



For more information

Toll Free No.  
**18001802060**

Websites

<https://ekhrid.haryana.gov.in>  
<https://fasal.haryana.gov.in>

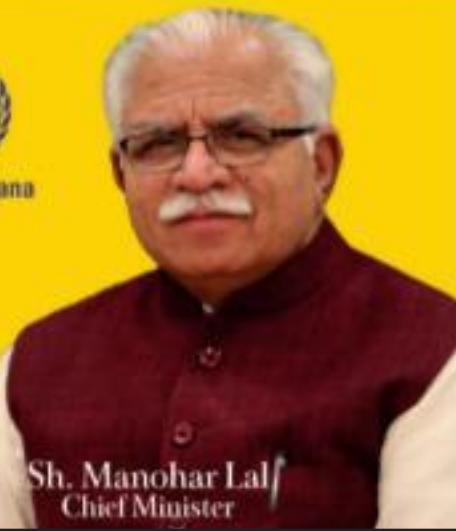
## Haryana Government's Initiative for Farmers' Crop Procurement

Remaining Farmers  
can get registered at  
**'Meri Fasal-Mera Byora'**  
Portal on 5-6<sup>th</sup> April

Registered Farmers  
will get message  
through mobile

Saturday & Sunday  
are specified for Farmers  
who are unable  
to reach on given days

Prosperous Farmers  
Our Identity



Sh. Manohar Lal  
Chief Minister

Information, Public Relations & Languages Department, Haryana

[@Cmohry @DiprHaryana](http://www.prharyana.gov.in)

## WEATHER

Mainly clear sky. Strong dust raising winds during the day. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 34 and 18 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: Nil

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Max: 53% Min: 19%

TEMPERATURE

Max: 34.6°C (+1) Min: 20.0°C (+2)

SUN RISES SUN SETS

06:10 hrs 18:39 hrs

MOON RISES MOON SETS

22:49 hrs 09:33 hrs

## THUMBNAILS



Students undergo thermal screening as they arrive to attend classes on the opening day of new academic session, at a school in Jammu, on Wednesday. ■ AGENCEES

**India's economy bounces back:** India's economy has bounced back amazingly from the Covid-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown over the last one year, but it is not out of the woods yet, according to the World Bank, which in its latest report has predicted that the country's real GDP growth for fiscal year 21/22 could range from 7.5 to 12.5 per cent. The Washington-based global lender said that the economy was already slowing when the Covid-19 pandemic unfolded.

**Interest rates on small savings slashed:** The central government Wednesday cut interest rates on small savings schemes, including National Savings Certificate (NSC) and Public Provident Fund (PPF), by up to 1.1 per cent for the first quarter of 2021-22 in line with falling fixed deposit rates of banks. Interest rate on PPF has been reduced by 0.7 per cent to 6.4 per cent while NSC will now earn 0.9 per cent less at 5.9 per cent.

## Court discharges 3 cops in Ishrat Jahan case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

AHMEDABAD, 31 MARCH

A special CBI court here on Wednesday discharged police officers G L Singhla, Tarun Barot and Anajoo Chaudhary in the 2004 Ishrat Jahan alleged fake encounter case.

Special CBI judge VR Raval allowed the discharge applications of Singhla, Barot (now retired) and Chaudhary.

"The CBI has not mentioned anything specific against the sanction order (in which the Gujarat government declined sanction to prosecute the three accused) which also leads to believe the act of applicants/accused was in discharge of official duties," the court observed.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on March 20 conveyed to the court that the state government had declined sanction for prosecution of the three accused.

The court in its October

### TIMELINE



► Ishrat Jahan, a 19-year-old woman from Mumbai near Mumbai, was killed along with Javed Shaikh alias Pranesh Pillai, Amjadali Akbarali Rana and Zeeshan Johar by Gujarat police in an 'encounter' near Ahmedabad on June 15, 2004.

► The police claimed the four were terrorists who were planning to assassinate the then Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi.

► But a high court-appointed Special Investigation Team concluded that the encounter was fake, after which the CBI registered a case against various police officials

2020 order observed that they had "acted in their official duties," so the probe agency was required to obtain sanction for prosecution.

Under section 197 of the Criminal Procedure Code, sanction is required for prosecuting government servants

for anything done in the discharge of official duty.

Ishrat Jahan, a 19-year-old woman from Mumbai near Mumbai, was killed along with Javed Shaikh alias Pranesh Pillai, Amjadali Akbarali Rana and Zeeshan Johar by Gujarat police in an 'encounter' near

Ahmedabad on June 15, 2004. The police claimed the four were terrorists who were planning to assassinate the then Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi.

However, a high court-appointed Special Investigation Team concluded that the encounter was fake, after which the CBI registered a case against various police officials.

Inspector General of Police Singhla, retired police officers Barot and J G Parmar, and Chaudhary had filed applications before the court seeking dropping of proceedings for want of the requisite sanction to prosecute them.

Parmar died during the course of hearing in the case.

On Wednesday, the judge said when this court earlier observed that the act of the accused was while discharging official duties, nobody challenged the order.

"Not only that, but the

Central Government and the Government of Gujarat have also believed that the act of the applicants/accused is while discharging the duties and therefore, the government was moved for sanction and the sanction is refused also," the court observed.

There is nothing on record, even prima facie, to suggest that the victims were not terrorists and the IB inputs were not genuine, the court said in its order.

The court also refused to accept the argument put forth by Special Public Prosecutor for the CBI, R C Kodekar, that the government order declining sanction to prosecute the three applicants was issued without the application of mind.

The CBI had named seven police officers, P P Pandey, D G Vanzara, N K Amin, Singh, Barot, Parmar and Chaudhary, as accused in its first charge sheet filed in 2013.

The committee was given two months to study the laws and consult all stakeholders.

"We submitted the report on March 19 in a sealed cover. Now, the court will decide the

future course of action," one of the members of the committee P K Mishra said.

As per the panel's official website, the panel held total 12 rounds of consultations with various stakeholders, including farmers groups, farmer producers organisations, procurement agencies, professionals, academicians, private as well as state agricultural marketing boards.

The panel also held nine internal meetings before finalising the report.

Apart from Mishra, Shetkari Sanghatana President Anil Ghanwat and agri-economist and former Chairman of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices Ashok Gulati are the other members.

The fourth member Bharatiya Kisan Union President Bhupinder Singh Mann had, however, recused himself from the committee.

Gender gap index: India slips 28 places, ranks 140 among 156

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

India has slipped 28 places to rank 140th among 156 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2021, becoming the third-worst performer in South Asia.

According to the report, India has closed 62.5 per cent of its gender gap till date.

The country had ranked 112th among 153 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2020.

Noting that the decline also took place on the economic participation and opportunity subindex, albeit to a lesser extent, the report said India's gender gap on this dimension widened by 3 per cent this year, leading to a 32.6 per cent gap till date.

Most of the decline occurred on the political empowerment subindex, where India regressed 13.5 percentage points, with a significant decline in the number of women ministers (from 23.1 per cent in 2019 to 9.1 per cent in 2021).

"Among the drivers of this decline is a decrease in women's labour force participation rate, which fell from 24.8 per cent to 22.3 per cent. The share of women in professional and technical roles declined further to 29.2 per cent. The share of women in senior and managerial positions also remains low: only 14.6 per cent of these positions are held by women and there are only 8.9 per cent firms with female top managers," the report said.

Further, the estimated earned income of women in India is one-fifth of men's, which puts the country among the bottom 10 globally on this indicator, it said.

PTI

## Centre in review meet with states, UTs ahead of jabs for people above 45

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

As India prepares to open up its Covid-19 vaccination drive to people above 45 from April 1, the Centre on Wednesday asked states and union territories to identify low vaccine coverage pockets, particularly in districts reporting a surge in new infections, and take corrective action.

National Health Authority (NHA) CEO and Empowered Group on Covid Vaccination chairperson Dr R S Sharma and Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan chaired a high-level meeting with health secretaries, mission directors of NHM and immunisation officers of all states and UTs during the day, a statement said.

The status and pace of the inoculation drive across the country were reviewed at the meeting held through video-conferencing, as were the preparations for April 2021, when vaccination would be extended to cover everybody above the age of 45, the ministry said.

"A key theme underlying the meet was the identification of low vaccine coverage pockets particularly in districts showing Covid-19 surge and for taking corrective actions there," it said in the statement.

On vaccination coverage of healthcare workers (HCWs) and frontline workers (FLWs), the states and the UTs were advised to ensure that only eligible beneficiaries were regis-

tered and inoculated under the respective categories.

They were also advised to archive incorrect and duplicate entries on the Co-WIN platform, identify pockets of low vaccination coverage, health facility, professional association, blocks, districts for taking corrective action, and ensure saturation of vaccination of these groups on priority.

States and UTs were asked to conduct regular reviews of vaccine stocks and consumption to identify gap areas and address the same, the ministry said in its statement.

They were also asked to undertake GIS analysis of CVCs to identify the need for more such facilities, and address apprehensions of private CVCs regarding vaccine

supply and guidelines, the statement said.

The states and UTs were also advised to ensure that there was no sedimentation of vaccine stocks at any level of storage, and that their distribution was based on consumption to avoid overstocking or under-stocking at cold chain points and CVCs.

