.

The opposition BJP on Tuesday stalled the Assembly proceedings demanding Mr. Vaze's suspension and arrest.

## CBI tells SC that it will pursue coal theft case

It is under the mandate of the CVC

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI

The CBI informed the Supreme Court on Wednesday that the Mamata Banerjee government's withdrawal of general consent for CBI investigations cannot stop it from probing the massive theft and illegal transportation of coal from the Eastern Coalfield mines by State and Central public sector officials in cahoots with the mafia.

One of the prime accused in the case, Anup Majee, had approached the Supreme Court in appeal against a Calcutta HC order upholding the CBI probe. Majee is a director of a company engaged in the pur-

## U.S. Defense Secretary to visit India

Cooperation, regional security challenges are expected to be discussed



Lloyd Austin

American Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin will visit India from March 19 to 21 and meet Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and other leaders as part of his maiden visit abroad, the Pentagon announced on Wednesday. The dates of the visit were released by the Defence Ministry. The Secretary, whose trip begins on Saturday, will also visit Japan and South Korea and the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command in Hawaii. It would reinforce the U.S.'s commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific region – founded on respect for international rules, laws, and norms," the Pentagon said.

"In India, Secretary Austin will meet his counterparts and other senior officials to dis-

cuss the importance of international defence relationships, and reinforce the United States' commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific region – founded on respect for international rules, laws, and norms," the statement said.

"Both sides are expected to discuss ways to further strengthen bilateral defence cooperation and exchange views on regional security challenges and common interests in maintaining a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region. Discussions regarding defence cooperation would also focus on how both countries could consolidate military-to-military cooperation and defence trade and industry coopera-

tion," a Defence Ministry statement said, adding that India being part of Mr. Austin's first official trip as Secretary underscored the strength of the U.S.-India strategic partnership.

India and the U.S. have witnessed a deepening of their security partnership, across both Democrat and Republican administrations. Growing Chinese assertiveness has also brought them closer in terms of security cooperation. There are several defence deals in the pipeline. A proposal for 30 armed drones, 10 for each Service, from General Atomics estimated at over \$3 billion, is at advanced stages of being cleared by the Defence Ministry.

## India not part of Russian meet on Afghanistan

Expanded 'Troika' includes U.S., China, Pakistan, with representatives from Kabul and Taliban

SUHASINI HAIDAR  
NEW DELHI

Close on the heels of U.S. plans for a United Nations regional conference on Afghanistan, Russia has announced it will hold a conference of special envoys from the U.S., China, and Pakistan, along with representatives of the Afghanistan government, Taliban and other senior Afghan leaders next week.

Unlike the UN-led formulation, however, India has not been invited to the Russian conference, officials confirmed, adding that Moscow has kept New Delhi apprised of the two-year old "Troika" process involving consultations between U.S.,

Russia and China. "A regular meeting of the expanded 'troika' is scheduled for March 18 in Moscow at the level of special representatives of Russia, China, the United States and Pakistan, dedicated to the intra-Afghan settlement," said Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakhrova.

Apart from the Afghan representatives of the Ghani government and the High Council for National Reconciliation, leaders including former President Hamid Karzai and Qatar's envoy have also been invited.

The meeting is expected to discuss ways to assist advancing intra-Afghan talks in Doha

try spokesperson said the composition of the final delegation that would travel from Kabul was under discussion, but that the Ghani government would participate.

**No comment from MEA**  
The MEA declined to comment on India's exclusion from the meeting, which would be the first such meeting with Afghanistan and Taliban representatives present, ever since the Doha talks process ran into trouble earlier this year.

Diplomatic sources said the Troika process was an "already established mechanism", and that there was no attempt to "leave In-

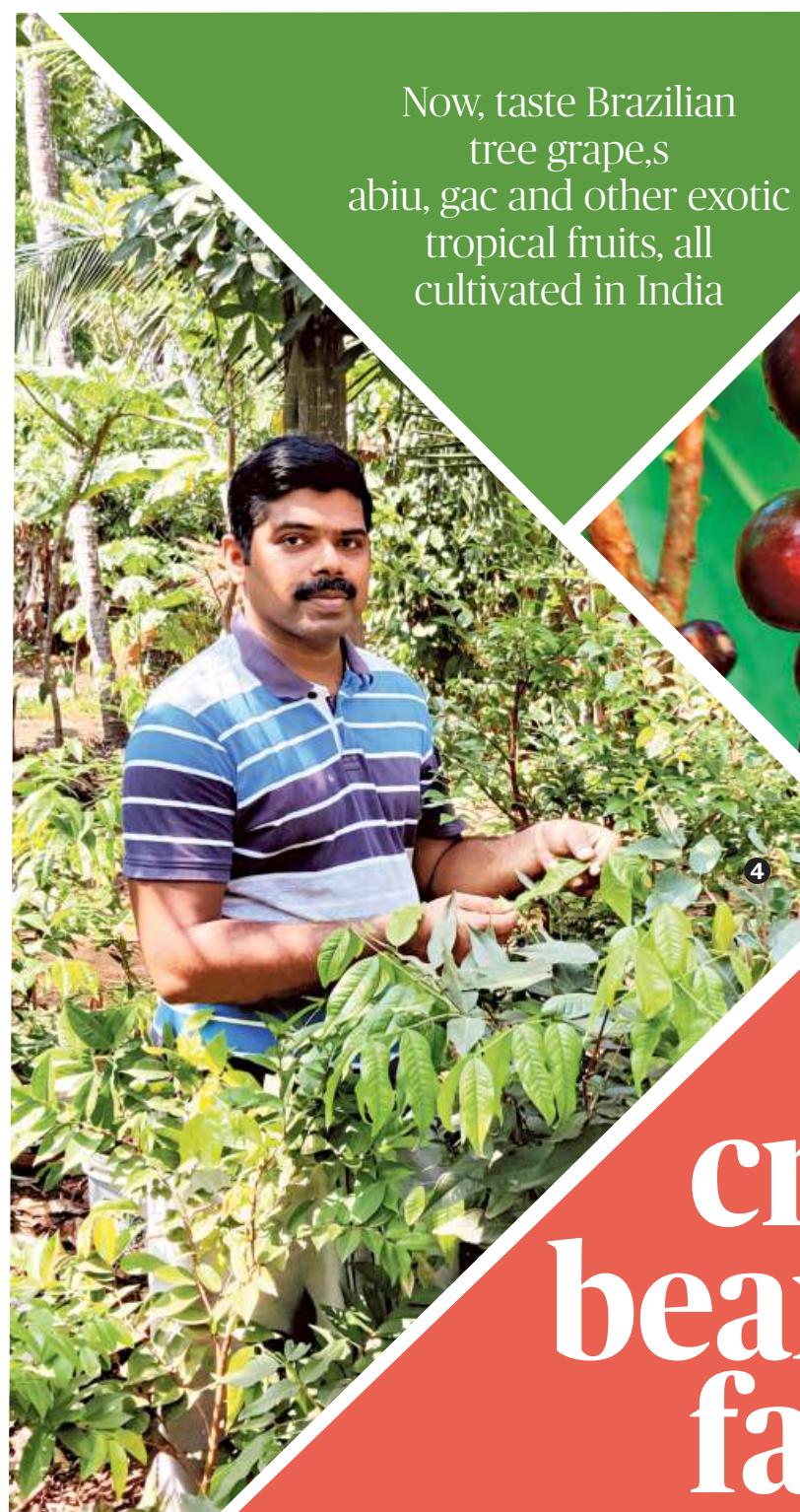
dia out" of the proposed talks. The sources said Russia is committed to the path of building "regional consensus" for Afghanistan's peace process, and that it hopes to include India in the talks framework at a later date.

Officials also said the Moscow "Troika Plus" meeting next week would run "in addition to" and not "counter to" the U.S. proposals for the future roadmap for Afghanistan. The proposals include discussions on a ceasefire and power sharing in a "more inclusive" government in Kabul, and indicated that the U.S. is still considering whether to pull out its final 2,500 troops from Afghanistan by May 1 this year.

Urban Development Minister Hardeep Puri, speaking on the Bill, said there "was a public perception that the issues with regard to unauthorised colonies were delayed by those who were in office earlier."

"In 1947, 17% of the total population of the country lived in urban areas, Delhi's population at that time was eight lakh. After partition and relocation, it went up to 22 lakhs, and I expect that during the Census of 2021, the population would be close to two crore people," he said.

**Survey extension**  
Mr. Puri also quoted a letter received by his Ministry from the Delhi government seeking the extension of a survey of un



Now, taste Brazilian tree grapes, abiu, gac and other exotic tropical fruits, all cultivated in India

## Ice cream beans, por favor?

PRIYADESHINI S

Have you tasted the abiu, jaboticaba, achachiru or gac? These exotic tropical fruits are now being grown locally and making their way to Indian dining tables. Initially a hobby, the commercial viability and nutritional value of the exotics have been established.

"The mangosteen, rambutan and dragon fruit are now familiar and being grown commercially in many farms in India. Though it is early days for the abiu, jaboticaba and others, some are already in shops and on our tables," says Ajesh TR, of Thoppil Orchards in Muvattupuzha on the outskirts of Kochi, which has about 300 varieties of exotic trees now.

Though Kerala leads in this

agrarian experiment, growers in Goa, Gujarat, Karnataka and Maharashtra have also jumped on to the bandwagon.

Bestin Joe, who grows foreign tropical fruits and vegetables, calls it "a big experiment...a sort of revolution". He adds, "In the last one year, people turned toward their gardens and asked themselves, 'what more can we grow?'