They were asked to conduct regular reviews of vaccine stocks and consumption to identify gap areas and address the same, the ministry said in its statement.

The Centre also advised the states and UTs to maintain vaccine wastage at less than one per cent (current National Waste Percentage being six per cent).

## India records 53,480 new cases, 354 deaths

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

India recorded 53,480 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours taking the total tally to 1,21,49,335 on Wednesday. It was 4.8 per cent lower than that recorded on Tuesday.

According to the ICMR, 24,36,72,940 samples have been tested up to March 30 with a positivity rate of 2.71 percent, while 11 more people succumbed to the pathogen in the city, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin.

India has registered a steady increase in the number of cases for 19 days in a row. The active cases have now increased to 5,52,566 comprising 4.55 per cent of the total infections, while

the recovery rate has further dropped to 94.11 per cent.

The death toll increased to 1,62,468 with 354 new fatalities. The number of people who have recovered from the disease surged to 1,14,34,301.

Delhi adds 1,819 cases, 11 deaths: Delhi today registered 1,819 coronavirus cases with a positivity rate of 2.71 percent, while 11 more people succumbed to the pathogen in the city, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin.

The city's Covid toll mounted to 11,027 while its caseload rose to 6,62,430, the health bulletin said.

(SEE P2)





People will avoid both the TMC and BJP this year

MOHIT SENGUPTA, LEADER, CONGRESS, NORTH DINAJPUR

DURING THE FILING OF NOMINATION FOR THE ELECTIONS FOR THE RAIGANJ ASSEMBLY SEAT

Two killed as tempo rams into 2-wheeler

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Two persons were killed and as many injured after a tempo hit a two-wheeler and climbed a footpath in north Delhi's Kashmere Gate area in the early hours of Wednesday, police said.

The driver of the two-wheeler has been identified as Veeram Khan (34), a resident of the national capital's Matia Mahal area, they said.

Police on Wednesday said around 6.15 am, the patrolling staff of Kashmere Gate police station noticed an accident on loop road towards Nigambodh Ghat from Yudhisther Setu.

The tempo, which was coming from the Shastri Park side, hit the two-wheeler before climbing the footpath where some people were sleeping, a senior police officer said. One unknown homeless person aged around 35 died at the spot. Three injured persons, including Khan, were shifted to Trauma Centre, where Khan was declared dead. The other two homeless injured are also in a serious condition, the officer said.

PTI

# In fresh Covid surge, Capital logs 1,819 cases, 11 deaths

230 ICU, 842 non-ICU beds added in Delhi's 33 private hospitals, says Jain

SNS & PTI  
NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH



**D**elhi today registered 1,819 coronavirus cases with a positivity rate of 2.71 percent, while 11 more people succumbed to the pathogen in the city, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin.

The city's Covid toll mounted to 11,027 while its caseload rose to 6,62,430, the health bulletin said. Over 6.42 lakh patients have recovered from the virus in the national capital so far.

The number of active cases rose to 8,838 from yesterday's 7,429, the bulletin stated.

Today's fresh cases were detected out of 6,7,070 tests, including 36,808 RT-PCR tests.

The number of patients under home isolation in the city rose to 5,196 from 4,832 the previous day. The containment zones increased to 2,009 from yesterday's 1,903, the bulletin added.

The national capital had yesterday reported 992 corona-

virus infections with a positivity rate of 2.70 per cent, even as 4 people were then reported to have succumbed to the contagious, deadly virus.

This relatively lower number of cases was attributed to fewer Covid tests on account of Holi. A total of only 36,757 tests, including 28,618 RT-PCR tests, were then conducted to detect these cases.

Delhi had recorded 1,904 cases last Monday, 1,881 cases on Sunday, 1,558 cases on Saturday, 1,534 cases on Friday, and 1,515 cases on Thursday. The city's Covid positivity rate was 2.77 per cent on

Monday, 2.35 per cent on Sunday, 1.70 per cent on Saturday, 1.80 per cent on Friday, and 1.69 per cent on Thursday.

Its Covid caseload on 1 January was over 6,25 lakh, and the total count of fatalities was 10,557. The number of daily cases had started to come down in the city in February. On 26 February, the month's highest daily count of 256 cases was recorded.

However, the cases began to rise again in Delhi in March, and it has been steadily surging over the past several days.

Meanwhile, Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain today said 230 more ICU beds for coronavirus patients have been added in 33 private hospitals in the city on the directions of the state government. He said the number of non-ICU beds in these private facilities has been increased by 842.

"We are in a comfortable position (in terms of number of beds available). Overall, only 25 per cent of the beds for coronavirus patients in government and private hospitals are occupied. A few private hos-

pitals have all ICU beds full. So, necessary orders were issued by chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday," Jain told reporters.

Orders have been issued to update the status of beds on the government's data management portal, a statement later quoted him as saying.

The number of non-ICU Covid beds in private hospitals has increased from 1,705 to 2,547, while ICU beds have increased to 838 from 608, the government said.

Jain also said that Delhi's positivity rate has hovered around 3 per cent for the last few days whereas it has breached the 10 per cent mark in several states.

The health minister also said that 65 lakh eligible beneficiaries (aged above 45) will be given coronavirus vaccine at more than 500 sites across Delhi starting tomorrow.

"We have enough vaccines available. The number of eligible beneficiaries is quite large. We will make efforts to complete the inoculation as soon as possible," he added.

## CM asks officials to expedite devp work in industrial areas

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday held a review meeting with senior officials of the DSIIIDC (Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation) in the presence of Industry Minister Satyender Jain on the issue of development of various industrial areas in the city. Kejriwal expressed satisfaction over the ongoing industrial work and directed the officials concerned to expedite the work for larger industrial development.

According to official statement, Kejriwal directed the officials to finish the development work within the stipulated time so that the overall industrial development in Delhi gets a big boost. Under the leadership of the Chief Minister, the Delhi government has been working to ensure the removal of any obstruction in the industrial development of Delhi, and is serious about the development of industrial areas within the capital. "Since the very beginning, the Delhi government has shown the administrative will for the

city's overall industrial development, focusing on various industrial areas and doing massive development work in those areas," the statement said.

Some of the industrial areas included in the discussion were those at Mangolpuri, Patparganj, Mayapuri, Udyog Nagar, Okhla, Jhilmil, Jhandewal, Kirti Nagar, GTK Road, Bhognar and Bawana (Phase 2). During the meeting, senior officials of the Industry Department apprised the Chief Minister of the progress of the work going on in these industrial areas and the satisfactory pace of work was noted.

The pace of work has been such that work has been completed before the timeline set by the government. To reinforce their claim, the officials gave example of the Mayapuri Industrial Area where more than 85 per cent of the development work has been completed. Similarly, 99 per cent of the road and drainage work in the Udyog Nagar Industrial Area and 95 per cent of the road work in the Okhla Industrial Area have been completed, the statement added.

Fire breaks out in Safdarjung ICU, 50 patients evacuated

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

A fire broke out on Wednesday morning in the ICU of the Safdarjung Hospital here following which 50 patients were evacuated, fire officials said.

No casualty has been reported in the blaze that broke out around 6:30 am, they said. Nine fire tenders were rushed to the spot. Around 50 patients were immediately shifted to other wards with the help of hospital staff, the officials said.

The hospital said that the fire probably broke out due to high voltage fluctuation and a short circuit. "There was a minor fire incident in medicine ward 11 (HDU) in Safdarjung Hospital on Wednesday probably due to high voltage fluctuation and short circuit. All the patients admitted in HDU and the ward were evacuated immediately to others by our nursing staff and security personnel."

"There was no loss of life. The fire was controlled immediately by our hospital fire safety team. Regular fire drills in the hospital with cooperation from Fire Department helped in managing the situation in time," the spokesperson of the hospital said. PTI

## Classified

### LEGAL NOTICES

DEBTS RECOVERY  
TRIBUNAL-III,  
4th Floor, Jeevan Tara  
Building, Parliament Street,  
New Delhi-110001  
OA No. 253/2019  
ICICI Bank Ltd.

— Applicant  
Versus  
Kawaljeet Singh & Sons.  
— Respondent

To,

— (Respondent No. 03)  
1. M/s. Mascot Soho Homes Pvt. Ltd. Having Its Corporate Office At- D-59, Ground Floor, Sector-63, Noida-201309.

Also at: M/s. Mascot Soho Homes Pvt. Ltd. Having Its Registered Office At- B-22, Gazipur Village, Gazipur, New Delhi-110005.

Also at: M/s. Mascot Soho Homes Pvt. Ltd. Having Its Office At- H-106, Sector-63, Noida-201301.

Also at: M/s. Mascot Soho Homes Pvt. Ltd. Having Its Site Office At- GH-4/1, Sector-16, Greater Noida-201307.

Whereas the abovenamed applicant has instituted a case for recovery of Rs. 50,00,832/- (Rupees Fifty Lacs Eight Hundred Thirty Two Only) against you and pleader as well as been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in ordinary way. Therefore, this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance before the Hoyle Tribunal on 05-06-2021 at 10-30 a.m. (or further details kindly visit DRT website www.etrubunal.gov.in Phone Number : 011-23748473).

Takes notice that in case of your failure to appear on the abovementioned day before this Tribunal, the case will be heard and decided in your absence.

Due to ongoing Pandemic Situation, all the matters will be taken up through Video Conferencing and for that purpose:

(i) All the Advocate/Litigants shall download the Cisco Webex application/Software.

(ii) Meeting ID and Password for the next date of hearing qua cases to be taken by Registrar/Recovery Officer-I and Recovery Officer-II shall be available on day prior to the next date at DRT Official Portal i.e. drt.gov.in under the Public Notice Head.

(iii) In any exigency qua that, the Advocate/Litigants can contact the concerned official at Ph. No. 23748469.

Given under my hand and Seal of the Court on this 24th day of February, 2021.

District Judge

(Commercial Court)-01

Room No. 12

Karkardooma Courts, Delhi

CS (COMM) NO. 306/2019

HDFC Bank of Ltd.

Versus

Son Verma

To,

Son Verma, Denim Trading Company WB-91, Doctor Bajaj Wali Ganesh Nagar-2, Delhi-110092.

Whereas abovenamed petitioner has instituted a suit against you hereby summoned to appear before this court in person or by pleader on 06-05-2021 at 10:00 am to answer the same.

Takes notice that in default of your appearance on that day before mentioned the suit will be heard and determined in your absence.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court on this 05th day of March, 2021.

District Judge

(Commercial Court)-01

Room No. 12

Karkardooma Courts, Delhi

CS (COMM) NO. 477/2019

HDFC Bank of Ltd.

Versus

Harpreet Kaur

To,

Harpreet Kaur, B-7, 2nd Floor

Street No. 8, New Govindpura, Noida Chander Nagar, Delhi-110051.

Also at: C G Mantra, E-5, Third Floor, P-2, South Extension, Delhi-110048.

Also at: H. No. 613, Sec. 2, Bhdurgurd-124507.

Whereas abovenamed petitioner has instituted a suit against you hereby summoned to appear before this court in person or by pleader on 05-05-2021 at 10:00 am to answer the same.

Takes notice that in default of your appearance on that day before mentioned the suit will be heard and determined in your absence.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court on this 05th day of March, 2021.

District Judge

(Commercial Court)-01

Room No. 12

Karkardooma Courts, Delhi

CS (COMM) NO. 477/2019

HDFC Bank of Ltd.

Versus

Harpreet Kaur

To,

Harpreet Kaur, B-7, 2nd Floor

Street No. 8, New Govindpura, Noida Chander Nagar, Delhi-110051.

Also at: C G Mantra, E-5, Third Floor, P-2, South Extension, Delhi-110048.

Also at: H. No. 613, Sec. 2, Bhdurgurd-124507.

Whereas abovenamed petitioner has instituted a suit against you hereby summoned to appear before this court in person or by pleader on 05-05-2021 at 10:00 am to answer the same.

Takes notice that in default of your appearance on that day before mentioned the suit will be heard and determined in your absence.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court on this 05th day of March, 2021.

District Judge

(Commercial Court)-01

Room No. 12

Karkardooma Courts, Delhi

CS (COMM) NO. 198/2020

State Bank of India

Versus

Suraj Ray

To,

Sh. Suraj Ray, s/o Sh.

Bideswar Ray, r/o Flat No.

12-A, 2nd Floor-G, Exotica, Fresco Apartment, Sector-137, Noida - 201301, Mobile No. 9717281661.

Also at: Lama Compound, Dong Kamon, Opp. Police Out Post, Nangymonsong, Shillong, Meghalaya-793001.

Also at: O M/S Nimbus Motors Pvt. Ltd. A-109, Sector-5, Noida-201301.

Whereas abovenamed petitioner has instituted a suit against you hereby summoned to appear before this court in person or by pleader on 22-04-2021 at 10:00 am to answer the same.

Takes notice that in default of your appearance on that day before mentioned the suit will be heard and determined in your absence.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court on this 05th day of April, 2021.

District Judge

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# Capt joins issue with Centre over Covid management

Rejecting the Centre's criticism of the Punjab govt's handling of Covid upsurge, CM says the situation might have been better if the GoI had not 'delayed' opening up vaccination for 45+ age group

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
CHANDIGARH, 31 MARCH

Taking strong exception to the Centre's criticism of his government's management of the Covid surge, Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh today said not only was the state consistently doing more tests per million than the national average, but the situation would perhaps have been better had the Government of India not delayed opening up of vaccination for 45+ age group.

Had the Central government acceded the state's request for allowing vaccination of all 50+ category population earlier, instead of delaying the decision to include 45+ age population by almost two months, the situation would perhaps have been better than present, Capt Amarinder said.

The Punjab CM was reacting to the Centre's allegation that the state government was not doing enough Covid testing and isolating affected people. He said his government had put severe restrictions on



social gatherings and closed all educational institutions, with night curfews imposed from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. in severely affected 11 districts.

Capt Amarinder said that the state government had been repeatedly requesting the Centre in writing, as well as in meetings attended by the chief secretary, that the cur-

rent strategy of immunisation needs a review.

Vaccination in a campaign that covers all age groups in selected areas will lead to better outcomes than the periodic cycles of vaccination targeting a small section of the population at each cycle, he stressed, underlining the need for such approach in any area

where weekly testing shows a doubling of positivity rate.

The CM repeated his demand for permission for occupation-based immunisation for school and college students and teachers, judges, bus drivers, conductors and selected public representatives everywhere.

Amarinder also took note

of the delay in receiving reports of genome sequencing. Of the 874 samples sent, only 588 reports had been received so far, of which 411 samples were found positive for B.1.1.7 (UK variant) and 2 samples positive for N440K. The implication of presence of UK variant mutant needs to be looked into and appropriate advice is required to be shared with the state, the CM urged the Centre.

Citing the factual position on the testing front, Amarinder noted that during the first peak, which happened in September 2020, the positivity rate was around 10 and the state was testing 30,000 Covid samples per day.

Now, when the positivity is over 7 per cent, the state is testing around 40,000 Covid samples per day. Further, the CM pointed out that during the first peak in September 2020, Punjab had increased contact tracing to 10 contacts per positive case. Now, during the second peak, "we are tracing more than 15 contacts per positive case," he added.

Addressing a virtual meeting with top health, administrative and police officials on COVID-19, the chief minister said a decision on further curbs will be taken after a review of the situation on April 8, as per an official statement.

"I will watch things for a week, and then if there is no improvement, we may have to go for stricter curbs," Singh said.

Punjab is witnessing a surge

in the infections with more than 2,000 new cases being reported daily. There is also a rise in the number of fatalities due to the disease. On Tuesday, 65 COVID-19 deaths were reported in the state.

At the meeting, Singh underlined the need for aggressive vaccination against the virus, particularly in areas with high cases and cities with more than 300 infections.

He directed the officials to reach out to eligible people at the mohalla level in the worst-affected districts for vaccination.

Singh also directed stricter enforcement of COVID-19 restrictions and protocols in Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Mohali and Amritsar, the worst-affected cities.

K K Talwar, head of the state's expert committee on COVID-19, said enforcement of restrictions was needed in the urban areas of Punjab as these were reporting more cases.

Director General of Police Dinkar Gupta said since March 19, 1.30 lakh people have been taken for RT-PCR testing on being found moving around without masks.

Of these, 391 were found

positive, he said.

The districts of SAS Nagar, Kapurthala, Patiala, SBS Nagar, Jalandhar, Amritsar, Hoshiarpur and Ludhiana are reporting high positivity rates, while the overall positivity in the state stood at 7.6 per cent on March 24.

Taking note of the inconvenience caused to commuters, the chief minister did away with the one-hour-silence on Saturdays to commemorate COVID warriors.

He expressed concerns over the high death rate due to the disease in the state. Talwar said this was due to patients not going to hospitals in time and high rate of comorbidities.

Talwar informed the meeting that 80-85 per cent of patients dying have chronic diseases.

The chief minister directed the administration to develop a robust mechanism to get people with comorbidities to hospitals at the earliest, besides stricter monitoring of people in home-isolation.

He also once again appealed to religious and political leaders to promote COVID-19-appropriate behaviour in the interest of the people of the state.

## Himachal Pradesh panchayat bans gambling, imposes fine on violators



A Kaza Gram Sabha meeting.

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
SHIMLA, 31 MARCH

With women taking charge of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Himachal Pradesh, new kind of initiatives to curb prevalent social evils are being taken in the state with Kaza panchayat in Lahaul Spiti district banning gambling and playing cards in public places.

The decision had been taken in the Kaza Panchayat by newly elected woman gram panchayat pradhan, Sonam Dolma after noticing ill-effects of gambling on younger generations.

"A meeting of Gram Sabha was organized on 22 March in which a complete ban was imposed on gambling and playing cards in Kaza panchayat.

If anyone is found violating the rules then a fine of Rs 40,000 will be imposed on erring persons," Sonam Dolma said.

Dolma further stated that she wanted to make a positive change in the society and save youths from prevalent social evils after getting elected as pradhan.

In the Gram Sabha meeting, the locals pointed out that people are found playing cards and gambling in many areas of the panchayat which was having bad impacts on the children and youths.