An IT professional based in Bengaluru, Bestin has been working from home in Kochi since April 2020. This gave him the opportunity to work with his father, PV Jose, on their two-acre farm. He explains that the recent spike in interest has been because of successful experiments with imported fruit plants like the achachiru or the Bolivian mangosteen.

### BEFORE YOU EXPERIMENT

According to most growers, the Government policy regarding import of exotic plants is strict and limiting. Import of plants require a phytosanitary certificate and the plants are quarantined. They are then checked for any pathogen that may infect the local environment. Pauline Deborah, Professor of Botany at Women's Christian College, Chennai, explains "Some of the exotics adapt themselves easily and some struggle to establish. It's a real fancy thing to grow exotics and certainly an object of pride. However these turn competitive for native fruits and a challenge for farmers. Some of them can become naturalised or invasive too, posing a threat to local fruit trees. Experiments with exotics can be for the hobbyists in small pockets but certainly not recommended for farmers. Anything grown in its native soil at a mass level is always good for the people, ecology and commerce."

that dragon fruit too has seen a similar trajectory.

Jigar Mehta, a doctor by profession, began farming dragon fruit, along with his father Rashmikant Mehta, at their six-acre

Gurukul farms at Pantia in Kutch. "The demand is high, especially in metro cities, and the fruit grown in India is sweeter than the ones that are imported from Thailand and other countries," says Rashmikant, explaining that the difference in day and night temperatures of Kutch (ranging from 44 degrees Centigrade at day time to 23 degrees at night) is favourable for this plant from the cactus family. He has 3,000 poles on which the creeper is growing.

Farmers in Maharashtra, Punjab and West Bengal are also cultivating dragon fruit.

One of the latest foreign tropical fruits to join the list is jaboticaba, or the Brazilian tree grape, which grows in bunches on the tree trunk. "It is sweet and visually the tree looks very appealing," says Bestin; a reason why it

is also now being used in landscaping.

He explains that the first variety that came here, the sabara,

was a slow grower and took almost eight years to bear fruit.

"Farmers ran out of patience but later a precocious variety, the red hybrid variety bore fruit in just three years." This changed the approach to jaboticaba.

**Passing on the wisdom**

Retired scientist Hari Muraleedharan grows almost 800 foreign species on his farm Green Grama in Kottarakkara, in Kollam district. "Of these, 500 are fruiting, he says. "I know each plant, leaf and bud."

Nine years ago, he pioneered the fruiting of the Inca peanut, a native of the Amazon rainforest and a rich source of omega fatty acids. He also grew the West African fluted pumpkin, for the first time.

On Hari's farm, one can find the Cupuacu, a cocoa-like fruit from West Africa; 12 varieties of jaboticaba of which two are fruiting; the Brazilian grumichama cherry; kesusu and nam-nam

from Borneo islands, and the Chinese mulberry – Che fruit.

Six months ago he began a YouTube Channel discussing ways and means to grow exotic plants and has been building a steady following.

"Social media has been a multiplier of this craze," agrees Bestin – there are several Facebook and WhatsApp groups that connect them globally.

Last year Ajesh started to review fruits on his YouTube Channel, helping others understand their prospects. "I host fruit tree reviews, their care, pollination, flowering fertilisation and all related information. I also taste the fruit and talk about it," says Ajesh.

According to him, abiu with its tender coconut-like flesh carries a hint of pineapple and mango flavours and lasts for seven days, while the jaboticaba is very similar to the grape and has a shelf life of two to three days. As most exotics here are tropical, their tastes are akin to fruits familiar with us already, like lychee, sapota and mango family," adds Ajesh.

Prashanth SP's I-NET Farms at Kottayam attracts visitors in droves to see the amazing collection of exotic fruit trees and plants. Spread over 10 acres the farm, with rare fruit plants from 17 countries, was started in 2012.

In Mangalur, founder of Balanja Farm Nursery, Anil Balanja has specifically developed grafted varieties suitable for the coastal area, "from Thiruvananthapuram to Goa." He makes trips to South Asia and other countries to bring graft "scions" from the mother tree.

Some of the rare plants he has are pepisanjan or Burmese tree grape, rambai and bacupari from Brazil. The newest additions are the blue Java banana from Indonesia, which has started to blossom, blood oranges from Brazil and red lemons from Papua New Guinea. A buyer from Bengaluru recently bought a consignment of 2,000 ice cream bean saplings to grow commercially.

"There is a lot of movement in this area of farming definitely," he says. Bestin, however, sounds a cautionary note. "Not all exotics are useful. It's by trial and error that we learn of their efficacy and grow it commercially."

## Cop in the act

A dead body in a lake brings chaos in city author Prraveen Khumar's latest thriller, *Battle for Power*

SRINIVASA RAMANUJAM

"A policeman's wife is missing." That is the one-line film idea that producer MM Chandramouli pitched to author Prraveen Khumar N, after being impressed reading his debut novel, *An Incredible Indian Rescue*.

The producer wanted a slapstick comedy revolving around that line, but Prraveen found it hard. "I just could not make it funny. So, I wrote a thriller in the form of a book and presented it to him when it was 70% complete."

The producer leafed through it, and was convinced that it was "global content". A film on the subject is in the works currently, but Prraveen is currently basking in the good vibes he is receiving for its written version.

His second book, *Battle for Power* (Emerald Publishers), set in Chennai, revolves around how life changes for Thilk Ratnagar, ACP Crime, when he investigates a dead body in a lake.

"Most of the events portrayed are taken from reality," says Prraveen, about the mys-

### WITH KAMAL HAASAN IN MIND

Prraveen Khumar is a big fan of actor Kamal Haasan. He wrote the protagonist of his debut novel keeping his favourite Kamal character (Adhi Narayanan of 1995 Tamil film *Kuruthipunal*) in mind. His latest novel, *Battle for Power*, was released by the actor at the recently-concluded Chennai Book Fair.



Reality bytes  
Prraveen Khumar  
• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

## BACK TO ROOTS

Ethnic answer The palm leaf is flexible and durable which is why it is best suited for packaging • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Handcrafted palm leaf boxes for packing food have regained popularity in Tamil Nadu as a sustainable, durable option

CHITRADEEPAN ANANTHARAM

Using the banana leaf, *mandarai* leaf (*Bauhinia variegata*) and *panai olai* (palm leaves) to pack food was once traditional in South India.

The pandemic, which prompted a surge in the use of plastics, reiterated the need for sustainable packaging alternatives. Palm leaves, as restaurants and cloud kitchens launched in the past year have found, are a practical option.

Chennai-based cloud kitchen, Karigar Biryani offers *perunchoru* packaged in palm leaf boxes. This rice dish cooked with meat finds mention in Sangam literature. "Over a period of time, biryani that used to be served on special occasions, has come to be a common, easily available dish. We wanted to offer something

different; therefore in order to make our dish distinctive from other types of biryani available in the market, we pack it in palm leaf boxes," says Girish Subash, co-founder, Kariyar Biryani.

"We initially decided to go in for bamboo boxes, but our research led us to understand that maintenance was a major issue," he continues, "While travelling in Sattun and Kovilpatti region, I came across many families that were weaving *panai olai petti*, which was predominantly used for packing palm jaggery."

Palm leaves are available in abundance in the region in and around Tiruchendur, but it is during the summer months that craftspersons collect, clean and sun dry the leaves for making various products through the year, shares Jariya Aziz, who runs

a crafts collective Abati, at Kayalpatnam. "In this region, palm leaves are commonly used to store snacks and food items such as *idiyappam*. Wedding favours are also given to guests in *mittai petti*, made of palm leaves. Traditionally, these *pettis* have been a practical and cost effective way to store palm jaggery. Box making is a cottage industry in this region, and it is mostly women who engage in this work," she says.

"There are few artisans who are now actively weaving palm leaf boxes, but for the past few months the demand has surged," says 32-year-

old D Anto Brighten, an Engineering graduate, who took up his family vocation of making palm leaf products at his hometown, Adikalapuram, near Tiruchendur.

Some of the regions in the State where artisans still make products with palm leaf are Thoothukudi, Vilathikulam, Vembai and Nagalapuram, and Pazhaverkadu near Chennai. The craftspersons make six to eight baskets per day, earning a daily wage of ₹200.

"We have supplied over 3,000 boxes so far for packaging biryani. Though it is a labour intensive craft, completely hand made, it is reusable, durable, and has high flexibility. I am glad that it is gaining popularity as a packaging option," says Anto.

Chef Koushik S of Eatitude Consultants, points out that *mandarai* leaves, banana leaves and palm leaves have been part of our culture; these have only regained popularity during the pandemic.

"Apart from being sustainable and biodegradable, palm leaves also impart a unique earthy flavour when I add it and cook it along with biryani," he says.

Not just as boxes, palm leaves can be used to make spoons, cups and even wedding garlands. Anto's most popular innovation last year was a Christmas star made of palm leaf. "These don't require any sort of chemical treatment. Just sun drying would suffice," says Koushik.

"We have to ensure that they do not come in contact with water," says Girish. The leaves are sun-dried to ensure there is no moisture, cut into strips, with the help of a machine, and then woven. Girish says that they have adopted a sterilisation method in their restaurant, where they pre-heat their pizza oven to 300 degrees, flash heat the boxes in batches for a few seconds and then pack the food in them, after layering it with banana leaf.

A palm box's life does not end there, Girish has learnt: "The boxes we send out our biryani in are being repurposed by our customers as planters, dust bins and for storage."