There was also concern on snooker clubs in the panchayats wherein minor children were found indulging in the game which was resulting in quarrels amongst them.

"After discussions, the panchayat decided to ban these and it was also decided that mahila mandali members will conduct surprise checking of snooker clubs.

The minors are banned from playing snooker besides, the timing of such clubs will be from 10 am to 6 pm and if some one violates the new norms, a fine of Rs 5,000 will be imposed on the defaulter," she added.

In another initiative, the Kaza Gram Sabha had also decided to impose a fine of Rs 1,000 for littering waste in open spaces and in addition, the erring persons will be told to dispose of the waste at designated places.

If the same person commits the crime of disposing of waste in open twice, then this will have repercussions on character certificate, Dolma added.

Kaza assistant public relations officer Ajay Banyal said the decisions were being welcomed by one and all and this will not only usher in positive change in Lahaul Spiti society but inspire other PRIs representatives to emulate the initiatives.

Meanwhile, another panchayat in Shimla district had decided to impose fine on persons for unintentional incidents of fire in forests and orchards to avoid damage to forest wealth ahead of summer season in the state.

The Nankhatri panchayat of Shimla district will impose fine immediately on erring person if he/she was found committing such a crime that results in fire incidents in forests.

The Nankhatri panchayat had also imposed a ban on playing cards, smoking and doing drugs at public places besides completely prohibiting illegal sale of liquor and marijuana.

## All monetary transactions in Haryana PRIs through online mode: Khattar

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
CHANDIGARH, 31 MARCH

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Wednesday said all monetary transactions will be done through online mode at the panchayat level in the state.

Presiding over a meeting for planning of budget and financial management of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and local bodies, the CM said, "We want the state to move towards a new Haryana". At present, 2,713 Panchayats are implementing online payments in the state. On hearing this, the CM suggested that it (online payment) should be implemented in every Panchayat.

He said that the implementation of online mode in the system will bring in transparency and everything can be monitored closely. It was also apprised in the meeting that so far, 55,000 vendors have registered on the e-Gram Swaraj portal. He also directed to formulate the budget of each level on a prescribed form and send it before 30 April so that the Budget can be released on time.

Khattar said more budget should be released in the first two quarters in order to expedite the works in the first two quarters. He further said that minimum budget should be released in the last quarter so that emphasis can be laid to complete the developmental works started in the first three quarters by the last quarter.

While directing all the Panchayats to implement e-panchayats, the CM said that there will be transparency with the introduction of e-panchayats and e-offices.

Meanwhile, in a relief to Arhtiyas (grain commission agents) a day ahead of Rabi procurement season, Khattar announced relief in outstanding payment of interest and penalties for Arhtiyas.

For those plot holders owning plots in Grain Markets and Vegetable Mandis of Haryana State Agricultural Marketing Board (HSAMB), who are unable to pay their instalments on time due to any reasons, now the state government has decided to give 40 per cent interest waiver on the default amount and 100 per cent waiver on penal interest.

Addressing a Press conference, the CM announced 40 per cent interest waiver on default amount and 100 per cent waiver of penal interest for the Arhtiyas.

"For those plot holders owning plots in Grain Markets and Vegetable Mandis of Haryana State Agricultural Marketing Board (HSAMB), who are unable to pay their instalments on time due to any reasons, now the state government has decided to give 40 per cent interest waiver on the default amount and 100 per cent waiver on penal interest, provided that the plot holder clears the entire balance amount by 15 June, 2021," the CM said.

## HP govt declares holiday on 7 April in poll-bound areas

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
SHIMLA, 31 MARCH

The Himachal Pradesh government on Wednesday declared 7 April as public holiday on account of general election to 4 Municipal Corporations, 6 Nagar Panchayats and panchayats of Shimla and Mandi districts.

The elections to Panchayat Raj Institutions in developmental blocks Chopal and Tutu of district Shimla and developmental block Dharampur of district Mandi were delayed owing to reservation roster against which some

candidates had approached the HP High Court.

A state government official said on account of general election to Municipal Corporations of Dharamshala, Palampur, Mandi and Solan Palampur, Mandi and Solan and general election to six Nagar Panchayats of Chirgaon, Nerwa, Ani, Nirmand Kandaghat and Amb on 7 April, it will be a public holiday in these areas on that day.

The six Nagar panchayats and three Municipal Corporations of Palampur, Mandi and Solan were recently upgraded by the state government.

"All government offices, boards, corporations, educational institutions and industrial establishments situated in the state under Industrial Disputes Act and shops will remain closed in these areas. This will also be a paid holiday to daily wages employees. A special casual leave may be given to those employees who are working in different places in the State but have a right to vote in Panchayati Raj Institutions on producing certificate from the concerned Presiding Officer that the employee has actually casted his/her vote," he added.

## Free travel for Punjab women in state govt buses from today

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
CHANDIGARH, 31 MARCH

Ahead of early 2022 Assembly polls, the Captain Amarinder Singh-led Congress government in Punjab on Wednesday announced free travel for women in all state government-run non-air-conditioned buses within the state from Thursday.

The CM had announced the free travel scheme in the Assembly on 5 March, as part of his government's efforts to empower women and girls in the state. The Cabinet formally approved the scheme.

Under the scheme, women residents of Punjab can avail free bus travel in Government-owned buses, including PEPSU Road Transport Corporation (PRTC), Punjab Roadways Buses (PUNBUS) and City Bus Services operated by Local Bodies. However, the scheme is not applicable to government-owned air-conditioned buses.

Documents like Aadhaar Card, Voter Card or any other proof of residence in Punjab would be required to avail the facility.

Further, all women who are family members of Punjab government employees and residing in Chandigarh can also avail the benefit, irrespective of age and income criteria, of

free travel in the said government buses.

The spokesperson said this scheme is expected to not only reduce female drop-out in schools because of high cost of daily transport but also facilitate working women, who have to travel considerable distances to their workplace.

The facility will thus ensure access to safe, cheap and reliable travel for women to engage in any economic activity. Since the scheme is expected to encourage women and their companions to utilise public transport, it would naturally bring down the number of personal vehicles plying on the roads leading to consequent reduction in pollution, accidents and vehicular congestion, the Cabinet said.

## 'Farmers to march on foot to Parliament in May'

PTI  
NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha on Wednesday announced a slew of plans for upcoming two months to strengthen the ongoing agitation against the new farm laws, including a proposed march to Parliament on foot in May.

"The Samyukt Kisan Morcha met yesterday, and decided that the farmers will be undertaking a march to the Parliament in the first fortnight of May. The date for the march is yet to be decided."

"It will be joined not just by farmers, but also by women, and unemployed individuals, and labourers who have been supporting the movement," farmer leader Gurnaam Singh Chadha said.

Addressing a press conference, he said that the march would be carried out in a "peaceful" manner, and special care would be taken that "what happened on January 26 is not repeated".

The leaders also shared



their plans of forming a committee to control protesters

if there is police action in Parliament march.

"We will form a committee to let the protesters know what to do in case there is police action during the

march.

"It will also be made clear to them that SKM condemns all kinds of violence. So the protesters will know that if there is any damage of property by them, they will have to serve the penalty," a farmer leader said.

Farmer leaders also announced their plans to block the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal expressway for 24 hours on April 10.

"We will be blocking the KMP expressway on April 10 for 24 hours, that is from 11 am on April 10 to 11 am on the next day.

"We will be doing this because the government has not been listening to us. It has been sleeping. This is to wake up the government," another farmer leader said.

An event to honour the farmers who have lost their lives during the agitation will be organised on May 6.

"Soil from different parts of the country will be brought to these borders and a memorial will be created for all our

brothers who lost their lives while participating in this movement," a farmer leader said.

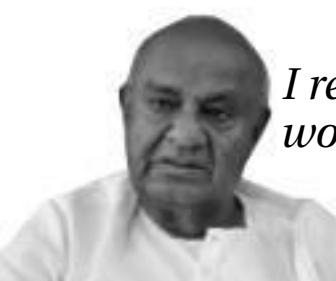
Other events that will be organised by the farmers as part of strengthening their agitation against the farm laws include the "FCI (Food Corporation of India) Bachao Divas" on April 5 that will be marked by the "gherao" of FCI offices across the country.

The farmers also called for the celebration of the "Sanvidhan Bachao Divas" (Save the Constitution Day) on April 14 to mark the birth anniversary of Bhim Rao Ambedkar.

According to one of the farmer leaders, the Constitution of India "is under danger" from the government.

Similarly, Labour Day on May 1 will also be celebrated at the Delhi borders, where all programmes during the day will be dedicated to "mazdoor-kisan unity".

A separate press conference was also held at the Ghazipur border protest site, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates.



I request the friends and well wishers of the family not to worry, experts doctors are giving them the best treatment...

FORMER PRIME MINISTER H D DEVE GOWDA

AFTER GOWDA AND HIS WIFE WERE TESTED COVID POSITIVE

India

## THUMBNAILS



A woman, wearing a face mask, walks past a coronavirus-themed mural, in Mumbai on Wednesday. ■ AGENCIES

**Liquor deaths:** Four persons died in the Udaypur area in Pratapgarh (UP), allegedly after consuming spurious liquor, officials said on Wednesday. The local police station in-charge has been suspended following the incident for alleged laxity, they said.