**Jaboticaba on your plate?** (1) *Rollinia deliciosa*; (2-3) sweet kokum; (4) fruit grower Bestin Jose with his jaboticaba; (5) Hawaiian populu banana; (6) Anil Balanja with black jackfruit and (7) Hari Muraleedharan with bowl of West Indian cherry, in their respective gardens • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

After a year of lockdowns, workouts are moving away from gyms as runners, cyclists and surfers reclaim open public spaces to luxuriate in fresh air and sunshine



GOWRI S

Everyday at 4 am, Hari Ramakrishnan straps on a helmet and sets out on his Cervelo S3 bicycle.

From his house in T Nagar, he pedals to East Coast Road-Old Mahabalipuram Road (ECR-OMR), aiming to cover around 70 kilometres. His weekly target is 350 to 400 kilometres.

But Hari has not always been a cycling enthusiast. In mid-September, when the pandemic was raging through Chennai, this former MMA (Mixed Martial Arts) trainee discovered the joy of biking.

Many untried paths and a number of bike upgrades later, the theatre actor-director says, "I feel I have more control over cycling than any other workout that I have ever done."

Like many of us, Hari too felt lethargy creep in during lockdown before he realised it was vital to remain active. Though he wanted to get back into a fitness routine, MMA being a contact sport was not ideal at a time that mandated physical distancing. That is when he discovered cycling. In a few months, he was a part of multiple, mushrooming groups in the city, offering people company to ride with.

It was the with Dr Naveen Alexan-

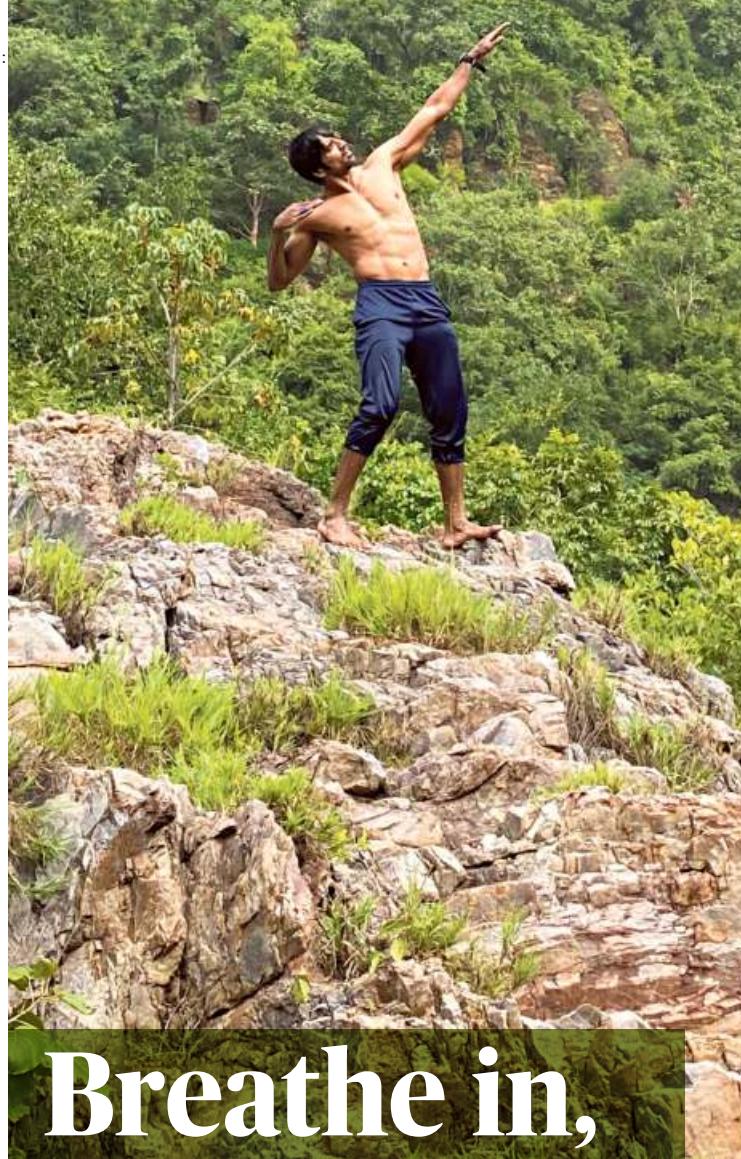
der, a general surgeon at Sri Rama-chandra Medical Centre. "When you get hooked on to going to the gym at least six times a week, and suddenly a lockdown starts, you feel lost," he says.

Though he had bought a bicycle in 2014, he had not got around to using it, until last year. Now, he easily touches upwards of 60 kilometres a day. And when training for cycling challenges, even hits 100-odd kilometres. "A four-hour ride is nothing for me now. My resting heart rate has drastically reduced. I get through my days much better than I did before," he adds.

Much like Hari and Dr Naveen, people across the country are reclaiming the outdoors to stay fit. Since November last year, Chennai-based actor Shabeer Kallarakal has been participating in group treks. To make the treks more challenging, he incorporates parkour moves to scale around obstacles. "We see how efficiently we can move while on the trek," he states. Thus, as much as it is an adventure, the trek also becomes an extension of his carefully-constructed fitness regimen.

#### A breath of fresh air

While the pandemic has certainly given way to a sense of appreciation for the outdoors, it has also been a



## Breathe in, get out



wake up call for many to remain healthy and active. Meanwhile, the paranoia that comes with exercising indoors in the presence of others, has only just begun to wane.

All combined, outdoor activities – everything from an easy walk to an acquired skill like surfing – are seeing many more takers now. "I started enjoying the small things – like looking at ants and spiders... I feel very connected to these treks now. Even though the climb is physically exhausting, the positivity it brings is something else," says Shabeer, who also runs on the beach, as part of his

strength and conditioning routine. His next goal? A course in mountaineering.

Outdoor sports, earlier overlooked by people who preferred air-conditioned gyms, have been getting increasingly popular.

Especially with WFH (work from home) enabling people to save time on commuting, which they can then use on self care.

Since December, Varshaa Rajan has been surfing twice every week; she vouches for its positive effect on her mental health and says she does not see herself returning to the gym.

**Nature is my playground**  
(Clockwise from far left) A photo from Dr Naveen's cycling trail; Shabeer during one of his treks; an outdoor session at SimpleSTRONG; daily joggers warming up at Marina Beach, in Chennai

■ R RAVINDRA N, DR NAVEEN ALEXANDER AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Being cooped up at home for months together for the first time ever, has only increased the vast ocean's appeal, she says. She travels from Virugambakkam to Kovalam twice a week for her classes.

#### Making parks cool again

"You don't even realise that you are exercising. It's so much better because you have your own little pocket of space in this ocean," says Varshaa, who spotted dolphins once.

Young adults have a misplaced perception that working out in parks, beaches and other public spaces is not 'cool' enough, says Dr Rohini Rau, who set out on regular walks along Panayur beach during the lockdowns. She was pregnant at the time and these walks were deemed essential.

"These spaces were usually considered for people who are above 40 or so. That is changing," says Dr Rohini. Playpens in parks and beaches being repurposed as pull-up bars and props for mobility exercises is a testament to the same, she adds.

There are many benefits to training outdoors. Vikram Menon, founder and coach at Chennai-based SimpleSTRONG, a functional strength training and calisthenics outfit explains, "There is a huge mental health aspect to training outdoors. There are less distractions – you are not looking at your phone, or being troubled by anyone at home. You can call it meditation in many ways, where it's just you and Nature. You will feel more refreshed and recharged."

Apart from the physical and mental health benefits, outdoor fitness can also open doors to acquiring unexpected hobbies and skills. "It [cycling] also gave me an excuse to do a lot of photography!" says Dr Naveen.

He has been steadily documenting sights along the trails.

As for Shabeer, new streams, lean waterfalls and unusual picnic spots came his way while scaling up the Nagalapuram falls in Andhra Pradesh.

He says, "We tried three to four routes to scale the peak. Every time we go uphill, we find a new waterfall! These are the experiences that we take back even if we don't succeed in scaling the peak."

As more people breathe in the fresh air and sights, and carefully clock in hours of activity, there is a renewed sense of fitness among the city's residents. Meanwhile, it's time to work around our excuses, fellow homebodies!



## Celebrating the FORGOTTEN

Singer Dhee and rapper Arivu's new track 'Enjoy Enjaami' is the first single to release on AR Rahman's indie platform maajja

PRADEEP KUMAR

A call to our ancestors, a celebration of our roots: that's what singer Dhee and rapper Arivu's track 'Enjoy Enjaami' is about. The recently-released track is produced by maajja, the platform started by composer AR Rahman – to support indie musicians – and composer Santhosh Narayanan.

Dhee is currently managed by maajja who is also producing her upcoming début album in English. "They (maajja) asked me if I wanted to do a song for the YAALL festival (maajja's music fest), and I thought it would be nice to do something in Tamil. Arivu and I had wanted to collaborate [for some time]; he is an amazing musician and appa (Santhosh) was kind enough to produce this," says the singer, who has sung tracks in films like *Madras*, *Iruhi Suttru*, *Soorai Pottru* and the upcoming *Jaththiram*.

The music video for 'Enjoy Enjaami', shot in Arivu's hometown in Tiruvannamalai district, is the "first-ever time" 22-year-old Dhee has been filmed for an independent track. "It was pretty scary at first but when you get there [and start filming], you just vibe to it and then it becomes fine. At the end of the day, I didn't want to leave and didn't want to stop." Her début album is expected to be out by the end of this year; at the very least, a few tracks from the album will be released, she says.

Dhee lets on that the tracks will be "contemporary jazz laced with different things. I wish I could write in Tamil but it would probably take five to 10 years for me to learn Tamil. I can speak the language but not creatively write. Maybe, I will do it one day."

Life has changed for Dhee since 'Rowdy Baby' by' released; the track from the film *Maari 2*, which she sang alongside Dhanush, has over a billion views on YouTube. When she steps out, kids call her the "Goli soda akka", she tells us, but she will not concede that her career has been progressing in a way that is not organic.

Dhee has been in Chennai since the national lockdown was enforced in March 2020. Under normal circumstances, she would have split her time between Sydney, Australia, where she is based, and Chennai, where her parents live.

"My dream is to see South Asian artistes excel. When festivals like YAALL happen, it will promote South Asian indie musicians all over the world."

#### THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13402

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- Across**
- 1 Person hoping to find sanctuary elsewhere (6,6)
  - 9 Eliminating rounds of a race (5)
  - 10 Nonplussed (2,1,4)
  - 11 Collar - cop (4)
  - 12 Spring-flowering woodland plant (8)
  - 14 No matter whether (4,2)
  - 15 South and Central American wildcat (6)
  - 18 Not batting? (8)
  - 20 Destruction (4)
  - 22 In a state of serenity (2,5)
  - 23 Prestige (5)
  - 24 State of inability to manage (12)
- Down**
- 2 Disease (anag) – coast (7)
  - 3 In case (4)
  - 4 Ridiculously small (6)
  - 5 Seen cave (anag) –

The solution will appear on March 18, 2021

Solution No. 13402



## A good day to dive hard

At the CLAW Global team, Special Forces veterans are training people with disabilities in scuba diving for the Triple Elemental World Record. All you need to join them is an unconquerable spirit

DEEPA ALEXANDER

The Special Forces (SF) are the Jedi knights of the Indian armed forces: elite warriors trained to survive, stabilise, and thrive in extraordinary situations. They retire in their mid-30s with skill sets such as sky diving, scuba diving, mountaineering, unarmed combat and emergency medical response. In the hinterland from where most hail, and in the corporate jobs that are their second careers, these skills rust.

In January 2019, Major Vivek Jacob, a Para



**Into the deep** (Clockwise from far left) Scenes from the camp; Pardeep Ritwal, a combat diving instructor who lost his leg in a cylinder blast accident, helps train PWDs • CEE JAY AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

SF officer who had to hang up his boots following a combat skydive injury, founded CLAW Global (Conquer Land Air and Water), to teach life skills to adventurers and people with disabilities (PWD). Its core team, mostly in their 30s, also comprises Major Arun Ambathy and five soldiers drawn from the Para, Para SF and the Navy's marine commandos (MARCO).

"Team Claw comprises soldiers who have

extended exposure to hard combat, and civilian volunteers who swell our ranks," says Chennai-based Arun who retired after a slew of injuries.

"There are no ecosystems to absorb these men and CLAW helped them fit into a job profile they are comfortable with.

In February 2019, CLAW's Operation Blue Freedom began teaching PWDs to scuba

diving to secure their dignity."

Despite the pandemic, team CLAW has offered free scuba diving training to more than a 100 PWDs paralysed by spinal cord injuries. It is now assembling a team for the first of the Triple Elemental World Record scheduled to be held in Maldives in April.

"We first train in a pool, move to quarry diving and then to the open sea. PWDs will also be trained in adaptive skydiving (Dubai) and in adaptive mountaineering (Siachen glacier). We hope to complete the three

records by end-2021," says Arun over a phone call, adding that this is an open call to PWDs and the able-bodied to join them for the record. "PWDs have

informed us that they are excited to join the team and are looking forward to the challenge."

"Our instructor to student ratio is 1:1. We descend to 18 metres through eight progressive immersions and monitoring of vitals – people with spinal cord injuries cannot thermo-regulate and may lack bladder and bowel control," says Arun.

Instructors use a combination of encouragement and instruction. "This was the first time I had heard of adaptive scuba diving in India and now want to participate for the record too. CLAW worked around my disability, weighing down my legs so that I didn't keep floating up. The instructors are empathetic and make us practise on a par with others; that makes a world of difference," says Dr Deepa. "Adventure is for everyone."

That is something Petty Officer Pardeep Ritwal, MARCO veteran, believes in. Pardeep lost his leg to an accident but now helps PWDs dive. He hops to the edge of the ocean and dives deep.

For registration and details call, 9958084473.

the spirit – like the SF they learn to thrive in a tough world – but sometimes not the money or the circumstances. We want to bridge that. Going forward we hope NGOs and corporates can directly sponsor the PWDs."

In Puducherry an unlikely smattering of enthusiasts – teenagers, doctors, college students and veterans – has banded together to learn diving.

"The level of disability has never been a problem as we are trained in adaptive diving. We have mixed batches – able-bodied, amputees, wheel-chair users, some paralysed neck down," says Arun, adding that the venture has been lauded by the Government of India. "When we took Salma Salmath diving in Lakshadweep, the powerful image of her in a hijab underwater opened the gates for others."

In the Bay of Bengal, a boat with diving apparatus reveals little of the calm cobalt-blue waters beneath. Coorg-based Dr Deepa Venkatesh, a 34-year-old dentist with polio who uses crutches, follows her instructor retired Havildar Prabash Kumar as she gingerly lowers herself into the ocean where visibility is 12 metres on a good day.

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# Indo-Pacific is key priority: White House

'Early scheduling of the Quad summit signifies the group's importance for the Biden administration'

SRI RAM LAKSHMAN

The scheduling of the first-ever Quad leaders' summit-level meeting within 50 days of the Biden administration signified the importance the administration places on the Indo-Pacific, the White House said on Tuesday.

"That President Biden has made this one of his earliest multilateral engagements speaks to the importance we place on close cooperation with our allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific," Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters about Friday's virtual meeting between U.S. President Joe Biden, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Prime Minister Scott Morrison of Australia and Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga of Japan.

The White House is expecting a range of issues to



**Focal point:** Several issues, including COVID-19, economic cooperation and climate crisis, are likely to be discussed. • AFP

be discussed, including COVID-19, economic cooperation and the climate crisis.

In his interim strategic guidance to administration agencies and departments issued earlier this month, President Biden had said China was "the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological

power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system."

Yet, the Biden administration has been careful to portray the Quad as something bigger than a grouping centred around the China challenge. It reiterated this position on Tuesday.

"It (Friday's meeting) will showcase the Quad's ability

to pool our capabilities and build habits of cooperation to address some of those urgent challenges we face. At the same time, I would just note that the Quad is not about any single challenge. It's not about any single competitor," State Department spokesperson Ned Price said. He was responding to a question on the extent to which the China-U.S. adversarial relationship would be discussed on Friday.

**Common interests**

"This is an entity forged and formed because we share common interests. There, maritime security is, of course, an important one, but our shared interests go well beyond that. And I think you will see reflected in the agenda, the breadth of those shared interest in the after-

math of the Quad meetings," he said. Mr. Price also said the fact that President Biden was due to meet with his counterparts on Friday and that Mr. Blinken had already held discussions with his Quad counterparts in February, signalled the U.S.' commitment to the Indo-Pacific.

"It was important for us to underline in the early days of this administration, our commitment to the Indo-Pacific as we've said from this podium, it's a region that holds tremendous promise for the U.S. Also tremendous challenge. We see ourselves as a Pacific nation, we see ourselves as engaged in this region. We want to deepen that engagement and this is an important forum with important partners with whom we share a good deal of interest," he said.

# What does Biden's peace plan mean for Afghanistan?

The administration pushes for an interim unity government

STANLY JOHNY

The Joe Biden administration has proposed a new peace plan to the Afghan government and the Taliban, seeking to bring violence to a halt. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has written a letter to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, detailing the proposal.



The Ghani administration has been critical of the U.S.' outreach to the Taliban. • AP

administration is concerned about the slow pace of the talks. The U.S. assessment is that if American troops are pulled out of Afghanistan, the Taliban would make quick gains.

## EXPLAINER

In his letter to Mr. Ghani, Mr. Blinken was blunt. "We are considering the full withdrawal of our forces by May 1, as we consider other options. Even with the continuation of financial assistance from the U.S. to your forces after an American military withdrawal, I am concerned that the security situation will worsen and that the Taliban could make rapid territorial gains," he writes.

Second, Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S.'s special envoy for Afghanistan, will share written proposals with the Afghan leadership and the Taliban to accelerate talks. It urges both sides to reach a consensus on Afghanistan's future constitutional and governing arrangements; find a road map to a new "inclusive government"; and agree on the terms of a "permanent and comprehensive ceasefire". Mr. Blinken has also proposed a senior level meeting of the Afghan government and the Taliban in Turkey.

According to the agreement the U.S. signed with the Taliban in February 2020, American troops are set to leave Afghanistan by May 1. The Taliban and the Afghan government started peace talks in Doha in September last year but reached no breakthrough. The Biden

sure to Kabul to release Taliban prisoners as part of an agreement it reached with the insurgents. Even when the Doha talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government were under way, Mr. Ghani made it clear that he, as elected President, is the only legitimate representative of the Afghan people and he resisted making concessions to the Taliban.

When Mr. Blinken's letter was leaked, Mr. Ghani was quick to respond. He reiterated his opposition to any transfer of power except through elections. His Vice President Amrullah Saleh, a hardline critic of the Taliban, said the U.S. "can make a decision on their troops, not on the people of Afghanistan".