**Defamation case:** A court here in Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday issued summons against TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee, nephew of West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, directing him to appear before it on 1 May in connection with a defama-

tion case filed by Akash Vijaywargiya, the MLA son of BJP's Bengal minter Kailash Vijaywargiya.

**Bal Thackeray memorial:** Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday laid the foundation stone of late Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray's memorial at Dadar in central Mumbai, even as the opposition BJP and the MNS slammed the state government for not inviting their party leaders to the func-

PTI

# Second phase Assam polling today

Fate of 345 candidates, including 26 women, will be decided by over 73 lakh voters in 39 Assembly constituencies

SNS & PTI  
GUWAHATI, 31 MARCH

The second phase polling of Assam legislative Assembly elections is set for tomorrow, where the fate of 345 candidates including 26 women will be decided by over 73 lakh voters in 39 Assembly constituencies including 15 seats in Barakvalley of the state. The polling will begin on 7 a.m. continue till 6 p.m. Among the 73,44,631 electors in second phase, there are 37,34,537 males voters, 36,09,959 females voters and 135 transgender voters.

According to the election authority, Hojai constituency has the highest number of electors (2,65,886 voters), whereas Howrah will be the lowest one (1,32,339).

Most constituencies will witness straight battle between the BJP led alliance and the opposition led Mohajoot (grand alliance).

For the grand alliance, Congress leaders Siddique Ahmed, Kamalakhy Dey Purkayastha, Sum Ronghang, Santanu Sarma, etc along with Bodoland People's Front leader Rihon Daimary, All India United Democratic Front leader Sirajuddin Ajmal, etc would also seek the voters' mandates.

State chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal, before the closing time of campaigning yesterday addressed a series of rallies at Dholai, Ratabari, North Karimganj, Sonai, Silchar and Udarbond. Seeking supports for the saffron candidates,

Sonowal asserted that the BJP led government in Dispur worked tirelessly for safeguarding the lives and properties, pride and prestige of all sections of the people cutting across the language, caste, creed and community.

State minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, addressing poll rallies, highlighted the assurances of BJP to increase Orunadai scheme's amount from rupees 830 to 3000 per month, waive off micro finance loan up to 50%, assurance for jobs, two-wheelers for youths and various infrastructures in rural Assam.

**Five ministers, deputy speaker in fray:**

The fate of five ministers, the deputy speaker and a few significant opposition faces will be decided as 39 seats in Assam go to the polls in the second phase on Thursday.

BJP minister Parimal Suklabaidya is in a direct contest with Congress's Kamakhya Prasad Mala in Dholai, while Deputy Speaker Aminul Haque Laskar of the BJP is in a straight contest with AIUDF's Karim Uddin Barbhuiyan in Sonai.

Minister Pijush Hazarika is locked in a triangular contest with Congress's Swapna Kumar Mandal and AJP's Bulbul Das from Jagiroad (SC), and his cabinet colleague Bhakesh Kalita is in a direct fight with AJP's Babul Saharia in the Rangiya constituency.

Rajya Sabha MP Biswajit Daimary is fighting against BPF's Karuna Kanta Swargaryn Paneri, while AIUDF's Sirajuddin Ajmal, a former MP and MLA, is fighting the elections against AGP's Sadikullah Bhuyan from Jamunamukhi. Total 175 candidates are fighting the phase two elections from 15 seats in the three districts of Karimganj, Hailakandi and Cachar. Algapur is the constituency with the highest 19 candidates.

Speaking to reporters after praying at the famed Shakti cult shrine of Kamakhya, Gandhi said that unlike the BJP his party keeps promises made to the people during elections.

Replies to a question on what his party would do if it wins the state elections, Gandhi said, "We have promised five guarantees". The 'five guarantees' include 'nullifying' the CAA in the state, providing five lakh government jobs to youths in five years, 200 units of free electricity for every household, raising tea garden workers' daily-wages from a current Rs 193 to Rs 365," he said, referring to one of the five promises.

Gandhi offered prayers at the Shaktipeeth atop the Nilachal Hill prior to setting out for election rallies at Chaygaon and Barkhetri, which will go to the polls in the last phase on April 6.

Gandhi could not travel to his scheduled rallies at Silchar, Haflong and Bokajan on Tuesday due to heavy downpour and bad weather there.

Instead, he posted his



Officials check Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) and other election materials at a distribution centre, on the eve of second phase of Assam Assembly poll, in Nagaon on Wednesday. ■ AGENCY

## Congress has track record of fulfilling poll promises: Rahul

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
GUWAHATI, 31 MARCH

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday asserted that his party keeps its promises and has a track record of having done so after winning assembly elections in other states.

Speaking to reporters after praying at the famed Shakti cult shrine of Kamakhya, Gandhi said that unlike the BJP his party had promised to waive farm loans and did so after assuming power. "In Assam, we have guaranteed to raise the tea garden workers' daily wage to Rs 365," he said, referring to one of the five promises.

Gandhi offered prayers at the Shaktipeeth atop the Nilachal Hill prior to setting out for election rallies at Chaygaon and Barkhetri, which will go to the polls in the last phase on April 6.

Gandhi could not travel to his scheduled rallies at Silchar, Haflong and Bokajan on Tuesday due to heavy downpour and bad weather there.

Instead, he posted his

Cong-AIUDF want power to help illegal immigrants: Shah

BJNU/HAJO/SONAPUR, 31 MARCH

Union home minister Amit Shah on Wednesday accused Congress and AIUDF of hankering for power in Assam to open the borders for infiltrators and said emphatically that BJP will not allow the state to become a hub for illegal immigrants again after freeing the land encroached by them during last five years.

Taking a swipe at All India United Democratic Front chief Badruddin Ajmal for claiming that the "lock and key" (AIUDF symbol) of forming the next government in the state is in his hands, Shah said the people would decide who will run Assam.

Shah began the day with a rally at Bijni constituency in Chirang district that comes under Bodoland Territorial Region followed by public meetings at Hajo in Kamrup (Rural) and Dispur in Kamrup (Metropolitan) districts.

"Ajmal claims that the 'lock and key' of forming the next government is in his hands and he will decide who will form the next government in Assam, but he does not realise that the 'taala aur chabi' Assam ke janta ke haath mein hain (the lock and key is with the people of Assam)", he said.

Gandhi, while addressing an election rally in Chaygaon constituency in Assam's Kamrup district, urged people to listen to him if they want to hear the truth.

"I haven't come here to lie to you. My name is not Narendra Modi. If you wish to hear him lie about Assam, farmers or any other issue, switch on the television. He lies to India 24/7. If you want to listen to the truth, hear me out," he said.

IAF to receive more Rafale jets



NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

India is set to receive another batch of Rafale fighter jets from France that will bolster the air power of the Indian Air Force (IAF).

"Another batch of Rafale takes to the skies on a non-stop flight to India with air refueling by (the) UAE. Indian Air power grows further!" the Indian Embassy in Paris tweeted. The embassy also posted a video of the jets taking off from an airbase.

On arrival in India, the three fighter jets will join the Golden Arrows Squadron in Ambala. The fresh induction will take the squadron's strength to 14.

The first batch of five Rafale jets arrived in India on 29 July last year, nearly four years after India signed an inter-governmental agreement with France to procure 36 of the aircraft at a cost of Rs 59,000 crore. The formal induction ceremony of the fleet had taken place in Ambala.

A second batch of three Rafale jets arrived in India on 3 November last year while a third batch of another three jets joined the IAF on 27 January.

India is expected to get more Rafale jets from France in the next couple of months. The next batch of nine Rafale fighter jets will be coming in April. Out of these, five will be inducted at Hashimara air base in West Bengal.

The twin-engine Rafale jets are India's first major acquisition of fighter planes in 23 years after the Sukhoi jets were imported from Russia. Considered among the world's best, the jets have been built by French aviation firm Dassault. SNS

## TENDER

**OFFICE OF MEMBER SECRETARY  
RAJASTHAN MEDICARE RELIEF SOCIETY  
MAHARANA BHUPAL GOVERNMENT HOSPITAL, UDAIPUR**  
No./RMRS/2020-21/106  
**E Tender No. 14/17-03-2021  
NIB NO. GHU2021WS0B00128**  
Bids for open tender of Canteen & SSB Block Cafeteria Sanchalan tender at Member Secretary, RMRS, Maharana Bhupal Govt. Hospital, Udaipur are invited from interested bidder.  
■ Bids for open tender of Canteen & SSB Block Cafeteria Sanchalan tender up to 5-00 pm, Date: 7-4-2021  
Other particular of the bid may be visited on the procurement portal: <http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in> or the state: Member Secretary  
Rajasthan Medicare Relief Society  
Maharana Bhupal Govt. Hospital, Udaipur