## What's next?

While the Afghan government's opposition to sharing power with the Taliban is well known, it is not clear whether Mr. Ghani could continue to resist American pressure, especially if the U.S. brings regional powers, including India, on board.

And if the Biden administration decides to withdraw troops by May, Mr. Ghani would be in a tougher spot. He doesn't have any good options. If he rejects the American offer, the war will continue. The Taliban have already taken over much of the country's hinterlands and are breathing down the neck of its cities. If he accepts the proposal, he will have to share power with the Taliban and discuss amendments to the Constitution and the future governance framework. Either way, the Taliban are set to make gains.

# China hopes Quad meet will be 'conducive to peace'

ANANTH KRISHNAN

China's Foreign Ministry said Beijing hoped Friday's first-ever summit of the leaders of the Quad framework – India, Australia, Japan and the U.S. – would be "conducive" to regional peace and stability "rather than the opposite".

The comments from Beijing on Wednesday came days after China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in his annual press conference on March 7, said China was "open-minded to explore and deepen cooperation with the U.S." under the Biden administration after four turbulent years, and hoped "the U.S. will move in the same direction and remove all its unreasonable restrictions on bilateral cooperation as early as possible, not

create new obstacles". Without mentioning the Quad, Mr. Wang hit out at what he called "building small circles in the name of multilateralism", which was "in fact 'group politics'." "Multilateralism with one's own interests taking precedence is still unilateral thinking," he said. "Selective multilateralism is not the right choice."

Friday's virtual summit will be attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, President Joe Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison.

Asked about the summit, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said China "believes that any regional cooperation architecture should follow the principle of peaceful deve-

lopment and win-win cooperation, which is the prevailing trend of the times". "We hope the relevant countries will keep in mind the common interests of the regional countries, uphold the principles of openness, inclusiveness and win-win cooperation, and do things that are conducive to regional peace stability and prosperity, rather than the opposite," he said.

**High-level meeting**  
The U.S. and China, meanwhile, are preparing for the highest level face-to-face official meeting following the U.S. election, which reports said could take place as early as next week. Mr. Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke for two hours on February 11, and a Chinese de-

legation led by the top foreign policy official, Yang Jiechi, who is a member of the Politburo and director of the Central Committee's Foreign Affairs Commission, may travel to Alaska, the *South China Morning Post* reported. He may be accompanied by Mr. Wang, the Foreign Minister, and meet with their counterparts, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan.

The report noted the selection of the two topmost Chinese officials for the meeting "would reflect the importance Beijing puts on rebuilding China-U.S. ties" and the meeting in Alaska would be at "the geographical halfway point for the two sides, away from the global media's glare".

On reports that the four Quad countries were exploring coordination in their supply of vaccines to countries in the region, Mr. Zhao, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said China "is a steadfast advocate of equitable vaccine distribution". "We have joined COVAX [the World Health Organization-backed global initiative] under which China has undertaken to provide an initial 10 million doses for emergency use in developing countries," he said. "So far, China has donated or is donating COVID-19 vaccines to 69 developing countries in urgent need and is exporting vaccines to 43 countries... Now a number of vaccines are available around the world. It up to each country to decide to choose..."

# Sri Lanka invites Myanmar junta's Minister

Wunna Maung Lwin has been invited to attend a virtual BIMSTEC meeting

MEERA SRINIVASAN  
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka has invited Myanmar's junta-appointed Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin for a virtual meeting of members of regional body BIMSTEC, which Sri Lanka currently chairs.

Pro-democracy activists in Myanmar slammed the move on social media, as Colombo's outreach comes just over a month after Myanmar's military seized power in Yangon. Sri Lanka has not commented on the development so far.

In a March 2 letter addressed to Mr. Wunna Maung Lwin, Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena said a ministerial meeting of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation would be held on April 1.

"The 17th ministerial meeting will greatly benefit from your Excellency's va-



**Saying no:** Activists staging a protest outside Myanmar's Embassy in Colombo against the BIMSTEC invite. • AFP

lued participation, and I look forward to our close engagement over the course of the meeting," the letter said.

**Critical comments**  
Hundreds of Facebook users identifying as citizens of Myanmar left a trail of critical comments on the official page of Sri Lanka's Foreign Ministry. They urged the Sri Lankan government to stand with the people of Myanmar, and not recognise or accept the military junta as legiti-

mate government.

Commenting on Colombo's invitation, Admiral (Retd.) Jayanath Colombage, Secretary to the Foreign Ministry, said Sri Lanka has invited the incumbent Foreign Ministers of all the fellow BIMSTEC members – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Myanmar, and Thailand.

"Our invitation to the incumbent Foreign Minister of Myanmar is only within the ambit of BIMSTEC. Unless BIMSTEC expels Myanmar,

meanwhile, we have to exclude them," he told *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

Seeking to make a distinction between Colombo's BIMSTEC summit invite to Myanmar, and its stance on the junta takeover, Mr. Colombage said the government was yet to decide on its position on the latter. "We are busy battling the Geneva [UN Human Rights Council] session, so we have kept that decision in abeyance," he said.

**Close ties**  
Sri Lanka and Myanmar share close religious and cultural ties, as the majority community in both countries follow the Theravada strand of Buddhism.

Meanwhile, nearly 40 Sri Lankan activists staged a demonstration outside the Myanmar Embassy in Colombo on Wednesday, in solidarity with Myanmar's protesting civilians.

# Russia targets Twitter over 'illegal' content

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
PARIS

Russia said on Wednesday it was disrupting Twitter's services because the platform had failed to remove "illegal" content, the latest in a series of moves exerting control over foreign tech giants.

The Kremlin has been clamping down on sites, including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, in recent months for hosting content supporting jailed opposition figure Alexei Navalny.

Roskomnadzor, Russia's media watchdog, said the disruption aimed to "protect Russian citizens" after Twitter failed to comply with its requests to delete content related to child pornography, drug use and calls for minors to commit suicide.

# U.K. variant 64% deadlier than earlier strains: study

High lethality, faster spread a challenge

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
PARIS

The coronavirus strain that first emerged in Britain and is now spreading internationally is 64% more deadly than pre-existing strains, according to a study published on Wednesday that confirms earlier advice to the British government.

The variant, detected late last year, is one of several to have emerged in recent months from countries with large epidemics, raising the stakes in the race to rein in the pandemic.

Findings from one of those studies, led by the University of Exeter, were published in the *BMJ* on Wednesday.

Researchers compared data for nearly 55,000 pairs of participants who tested

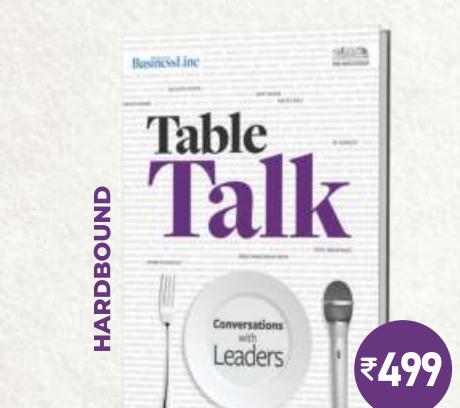
# UNSC slams Myanmar violence

REUTERS  
NEW YORK

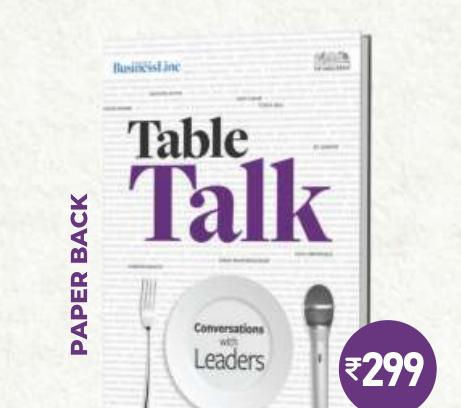
The UN Security Council agreed on a statement on Wednesday that condemns violence against Myanmar protesters and urges military restraint, diplomats said, but dropped language condemning the Army takeover as a coup and threatening possible further action due to opposition by China, Russia, India and Vietnam.

"The Security Council strongly condemns the violence against peaceful protesters, including against women, youth and children," according to the agreed statement, seen by Reuters. "The council calls for the military to exercise utmost restraint and emphasizes that it is following the situation closely."

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THE HINDU GROUP

M ND-NDE

## MARKET WATCH

	10-03-2021	% CHANGE
Sensex	51280	-0.50
US Dollar	72.91	0.02
Gold	44286	0.65
Brent oil	67.86	-0.35

## NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	745.35	+5.40
Asian Paints	2431.95	+9.25
Axis Bank	760.75	+15.30
Bajaj Auto	3867.55	+68.80
Bajaj Finserv	9991.45	+22.30
Bajaj Finance	5545.05	+130.00
Bharti Airtel	525.85	+4.10
BPCL	445.50	+0.40
Britannia Ind	3480.35	+53.60
Cipla	812.40	+15.40
Coal India	150.95	-0.75
Divis Lab	3528.10	+24.90
Dr Reddys Lab	4500.40	+52.10
Eicher Motors	2672.30	+79.60
GAIL (India)	147.70	-1.35
Grasim Ind	1385.05	+18.70
HCL Tech	988.50	+15.35
HDFC	2599.80	+22.50
HDFC Bank	1555.75	+6.75
HDFC Life	731.35	+8.85
Hero MotoCorp	3419.35	+29.50
Hindalco	340.35	+7.10
Hind Unilever	2227.85	+29.35
ICICI Bank	625.60	+0.50
IndusInd Bank	1039.85	+15.05
Infosys	1368.15	+22.60
Indian Oil Corp	98.85	+1.70
ITC	206.50	+1.30
JSW Steel	414.00	+12.40
Kotak Bank	1963.95	+15.00
L&T	1524.20	+15.90
M&M	863.80	+11.80
Maruti Suzuki	7272.10	+29.45
Nestle India Ltd.	16931.45	+20.65
NTPC	109.65	+0.15
ONGC	114.40	+2.35
PowerGrid Corp	215.15	-0.85
Reliance Ind	2181.95	+9.10
SBI Life	940.75	+30.55
State Bank	387.70	+0.10
Shree Cement	2755.80	+242.65
Sun Pharma	626.00	+13.40
Tata Motors	321.45	+6.25
Tata Steel	724.50	+17.75
TCS	3070.95	+20.00
Tech Mahindra	1008.75	+20.60
Titan	1471.25	+14.35
UltraTech Cement	6764.05	+66.65
UPL	621.30	+3.60
Wipro	426.70	+7.50

## EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	72.71	73.03
Euro	86.43	86.84
British Pound	100.83	101.28
Japanese Yen (100)	66.83	67.12
Chinese Yuan	11.16	11.22
Swiss Franc	78.05	78.40
Singapore Dollar	53.96	54.20
Canadian Dollar	57.47	57.72
Malaysian Ringgit	17.61	17.70

Source: Indian Bank

## IN BRIEF



## Dr. Reddy's U.S. plant gets FDA observations

HYDERABAD  
Dr. Reddy's Laboratories' API manufacturing plant in Middlebury, New York, has received 3 observations following an U.S. Food and Drug Administration audit. "We have been issued a Form 483 with three observations... will address them comprehensively within the stipulated timeline. Currently, we do not have any sales from this plant," the company informed the stock exchange on Wednesday.

## States get ₹6,194 cr. in revenue deficit grant

NEW DELHI  
The Finance Ministry released the 12th and final monthly instalment of revenue deficit grant of ₹6,194 crore to the States. With this, a total amount of ₹74,340 crore has been released to eligible States as Post Devolution Revenue Deficit Grant in the current financial year, the Ministry said. The grants are released as per the recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission to meet the gap in revenue accounts of the States post-devolution. PTI

## Govt. blocked over 9,800 URLs: Prasad

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI  
The government blocked over 9,800 URLs, accounts and web pages in 2020, an increase of about 170% from 2019, under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000.

In a written reply to Lok Sabha, Electronics and IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said, wherever the situation warrants, under the provision of section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000, the government blocks unlawful and malicious online content.

He added under this provision, 9,849 URLs/accounts/web pages were blocked in 2020, up from 3,603 URLs/accounts/web pages in 2019.

CM YK

# India filing appeal against Cairn arbitration award, say sources

'Cairn set up tax abusive structure, did not pay taxes anywhere on gains in India'

## PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

India is in the process of filing an appeal against an arbitration panel ruling asking it to return \$1.2 billion to British oil firm Cairn Energy Plc, sources said on Wednesday.

If enforcement proceedings are initiated, India is confident of addressing them and will strongly defend its interests, the sources said, adding it is open to a constructive settlement of tax disputes within the existing legal framework.

India is in the process of filing an appeal in the Cairn arbitration award case, they said, adding it was well within India's sovereign powers to redress the situation of



No end in sight: India will strongly defend its interests in any enforcement proceedings, say sources. ■ FILE PHOTO

## Double Non-Taxation and tax abuse.

Cairn CEO Simon Thomson had last month met the then Finance Secretary Ajay Bhushan Pandey to discuss the arbitration award.

The sources said Cairn is

yet to respond based on the discussions.

Cairn set up a tax abusive structure and did not pay taxes anywhere in the world on the gains that it made in India, they added.

An international tribunal

## IRDAI fines Chola MS General Insurance ₹1 cr.

Insurer violated MISP norms: regulator

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD

Insurance regulator IRDAI has imposed a ₹1-crore penalty on Chola MS General Insurance Company for violating certain provisions of the Motor Insurance Service Provider (MISP) Guidelines.

The March 8 order said the insurer had made payments towards display of advertisement material with four MISPs from November 2, 2017, to December 31, 2019, in contravention of the MISP norms.

"The violation continued for a period of more than two years. Therefore, the Authority imposes a penalty of ₹1 crore," the IRDAI said.

The insurer is directed to ensure in future that any

The violation [of norms] continued for a period of more than two years

engagement with automotive dealers is strictly in compliance with MISP Guidelines."

The charge against the insurer was it made indirect payments to MISPs, auto dealers and persons in the name of 'advertisement' and 'professional charges.'

On the insurer providing only partial data to IRDAI, the regulator said non-submission of documents was viewed seriously and directed it to ensure prompt submission of information in future inspections.

## LIC-owned IDBI Bank exits PCA framework

'Capital, NPA, leverage within limits'

## PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday removed IDBI Bank from its enhanced regulatory supervision, or the Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework, after almost four years, on improved financial performance.

The RBI had placed IDBI Bank under the framework in May 2017, after it had breached the thresholds for capital adequacy, asset quality (net NPAs were over 13% in March 2017), return on assets and leverage ratio.

It was noted as per published results for the quarter ended December 31, the bank was not in breach of the PCA parameters on reg-

ulatory capital, net NPA and leverage ratio, the RBI said.

"Taking all the above into consideration, it has been decided that IDBI Bank Ltd. be taken out of the PCA framework," the RBI said.

The LIC-owned IDBI Bank had reported a standalone net profit of ₹378 crore for the December quarter.

The lender had reported a net loss of ₹5,763 crore a year earlier.

Capital, NPA, leverage within limits'

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## Valli Arunachalam family moves waiver application

Bid to sue Ambadi, Murugappa family

## SANJAY VIJAYAKUMAR

CHENNAI

Valli Arunachalam and her family have moved a waiver application before the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), Chennai seeking waiver of the minimum shareholding requirement of 10% for maintaining the alleged oppression and mismanagement case against Ambadi Investments (AIL), the holding company of the Murugappa Group and also its family members.

Moving the petition, Senior Counsel P.S. Raman said the family owned 8.21% in AIL and fell short of the minimum requirement as per section 244 of the Companies Act, 2013, by 1.79%.

He said the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal, New Delhi had given a waiver to certain firms of Cyrus Mistry from the minimum requirement for main-

taining its case against Tata Sons.

The main allegation is that there has been a history of gender discrimination in the Murugappa Group and Ms. Arunachalam was denied a board seat. Valli Arunachalam family's plea for equal representation in the company's affairs had been denied since her father M.V. Murugappan's demise a few years back, Mr. Raman said.

NCLT has given three weeks time to the respondents to file a counter.

## IOB, Indian Bank get new EDs

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

Indian Overseas Bank (IOB), Indian Bank and other public sector banks are set to get new executive directors (EDs) with the elevation of chief general managers (CGMs) and general managers (GMS).

Canara Bank CGM S. Sri-mathy has been elevated as IOB's ED while Indian Bank GM Imran Amin Siddiqui has been appointed as ED in the same bank.

Indian Bank GM M. Karthikeyan will move to the Bank of India.

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) announced the names of 14 CGMs and GMS who were promoted as EDs of various public sector banks.

The notification, seen as a step towards excluding Chinese telecom equipment makers such as Huawei and ZTE, will come into effect from June 15.

Service providers have to take permission from the National Cyber Security Coordinator (NCSC) for upgradation of existing networks utilising equipment

had in December ruled that India violated its obligations under the U.K.-India Bilateral Investment Treaty in 2014, when the income tax department slapped a ₹10,247-crore tax assessment using legislation that gave it powers to levy taxes retrospectively.

Soon after seeking taxes over alleged capital gains made by the company over a 2006-07 reorganisation of the India business before its listing, the tax department seized Cairn's residual 10% stake in Cairn India.

Cairn had on Tuesday said it had identified Indian assets overseas, which it could seize in the event of New Delhi failing to pay up.

## PV dispatches rose 18% in Feb., says SIAM

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

# The magic of Eden in the eyes of its prime architect

Two decades down the line, V.V.S. Laxman recounts the stunning triumph over the Aussies in Kolkata

## 20 YEARS AGO

K.C. VIJAYA KUMAR

**W**hen Thursday dawns, it will mark the 20th anniversary of the magic of Eden! And it looks as though just yesterday V.V.S. Laxman was essaying his silken drives against Glenn McGrath and Shane Warne at Kolkata's Eden Gardens in that Test for the ages, one which perhaps scripted India's greatest triumph in cricket's longest format.

On March 11, 2001, the second Test between India and Australia commenced with the host trailing 0-1 after the loss at Mumbai. The woes continued as Australia posted 445 in the first innings with skipper Steve Waugh's 110 and Harbhajan Singh's hat-trick enlivening the proceedings.

### Destiny changed

Sourav Ganguly's men replied with 171 in which Laxman, stepping in at six, top-scored with a 59. Waugh, keen on securing the 'Final

Frontier', enforced the follow-on and the rest is history. Promoted to number three, Laxman's incredible 281 (452b, 44x4) and his 376-run fifth-wicket partnership with Rahul Dravid, whose 180 (353b, 20x4) was equally important, altered the contest's destiny.

India's second innings score of 657 for seven declared left Australia with a target of 384 on a fifth day pitch. Harbhajan claimed six wickets and India won by 171 runs in a turnaround that had magic and grit woven into it. Twenty years later, Laxman rewinds the clock as he talks over phone from Mumbai and, true to the man, the over-riding theme is one of modesty: "The first thing I feel is about how lucky and blessed I was to be part of such a wonderful Test."