**NORTHERN RAILWAY  
TENDER NOTICE  
(Through e-tendering)**  
Name of work with its location Work for formation LAN Cabling in C/w Railnet/Internet connectivity to workshop/DEMU Shed/Coaching Depot/ Freight maintenance depot at NDLS, NZM, ANVT, DEE, BLC Depot / TKD & SSB.  
App. Cost of the work (?) ₹ 67,66,675.60/- only  
Tender Document Fee (?) ₹ 0/- only  
Earnest Money Deposit (?) ₹ 0/- only  
Address of the office Senior Divisional Signal & Telecom Engineer-C, Northern Railway, 3/Floor, Annexe-1, DRM Office, New Delhi-110055.  
Date & Time for upload of tender / closing of tender 28.04.2021 up to 15.00 hrs.  
Website particular & notice board location where complete details of the tender can be seen etc. See the Northern Railway website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in) & Notice board at S&T branch, 3/Floor, DRM Office, State Entry Road, New Delhi-110055.  
Tender No. 558-Sig-16-Tele-OT-929 Dated: 30.03.2021. 740/21  
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

**SHORT TERMS NOTICE INVITING TENDER**  
The Executive Engineer Jal Shakti Division Bilaspur invites tenders on behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh from approved eligible contractors for the following work(s) through offline process:-  
Sr. No Name of work Estimated cost Earnest Money Cost of form Time allowed  
1 A/R&M/O Sewerage scheme New Bilaspur Town in Tehsil Sadar District Bilaspur (SH: Construction of brick masonry manhole chamber, providing laying jointing DI pipe 150 mm dia for left out habitation at Lakhnupur). 399739/- 8000/- 250/- Two Months  
2 A/R&M/O JSV Sub-Division Bilaspur at Changer Tehsil Sadar District Bilaspur (SH: Laying of cement concrete patch Leveling concrete in front of approach road JSV Division and Circle building at Changer). 354610/- 7100/- 250/- Two Months  
3 A/R&M/O LIS Jukhala (old) in Tehsil Sadar District Bilaspur (SH: Providing and fixing Cast Iron Reflux valve of 400mm dia). 349500/- 7000/- 250/- One Month  
4 Operation and maintenance of LWSS Gehra Bahl Churani in Tehsil Ghumarwin District Bilaspur (SH: Deployment of manpower for operation and maintenance of distribution system for one year). 339300/- 6790/- 250/- One year  
5 Operation and maintenance of LWSS Harlig Chatteri in Tehsil Ghumarwin District Bilaspur (SH: Deployment of manpower for operation and maintenance of distribution system for one year). 339300/- 6790/- 250/- One year  
6 Restoration of rain damages to LWSS New Bilaspur Town at Nog in Tehsil Sadar District Bilaspur (SH: Removal of slips, providing MS flanges, circumferential butt welding and providing laying jointing and testing of DI pipe 150mm dia (k-7) at various locations and RDS). 306349/- 6130/- 250/- Two Months  
7 A/R&M/O various LWSS/GWSS under Jal Shakti Sub-Division Bilaspur Tehsil Sadar District Bilaspur (SH: Deployment of manpower for preparation / collection of water charges for Urban area under Jal Shakti Sub-Division Bilaspur for one year). 264000/- 5280/- 250/- One year  
8 Restoration of rain damages to LWSS New Bilaspur Town at Nog in Tehsil Sadar District Bilaspur (SH: Construction of retaining wall to protect the pre-setting tank from back side). 252006/- 5050/- 250/- Two Months  
9 A/R&M/O Circle Building Bilaspur in District Bilaspur (SH: Providing electrical wiring, inverter wiring, P/FA LED TV and accessories). 242046/- 4850/- 250/- One Month  
10 Retrofitting of various ongoing water supply schemes to achieve functional household tap connection under Sadar Constituency in Tehsil Sadar District Bilaspur (Section Panjgian) (SH: Providing 50 Hos FHTC at various locations under schemes and laying jointing and testing of GI pipe 15mm dia). 222211/- 4450/- 250/- Two Months  
11 A/R&M/O Sewerage scheme New Bilaspur Town in Tehsil Sadar District Bilaspur (SH: Construction of brick masonry manhole chamber, providing laying jointing DI pipe 150mm dia near collage Chowki, Bilaspur). 189312/- 3790/- 250/- Two Months  
12 Restoration of rain damages to Sewerage scheme New Bilaspur Town in Tehsil Sadar District Bilaspur (SH: Construction of brick masonry manhole chamber, R/R masonry wall behind septic tank and laying jointing HDPE pipe 225mm dia). 167375/- 3350/- 250/- Two Months  
13 A/R&M/O various hand pumps under JSV Sub-Division Bilaspur (Section Panjgian) in Tehsil Sadar District Bilaspur (SH: Flushing of 12 Nos hand pumps at various locations). 165600/- 3315/- 250/- One Month  
14 Stock storage (SH: Providing / supplying XEROX B7025 Digital Photostate machine in Jal Shakti Circle Bilaspur and Jal Shakti Sub-Division No.II Bilaspur). 165375/- 3310/- 250/- One Month  
15 A/R&M/O Medium Lift Irrigation Project to Changer Area from Anandpur Hydel Channel in Tehsil Sh. Naina Devi Ji District Bilaspur (SH: Providing and fixing CT coils and other electrical accessories for control panel 11 KV motor at Dabat pump house). 142500/- 2850/- 250/- One Month  
16 A/R&M/O various pump houses under Jal Shakti Section Panjgian in Tehsil Sadar District Bilaspur (SH: Providing repair, white washing and distemping etc.). 135427/- 2710/- 250/- One Month  
17 A/R&M/O LWSS New Bilaspur Town at Nog in Tehsil Sadar District Bilaspur (SH: Providing MS flange and welding of pipe line at various RDs at various location under NBT). 117736/- 2360/- 250/- Two Months  
18 Restoration of rain damages to FIS Gutrahan in Tehsil Sadar District Bilaspur (SH: Construction of head weir). 116352/- 2330/- 250/- Two Months  
19 Restoration of rain damages to Medium Lift Irrigation Scheme to Changer Area from Anandpur Hydel Channel in Tehsil Sh. Naina Devi Ji District Bilaspur (SH: Construction of RCC pillar for Nallah Crossing of gravity main of various location of various dia). 105934/- 2120/- 250/- Two Months  
20 Stock storage (SH: Construction of cement concrete from courtyard of JSV section office at Talyana in Tehsil Ghumarwin District Bilaspur). 101069/- 2025/- 250/- Two Months

Last date of submission of tender: 09-04-2021 upto 11.00 AM  
Last date of sale of tender from divisional office 08-04-2021 upto 2.00 PM  
The tender forms and other detailed condition ns can be downloaded from the website [www.hpjhp.org](http://www.hpjhp.org).

Executive Engineer,  
Jal Shakti Division,  
Bilaspur

4 Covid deaths reported in J&K as virus spikes, 373 tested +ve

JAMMU, 31 MARCH

Four virus related deaths were reported in Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday where Covid-19 spike is being witnessed. A tourist from Pune (Maharashtra) died in Srinagar due to coronavirus.

This is the highest number of corona related deaths in J&K during the current year.

An official spokesman said that three deaths have been reported in Kashmir and one in the Jammu division.

The number of positive cases is also rising with every passing day. As many as 373 persons were today tested positive, 300 in Kashmir and 73 in the Jammu division. Of these 53 were travellers in Jammu and 44 in Kashmir were tested positive.

With 159 persons today testing positive, the Srinagar district is maintaining top position in the number of Covid-19 patients. As such, of the 20 districts in the UT, only Srinagar has been declared Orange Zone. Under the new guidelines applicable from Thursday, the J&K government has authorised deputy commissioners to decide on imposing restrictions in their respective jurisdiction.

The entry points into the UT from Punjab at Lakhnupur have been declared Red Zone from where no passenger will be allowed to proceed without testing. The health minister told newsmen today.

The minister appealed to the

## ON DUTY



A CISF personnel walks under an umbrella while guarding at the Taj Mahal on a hot day, in Agra on Wednesday. ■ AGENCY

## Covid surge in Bihar; govt rules out

Results of Assembly polls will mark the beginning of Congress' return to Delhi in 2024.



ASSERTING THAT THE BJP WOULD REMAIN A MARGINAL PLAYER IN THE POLLS

## THUMBNAILS



Workers use a crane to lift a tetrapod to create a seawall along the coastal area, at Bandra in Mumbai, on Wednesday. ■ AGENCE

**Wife seeks security for Ansari during jail transfer:** Wife of jailed mafia don-turned politician Mukhtar Ansari has written to President Ram Nath Kovind urging him to ensure adequate security for him when he is transferred from Punjab to Uttar Pradesh following a Supreme Court direction. PTI

## Former TMC leader joins BJP

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SILIGURI, 31 MARCH

Former Trinamul Congress leader from Siliguri Nantu Paul joined the BJP in Kolkata today. Disappointed at being denied a Trinamul Congress ticket to contest the assembly elections, Mr Paul had left the party and has already filed his nomination as an independent election candidate from the Siliguri Assembly constituency. He will, however, withdraw his nomination papers now.

Many today said here that Mr Paul was among the few politicians "who has the colour of all major political parties."

A ward councillor since 1988, Mr Paul, who is known to switch sides, started his political career with the CPI-M. He switched sides to the Trinamul Congress in 2006, and remained there for around a month before joining the Congress. Mr Paul



switched back to the TMC in Kolkata on 27 September, 2012. He left the party after the Trinamul Congress fielded Prof Om Prakash Mishra as a candidate for the Siliguri seat.