And as he remembers that surreal phase, Laxman admits to a sense of wonder: "Just the magnitude of the situation and to play in that fashion against a tough Australian side, even today it gives me goose-bumps and

sort of teaches us that nothing is impossible in life."

Not many would know that he almost missed the game and Laxman recalls: "Three days before the match, while batting I had a stiff back. Later in the hotel, our physio Andrew (Leipus) asked me to see myself in the mirror after asking me to remove my shirt. I was shell-shocked, my entire upper body had tilted to the left-side. I almost cried. Andrew reassured me and, thanks to him and to John's (coach Wright) desire that I play even if I was 70 or 60 per cent fit, all that worked in my favour, otherwise probably I wouldn't have played."

### Resolve-breaking stand

His alliance with Dravid was the one that broke the Aussies' resolve. "When Rahul came in, I was nervous, he was batting at number three and now he was coming at six. Usually Rahul doesn't talk much when he comes in but this time he does the fist-bump and tells: 'good going, let us keep up the fight'. We



**Pat from mate:** V.V.S. Laxman recalled Rahul Dravid telling him that he was proud about the way he batted the whole day. • FILE PHOTO: V.V. KRISHNAN

had a decent partnership on the third day evening and I got to my 100 and while walking back Rahul told me, 'I am so proud about the way you batted the whole day'."

The duo extended its heroics into the fourth day and Laxman narrates: "Jamy (Dravid) mentioned let's have a goal of batting the whole day! And like the way we batted together for South Zone, there was a certain

amount of calmness with Rahul. The toughest phase was after tea, Rahul came into the Test with a viral fever and I was struggling with my back. The Australians were coming hard at us. We endured the pain and kept motivating each other."

While snuggling into nostalgia, Laxman lauded Harbhajan: "Bhajji had great rhythm, the ball was drifting towards slip, turning and

bouncing sharply. With Sourav's ability to give security to a youngster, Bhajji bowled with a lot of freedom."

And as the interview wound down, Laxman felt that the can-do spirit is evident in the current team too.

As for his 281, all that he feels is infinite gratitude for being part of one of the greatest Tests ever and a series which India won 2-1.



**Master-class:** V.V.S. Laxman oozed elegance and composure in his epic innings of 281. • FILE PHOTO: V.V. KRISHNAN

## Focus on the present, future will be bright: Rohit Sharma

'Need to have the mindset of trying to win each game we play'



**Moral victory:** Rohit Sharma was happy that he could curb his natural attacking instinct to play in the manner the team wanted him to in the final Test. • AFP

## ENGLAND IN INDIA

ASHWIN ACHAL

India cricketer Rohit Sharma believes that it is too early to think about the ICC T20 World Cup, scheduled to be held in India in later this year. The Mumbai batsman stated that the team will instead focus on the immediate task – a five-match T20I series against England, which commences at Ahmedabad on Friday.

**Not think too far ahead**  
"When you play for India, there is no question of rehearsals. It is important for us to win this series, and not think too far ahead. If you focus on the present, the future will be bright. We need to have the mindset of trying to win each and every game we play," Rohit said in a media interaction on

Wednesday.  
Rohit was open to the idea of the ICC appointing neutral umpires for international fixtures, though he praised the Indian umpires for doing a great job in the recent home Test series against England.

"If players can travel, umpires can travel as well. Make them quarantine, make their lives difficult as well (laughs). But I think the umpiring in this Test series was brilliant. It wasn't easy for them, given the nature of the pitch. They had to consider so many things – it was turning square, bouncing, the odd ball went straight. Considering all these factors, I think they did a terrific job," Rohit said.

**Hardik raring to go**  
The vice-captain explained that Hardik Pandya is raring to go. Pandya, who had stopped bowling after suffering an injury in 2019, recently posted a video where he is seen bowling at full tilt.

"He (Pandya) has been working on his bowling and batting. He has been with the India team in the bubble for over a month now, and has done everything to get ready for this limited-overs series," Rohit said.

you do something that you are not used to, it counts as a small victory. When this happens, your confidence will rise. In the fourth Test, I made only 49, but I played 144 balls. That was a victory for me, because I curbed my instinct to play attacking shots. I didn't fall victim to playing a bad shot," Rohit said.

**Hardik raring to go**  
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## Stick to the basics is Jhulan's mantra

### SA IN INDIA

KAMESH SRINIVASAN  
LUCKNOW

In victory or defeat there is no dearth of effort from the 38-year-old Jhulan Goswami. In the two one-dayers against South Africa at the Atil Bihari Vajpayee Ekana Stadium, Jhulan has taken six of the 12 wickets, conceding 80 from 20 overs.

Tons of experience in the international arena has taught her to "stick to the basics".

"Representing India is the biggest motivation. My job is to perform each and every day, and maintain fitness. I am doing a lot of training and following a routine," said Jhulan after India's victory in the second one-dayer.

Jhulan conceded that the Indian bowling was a little wayward in the first match and quite "disciplined" in the second. Jhulan herself bowled six wides and two no-balls in the second match, one of which cost her a wicket. That was because she was really bending her tall frame to extract every bit of juice the pitch offered in the first session.



Jhulan Goswami. • FILE PHOTO

Jhulan pointed out that it was not easy to play shots early in the day, because of the moisture, and that batting was a lot easier in the warm afternoon, when the players could hit through the line.

### Thrilled

Obviously thrilled to hear the Board's announcement of a Test match against England, Jhulan said that the whole team was "excited and looking forward" to it.

"There is a lot of challenge, mental and physical, in playing a Test. Things change every session. We will be playing a Test after 2014," said Jhulan, who has played only 10 Tests as compared to 184 ODIs.

## India second in T20I rankings

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
DUBAI

India climbed a spot to second in the latest ICC men's T20 International team rankings ahead of a five-match series against top-placed England beginning on March 12.

England is seven points ahead of India, which was third before the away series against Australia.

Australia's 2-3 loss to New Zealand in a recent five-game series pushed the side below India with just one point separating the two.

## ICC chief Sawhney on 'forced leave'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
NEW DELHI

The International Cricket Council has put chief executive Manu Sawhney on 'forced leave' after an investigation found evidence of misconduct, world body sources said on Wednesday.

The move follows a review of his actions and management conduct by the business consultancy PwC.

ICC officials would not say what allegations had been made, but Indian media said they involved the treatment of staff and some decisions. Sawhney has been in the post for less than two years.

## Southampton to host WTC final

REUTERS  
DUBAI

The final of the ICC World Test Championship between India and New Zealand will be held at the Ageas Bowl in Southampton in June, cricket's governing body ICC said on Wednesday.

The ICC initially had said the match would take place at Lord's but after discussions

sions with the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), it confirmed Southampton, which has an on-site hotel at the Ageas Bowl, would host the June 18-22 contest.

The ICC is hopeful that a limited number of fans will be allowed to attend the final provided the UK government's phased easing of COVID-19 lockdown measures proceeds as planned.

## Roger Federer makes winning return



**Thumbs up:** Roger Federer is all smiles after clearing his first hurdle against Dan Evans. • GETTY IMAGES

## QATAR OPEN

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
DOHA

Roger Federer won his first match contested in over a year Wednesday as the 20-time Grand Slam champion returned from injury to beat British No. 1 Dan Evans at the Qatar Open second round.

Federer, who underwent two knee surgeries in 2020, still proved a tough opponent for an in-form Evans who ultimately succumbed 7-6(8), 3-6, 7-5 after an epic tussle lasting two hours and 24 minutes.

The Swiss great had not played a match since a semi-final defeat by Novak Djokovic at the Australian Open in January 2020 – 405 days ago – and acknowledged it was unusual for a player of his age to return after injury.

## FAITH

### Nathamuni and Alavandar

Vaishnava Acharya Alavandar wrote a work called Stotra Ratna. What is a stotra? People might define it as attributing to someone, qualities which they do not possess, or exaggerating their qualities. But when it comes to the Supreme One, no praise is exaggerated. He is the repository of all auspicious qualities, and no praise can be enough to capture the greatness of His qualities. Stotra Ratna speaks of His infinite good attributes. There are three gems in sacred literature – Mantra Ratna (Dhvaya mantra); Purana Ratna (Vishnu Purana) and Stotra Ratna of Alavandar – said Valayapet Ramachariar, in a discourse.

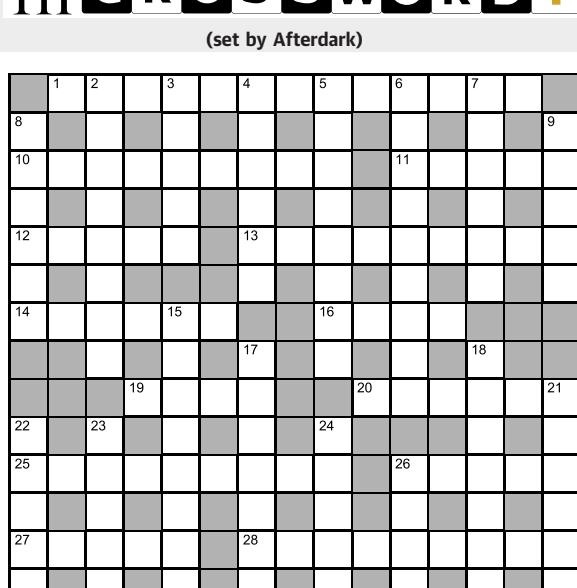
Alavandar was named Yamuna and was the grandson of Nathamuni, who recovered the Divya Prabandham. The verses were set to music and taught to Nathamuni's nephews Melaiyagathazhvan and Keezhaiyagathazhvan and became a part of temple worship in Vaishnava temples. Vedanta Desika, in his Adikara Sangraha, says that by studying the Divya Prabandham we obtain clarity with regard to difficult portions of Vedic literature.

In Adikara Sangraha, Vedanta Desika says none is equal to those who worship Nathamuni. Now the question might be asked if this is not pride, to claim that there is none equal to devotees of Nathamuni. There are three types of pride – sattvika ahamkara, raja ahamkara and tamasa ahamkara. To take pride in one's scholarship or one's wealth would fall in the category of undesirable ahamkaras, namely rajasa or tamasa ahamkara. But to be proud of one's Acharya is not wrong. We must have a sense of pride in the greatness of our Acharyas. This is sattvika ahamkara, and it is a desirable pride. Desika says that those who follow Alavandar's teachings do not study anything unnecessary.

## TH CROSSWORD + 13192

(set by Afterdark)

Solve cryptics with digital ease.  
Our online grids are at your fingertips!  
at <https://qrqo.page.link/jjpTn>



- ACROSS
- 1 Somehow stable people touring a school get hot and tense with the authorities
- 10 So article before bishop released without reading
- 11 Relatives are burdens; scratching head
- 12 Stranger loitering around team, standing at the front gates
- 13 Once in Berlin House, Edward was knocked out
- 14 Fellow's free, away halfway day before weekend

15 Like to be in bed, rested

16 Indian queen moving ahead north to shower...

- 19 ... always? Not at all, not north
- 20 Disregard Mr. Italy, primarily shameless to leave to England
- 25 Dispatched confidential informant to infiltrate a society holding Tesla or someone like him
- 26 Influences outcomes at Britain, leading from the front
- 27 New text, Raja hid
- 28 Scene in country scary to begin with? Point
- 29 Somehow enduring, taking stance with awareness
- DOWN
- 2 Description provided to a college in particular
- 3 States' roads are empty after a vehicle got gutted
- 4 Saw little, nothing's approved
- 5 That woman puts pressure on crush, a guide
- 6 Evaluating me? Promising not to keep top secret?
- 7 10 short of a ton, yet in nerves primarily, jittery
- 8 Felt is used, used to emphasise something
- 9 Has ideas inside privately
- 15 A key position offering superiority and edge
- 17 Stories in bits without a beginning
- 18 Jet on a hill, female takes over from man
- 21 More manageable at sea; at sea? That's right
- 22 Demanded job, starting off with journalist
- 23 Attend programme with dean regularly
- 24 Sunday Times has articles about New Zealand with a verse
- 26 Like to be in bed, rested

## SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY R

## TV PICKS

**Vijay Hazare trophy:** Star Sports 1 (SD & HD), 9 a.m.**Europa League:** Sony Ten 1, 2, 3 & Sony Six (SD & HD), 11.30 p.m. & 1.30 a.m. (Friday)**ATP 250:** Chile Open, Eurosport (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.

## IN BRIEF

**Sharath Kamal's campaign ends**

NEW DELHI Sharath Kamal's campaign in the World Table Tennis Star Contender event came to an end after losing to World No. 12 Dmitrij Ovtcharov 11-9, 11-8, 11-6 in the pre-quarterfinals in Doha on Wednesday. Beginning from Sunday, the focus of Sharath Kamal, G. Sathiyan, Manika Batra and Sutirtha Mukherjee will be on qualifying for the Tokyo Olympic Games from the World singles qualification tournament.

**Sania and Klepac beaten in second round**

DUBAI Sania Mirza and Slovenia's Andreja Klepac lost 6-3, 6-3 to even seeds Hayley Carter and Luisa Stefani in the second round of the \$1,835,490 WTA tennis on Wednesday.

**Other results: \$1,835,490 WTA, Dubai: First round:**

Klepac &amp; Sania bt Shelby Rogers (USA) &amp; Zheng Saisai (Chn) 6-1, 6-3.

**\$52,080 Challenger, St. Petersburg: Pre-quarterfinals:** Sikander Mansuri (Tun) & Arjun Kadhe bt Benjamin Lock (Zim) & Mark Vervoot (Ned) 6-2, 6-2.**I-League: Gokulam surprises Churchill**

KOLKATA Gokulam Kerala sprung a major surprise, downing runaway leader Churchill Brothers 3-0, in a second round match of I-League's championship round at the Kalyani Stadium on Wednesday.

Manipur's TRAU beat Real Kashmir FC 3-1.

**The results (championship leg):** RoundGlass Punjab 3 drew with Mohammedan Sporting 3; Real Kashmir 1 lost to TRAU 3; Churchill 0 lost to Gokulam Kerala 3.

## Porto dumps Juventus

Record-breaking Haaland fires Dortmund past Sevilla

## CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

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Juventus crashed out of the Champions League last 16 for the second year running on Tuesday, losing to 10-man Porto on away goals despite winning the second leg 3-2 in Turin. Sergio Oliveira's extra-time free-kick sent twice former winner Porto through to the quarterfinals as the tie finished 4-4 on aggregate.

**Fastest to 20**  
Borussia Dortmund striker Erling Haaland on Tuesday became the fastest player to reach 20 goals in the Champions League, as well as the youngest, after scoring twice**Key moment:** Sergio Oliveira, left, rifles in a low shot for Porto's second goal to dash Juventus' hopes. ■ AP

against Sevilla in the last 16.

Haaland's goals helped Dortmund secure a 2-2 draw in its second-leg match that sent it into the quarterfinals 5-4 on aggregate.

**The results:** Borussia Dortmund 2 (Haaland 35, 54-pen)

drew with Sevilla 2 (En-Nesyri 69-pen, 90+6). Dortmund wins 5-4 on aggregate.

Juventus 3 (Chiesa 49, 63, Rabiot 117) bt Porto 2 (Oliveira 19-pen, 115). 4-4 aggregate, Porto progresses on away goals.

## REGIONAL ROUND-UP

## Sidharth Rawat shocks

**Niki Pooncha**  
INDORE: Second seed Sidharth Rawat overcame reigning National champion Niki Pooncha 6-7(7), 6-2, 6-2 in the \$15,000 ITF men's tennis first round on Wednesday.**The results (first round):** Saketh Myneni bt Ishaque Eabal 6-4, 6-4; Filip Bergevi (Swe) bt Dmitrii Baskov (Mda) 6-1, 6-2; Marco Brugnerotto (Ita) bt Jonathan Binding (GBR) 6-4, 6-3; Aidan McHugh (GBR) bt Aryan Goaveas 6-1, 6-3; Paras Dahiya bt Dhruv Sunish 6-3, 7-5; Luca Castelnuovo (Sui) bt Muthu Adhithya Senthilkumar 6-4, 6-4.

Eric Vanshelboim (Ukr) bt Alexis Canter (GBR) 7-5, 6-1; Madhwin Kamath bt Siddhant Vishwakarma 2-6, 6-4, 6-4; Lorenzo Bocchi (Ita) bt Dominik Palan 7-5, 6-3; Jonathan Mridha (Swe) bt Dev Javia 6-1, 6-0; Zane Khan bt Vijay Sundar Prashanth 6-3, 6-3; Sidharth Rawat bt Niki Pooncha 6-7(7), 6-2, 6-2.

## Priyanshi enters

**quarterfinals**  
GURUGRAM: Priyanshi Bhambhani defeated fourth seed Kashini in the Haryana Open ₹500,000 women's tournament on Wednesday.**The results: Singles (pre-quarterfinals):** Yubarani Banerjee bt Sara Yadav 6-2, 6-1; S. Srinidhi bt Shantu Agarwal 6-3, 6-1; Priyanshi Bhandari bt Kashish Bhatia 7-5, 6-1; Rishika Sunkara bt Prathiba Narayan 6-2, 6-2; Reshma Maruri bt Ayushi Singh 6-4, 6-4; Sai Samihiha bt Lakshmi Sarvani 6-0, 6-3; Pooja Ingale bt Gayatri Menon 6-1, 6-2; Prema Bhambri bt Bala Gayathri Snigdha 6-0, 6-1.**Doubles (semifinals):** Yubarani & Rishika bt Pooja & Ishwari Matere 6-0, 6-2; Sara Yadav & Srinidhi bt Ayushi & Medhavi Singh 6-2, 7-6(6).

## Top names for World Tennis Conference

NEW DELHI: Some of the best names in tennis will discuss their trade secrets in the World Tennis Conference, being organised online by

Global Professional Tennis Coach Association (GPTCA) and Segal Institute from March 25 to 28. Toni Nadal, uncle and coach of Rafael Nadal, will be talking on the 'principles and values' to develop from the beginning, while 'developing a competitor on the circuit' will be the topic for Andrei Medvedev. The transition from juniors to the professional circuit will be addressed by Janko Tipsarevic.

## Vibhor Gaur helps

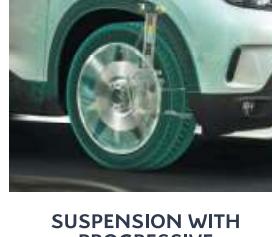
**BHA claim title**  
NEW DELHI: Man-of-the-Match Vibhor Gaur (101 not out) guided Baba Haridas Academy past Ravinder Phagna Academy for an eight-wicket win to claim the IIS Hirkary Delhi Capitals Junior (under-14) league.**The scores:** RPCA 149/6 in 40 overs (Sameer Khan 39 n.o., Dharmender Kasana 36, Rahul 23.4 overs (Vibhor Gaur 101 n.o.).

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