According to Mr Paul, he joined the saffron camp for the development of Siliguri and that he will withdraw his nomination.

He and his wife Manjusree Paul received the party flag from BJP national gen-

## J&K secretariat, offices to be shut for durbar move

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU, 31 MARCH

The J&K civil secretariat and other government offices will open in the summer capital of Srinagar on 10 May after their closure here on 30 April.

This was announced by chief secretary BVR Subrahmanyam here on Wednesday. While chairing a high-level meeting to review the preparations for summer 'durbar move 2021', Subrahmanyam informed that there will be a substantial reduction in the transportation of records

during the bi-annual shifting of capital from Jammu to Srinagar on 30 April.

It was informed that the Government has taken concrete steps to switch to paperless office by rolling out e-office in the moving departments.

As such, most of the official record has been uploaded to the e-office, and training of employees has begun. The switch to the online mode will avoid wear and tear as well as loss of official record during the bi-annual transit, besides saving the associated transportation cost.

## APPOINTMENT

**IJIRA requires  
Liaison Officers.  
For details visit:  
[www.ijira.org.in](http://www.ijira.org.in)**

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### Requires

- 1. Head Master/Mistress (VI-VIII) 2. Head Master/Mistress (IX & X)
- 3. PGT- Home Science 4. TGT (Hindi) 5. PRT- Social Science
- 6. P.T.-Primary Teacher 7. Accountant

Those who had applied against our advertisement in February 2020 are advised to send only the photocopies of any additional educational qualification or experience they have gained during the period from March 2020 to March 2021 through e-mail: [recruitment@dpsbhilai.in](mailto:recruitment@dpsbhilai.in). They must ensure that they fulfill all the required conditions of the post that they have applied for. The interviews for both the advertisements are likely to be held in the month of April/ May of June 2021.

Application form can be downloaded from the school website. Apply on or before 10.04.2021 with a Demand Draft/Banker's Cheque of Rs. 300/- drawn in favour of the Principal, Delhi Public School, payable at Bhilai (can be paid in cash also at the school office between 8:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon on working days).

FOR DETAILS PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE: [WWW.DPSBHILAI.IN](http://WWW.DPSBHILAI.IN), PRINCIPAL

## Eshwarappa accuses BSY of interference

Urge Guv to 'advice chief minister to adhere to rules'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

Umblings of discontent have started surfacing in the BSY-Yeddyurappa government. Rural development and panchayat raj minister KS Eshwarappa, has approached the governor with a five-page letter against the chief minister's alleged authoritarian manner, including interference in his department's functioning.

He urged the governor to "advise the chief minister to adhere to the rules and regulations besides adopting policies of non-interference in the discharge of Constitutional responsibilities in his department concerned."

According to him, Yeddyurappa had sanctioned huge funds at the request of a few legislators, bypassing the rural development minister. The allocations ran to over Rs 775 crore. This is not all, he added, while referring to another allocation of Rs 460 crore. Even though these were stayed by him, the minister said, his orders were superseded.



Despite raising objections, the finance department under the chief minister continued to sanction funds in the guise of "special grants." These developments had embarrassed him no end, undermining his position in the eyes of the legislators and party workers.

He also added that he had kept Prime Minister Narendra Modi informed of the development in addition to Union home minister Amit Shah.

It pained him to bring to "your notice," he told the governor "some of the recent actions of our chief minister relating to my department." These amount to direct inter-

ference in the affairs of the minister in charge. This, he added, was in clear violation of Karnataka (Transaction of Business) Rules, 1977, and also against established practices and procedures relating to the affairs of the state administration.

The minister said "it is highly unfortunate that the chief minister knowingly issued orders," ignoring him, as the minister in charge of the department concerned.

This apart, the minister has also written to Arun Singh, BJP's national general secretary, in charge of Karnataka, highlighting these incidents, adding that the chief minister had failed to provide necessary funds for implementing the schemes which were announced in the budget for 2021-22.

Yet in the last few months, in the name of special grants, Rs 1,439 crore was sanctioned. This action, "of sanctioning such huge funds for the schemes, not included in the budget, will certainly affect the department's plans for development or rural infrastructure," the rural development minister claimed.

### Dollar smuggling: Customs serves notice to Speaker

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 31 MARCH

The Customs, which is probing the sensational Kerala gold smuggling case has served a notice to the Kerala Assembly Speaker P. Seeramakrishnan again in connection with the dollar smuggling case.

The Speaker has been directed to appear before the Customs office in Kochi on 8 April.

The Customs have earlier summoned Seeramakrishnan to appear before its Kochi office on 12 March. But he didn't appear before the Customs citing reasons of busy work schedule related to his official duties.

Gold smuggling accused Swapna Suresh and Sarith had stated that Speaker Seeramakrishnan had handed over a bag containing dollar to them to deliver to UAE Consulate.

The two accused had levelled serious allegations against the speaker in their statements to the magistrate.

Meanwhile, the Customs team sought legal advice on the iPhone issue involving CPI-M Polit Bureau member Koderi Balakrishnan's wife Vinodini Balakrishnan.

Though she was served notice thrice, she had not appeared for interrogation. So, the Customs sought legal advice regarding this matter.

Normally, when a person fails to appear even after receiving notice thrice, the probe team will proceed to further actions after getting warrant from the court.

In this connection, the Crime Branch wing of police has stated that Vinodini Balakrishnan was using her own iPhone.

The Crime Branch found this in an investigation carried out on the basis of a complaint filed by Vinodini to the DGP.

### Teenager shot dead by classmate

MEERUT, 31 MARCH

A teenager was shot dead by his classmate outside his school in Behsuma town of Meerut district on Wednesday afternoon. The accused is yet to be arrested. Police has registered a case.

SP (rural) Keshav Mishra said the accused, a student of Class 9 in Navjeevan Inter-college of Behsuma town, lives in Akbarpur village.

On the complaint of family members of deceased Nitin a case of murder has been registered. Police have started the investigation and is conducting raids to arrest the accused minor. The cops are clueless about the motive behind the crime.

## Former KERALA CHIEF MINISTER OOMMEN CHANDY

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 31 MARCH

Nemom constituency in Thiruvananthapuram is witnessing a fierce three-way fight among the BJP, the Congress and the CPI-M. It is one of the keenly watched constituencies in Kerala where the BJP won in the 2016 Assembly elections.

BJP has fielded former Mizoram governor and senior party leader Kummanam Rajasekharan, from here, while CPI-M has deputed its old guard V. Sivankutty, to win back the constituency. The Congress has fielded sitting MP K. Muraleedharan from the seat.

In the 2016 Assembly elections veteran BJP leader O. Rajagopal wrested the seat from CPI-M's sitting MLA V. Sivankutty. In this election, Rajagopal bagged 47.46% of the polled votes, with his nearest rival, V. Sivankutty of the CPI-M getting 41.39%. The Congress had left the seat for its UDF minor ally JD(U). The JD(U)'s V. Surendran Pillai got only 9.7% votes.

The entry of K. Muralidharan in election arena has given a new dimension to the contest in Nemom. Son of former chief minister and Congress leader K. Karunakaran, Muraleedharan, has huge connec-

tions in the constituency. Muralidharan had contested from Vattiyoorkavu, a constituency bordering Nemom before electing to Lok Sabha from Vadakara. As for BJP, it remains to be seen whether former Mizoram Governor Kummanam Rajasekharan will be able to repeat the success registered by veteran leader O. Rajagopal in 2016.

In the 2019 Loksabha polls, while Congress leader Shashi Tharoor won from Thiruvananthapuram, in the Nemom Assembly segment falling under the constituency, the BJP's Kummanam Rajasekharan had a lead of 12,041 votes over Tharoor. Rajasekharan got 58,513 votes, while Tharoor had 46,472. The CPI got only 33,921 votes.

In the recent civic body elections as well, of the 23 divisions of Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation falling under the Nemom constituency, the BJP won 14. The LDF took the remaining nine.

This shows that BJP has steadily expanded its base in the constituency.

Now, the question is whether the entry of K. Muralidharan in the field will change the electoral arithmetic in the constituency, or whether lotus be again bloomed in Nemom.

## Nemom: Three-way fight among BJP, Cong, CPM

Priyanka reaches out to housewives in Kerala



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
CHALAKUDY (KER), 31 MARCH

In its manifesto for the 6 April Assembly polls, the Congress has promised Rs 2,000 'pension' for homemakers and Rs 72,000 annually to the poor under 'NYAY Yojana'.

She said putting Rs 6,000 directly into the account of poor families every month will be the first thing the Congress-led government will do, if it is elected to power.

The 49-year-old leader said the Congress-led government will implement the scheme to help the housewives so that they can stand up for themselves in their own way.

## Random Covid-19 test for flyers from surge states: Delhi airport

PTI  
NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

The Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) will conduct random COVID-19 test of passengers coming from states where there has been a surge in cases recently, said the Delhi airport's operator DIAL on Wednesday.

The Centre had on Tuesday said the COVID-19 situation is turning from "bad to worse" and

is a huge cause for worry, especially for some states, warning that the whole country is at risk and any complacency at this stage will have "heavy costs".

The Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) stated on Twitter on Wednesday, "As per the latest government mandate, DDMA shall conduct random COVID-19 testing of passengers coming from the states where cases are increasing."

"After the collection of sam-

ple, the travellers would be allowed to exit. However, the passengers who were found to be positive will be mandatorily quarantined as per the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare protocol," it added.

Six states, including Maharashtra, Punjab, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, have reported a high number of daily COVID-19 cases and account for 78.56 percent of the 56,211 fresh cases recorded in the country

in a day, the Union health ministry had said on Tuesday.

On testing at the Delhi airport, a state government on Wednesday officials said, "We random test people to know if asymptomatic people are carrying the virus into the state."

"Though it is not binding on anyone to go through random testing, but everyone has a responsibility to do so as a dutiful citizen of the country," he added.

General public is hereby informed that a girl

namely Unknown, D/o: Unknown, R/o: Unknown has been found on 19.03.2021 from nearby Chacha Nehru Hospital, Geeta Colony, Delhi. In this regard DD No. 103 A dated 19.03.2021 has been lodged at Police Station Geeta Colony, Delhi. The description of found abandoned girl is as under:

Name: Unknown, Age: 17 Years, Height: 5', Face: long, Complexion: Shallow, Wearing: Black colour printed suit, Turquoise colour salwar and Black colour Hawa Chappal in Feet.

If anyone has any information about this missing girl please inform P.S. Geeta Colony, Delhi.

Web: <http://cic.nic.in>, Email: [cic@cbi.gov.in](mailto:cic@cbi.gov.in)

Ph: 011-24368638/24368641, Fax: 011-24368639 SHO

Police Station, Geeta Colony, Delhi Ph: 011-22506665, 7065036026

## APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION



General public is hereby informed that an unidentified person about 35 years of age whose name, residence, and family is unknown had been found dead at Pahadi Forest area, Behind N-Block, Sainik farm, New Delhi. In this regard, a vide has been registered with DD No: 21-A, dated 22.03.2021 at PS Neb Sarai, New Delhi. Sincere efforts have been made by the local police to identify the deceased person, but no clue has come to light so far. The description of the UIDB is as under:

Sex: Male, Age: 35 Years, Height: 5'8", Face: Decomposed, Hair: Black, Wearing: Black colour t-shirt and black colour jeans.

If anyone has any information about his relatives, kindly inform the SHO/Neb Sarai, New Delhi.

E-mail: [cic@cbi.gov.in](mailto:cic@cbi.gov.in)  
Ph: 011-24368638, 24368641  
Fax: 011-24368639  
DP/477/SD/2021

## APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION

## Suez is Free

Monday witnessed a pregnant moment in maritime history. When one of the world's largest container ships, the *Ever Given*, was wrenched from the shoreline and set free in the Suez Canal, the heroic achievement of the salvage teams, spread over six days, ensured that the clear waters would once again facilitate international trade. Maritime traffic has resumed in the Suez, and this will contain the economic fallout of the dislocation. The geographical factor was no less critical. The salvage teams were eventually assisted by forces more powerful than technology, pre-eminently the moon and the tides. Salvage crews had worked around a schedule largely influenced by the tides. The crew, already in a state of nerves, strove to ensure progress during the six hours it would take for the water to flow from low point to high and then back again, to summon maritime terminology. Given a full moon on Sunday, the next 24 hours had offered quite the most propitious occasion to continue operations, with the tidal flow providing vital assistance at a crucial juncture. Throughout the night on Sunday and into Monday, tugboats worked in coordination with dredgers to return the vessel – is 'float' the right expression? – to the water. The 220,000-ton vessel slowly returned to buoyancy just before dawn. The impediment was cleared. The Suez canal, the proud boast of the world and not Egypt alone, was free. Profound is its importance in maritime history; for the Suez Canal offers the quickest maritime route from Asia and West Asia to Europe and the East Coast of the United States of America.

That freedom at dawn could turn out to be a turning point in one of the largest and most intensive salvage operations in contemporary history not least because the global trading system was rather perilously hanging in the balance for the past week. It is now pretty obvious that the salvage crew was engaged in a race against time. Each day of blockage rendered the global supply chains closer to what they call a "full-blown crisis". The maritime denouement has now thankfully been averted and the importance is profound both in terms of international trade and freedom of the sea in the wider canvas. At the peak of the crisis in the sea, many ships took the long way around the southern tip of Africa. The circuitous voyage could lengthen the journey by days and add significantly to fuel costs. The maritime crisis and the grave complexities have been addressed. Perfectly in order was the romantic euphoria, marked by blaring horns and shouts of joy that echoed in the desert dark. It was an adventurous epilogue to a maritime misadventure whose cause must now be investigated.

## Beijing & Britain

The standoff between the People's Republic of China and five MPs of the United Kingdom is embedded in Beijing's attempts to stifle what London calls "free and open debate". For the past few years, there has been neither save brutal repression of a minority segment. In a joint statement, the five parliamentarians, who have been sanctioned by Beijing and banned from entering China, have signalled their intent to "redouble" their efforts to campaign against human rights abuses, most particularly the repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang province. Thus has the sordid tale of repression been internationalised. Three MPs, including the ex-Tory leader, Sir Iain Duncan Smith, and two peers said China's action was an attempt to stifle "free and open debate". Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said emphatically that he "stands firmly" with those targeted by China for criticising its treatment of the Uighur people. The sanctions follow similar moves against China, by the United States, Canada and the European Union. As of now, Britain, at any rate its legislative segment, has been quite the most robust in its response. Prime Minister Johnson and President Joe Biden have "expressed their concern about retaliatory action taken by China," during a phone call on Friday. China has imposed sanctions on nine UK citizens – including the five parliamentarians – who are among its most vocal critics in the UK. The government in Beijing said it was sanctioning the group for spreading what it called "lies and disinformation" about China. In response, Sir Iain Duncan Smith, along with MPs Nusrat Ghani and Tim Loughton, and the peers Lord Alton and Baroness Kennedy, said: "Today's sanctions have unmasked the Chinese Communist Party." The crisis, therefore, is as much diplomatic as it is ideological, with human considerations being at the core of the raging kerfuffle. "These actions are not only an attack on us as individuals but an attempt to stifle the free and open debate that is at the heart of our parliamentary democracy." The group added that "intimidation" would encourage them to "redouble" their efforts, as they pledged to continue advocating on behalf of "the Uighurs, Tibetans, Hong Kongers and all other persecuted groups in China". The scope of Britain's response has, therefore, been widened. "These are the true victims of the Chinese government's authoritarian rule, not us," they added. In league with the government, the group also called for "international investigations into the alleged abuses" in Xinjiang against the Uighurs. From Whitehall to the White House, the cache of sanctions imposed by China has caused a flutter in the roost. The standoff has happened at a critical juncture in London's equation with Beijing when the government is trying to strike a balance in its relations with China. In its recent foreign policy review, the UK described China as a "systemic competitor" and "the biggest state-based threat to the UK's economic security". Yet it spoke of pursuing "a positive trade and investment relationship" and cooperating with China on climate change and biodiversity. The outlook is grim post the sanctions.

# Of Democracy

What the 23 letter writing members – now dubbed the 'G-23' – have written is like employees appealing to their employer. If that is their equation with the Gandhi family, it has to be said that they consider the latter to be indispensable. In this case, the party members should quietly accept what the Gandhis do or lump it



In the current political scenario, there is no effective national Opposition to the ruling BJP. There are intellectuals like Kapil Komireddy who believe that democracy in India is in danger unless a viable Opposition is created before the 2024 general election. Otherwise, democracy may be replaced by some form of dictatorship. While Komireddy seems to lay the blame at the door of Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi for this lacuna, in the humble opinion of this writer, blaming the scion of the Nehru dynasty alone for the lack of a viable Opposition would be wrong.

It is instructive to have a look at our post-independence history. Jawaharlal Nehru was Prime Minister from 1947 to 1964, a good 17 years continuously. The Chinese invasion of 1962 and our defeat was a national shame. Not because we lost, but for the reasons we had to endure a defeat and the way our valorous troops suffered; the loss was not as much military as it was a case of our soldiers being misled and betrayed by an unflattering political leadership. Soon after August 1947, Nehru had told the interim Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, General William Lockhart, "India is a peaceful country and therefore does not need an army. The police are sufficient to protect us". The result of such thinking played out on the ground too, as our armed forces were treated like pseudo-policemen. But by November 1962, Nehru panicked in the aftermath of the Chinese invasion a month earlier. His favourite general B M Kaul had sent our troops up to 16,000 feet altitude in NEFA (today's Arunachal Pradesh) in cotton uniforms, one ordinary pullover and WWII .303 Lee Enfield bolt action rifles. The shoes given to them were the brown version of tennis ones; no gloves were provided to our soldiers.

When Nehru was told that there was a strong possibility of the enemy entering Assam pretty

soon, he felt it was his duty to tell the local people their state was in danger, implying that it was going to fall into Chinese hands. He seemed to be weeping on the radio – I personally heard him speak on All India Radio. Fortunately, on the night between 20 and 21 November, the Chinese declared a unilateral ceasefire.

In the meantime, many members of Parliament were clamouring for the government's resignation. But Nehru paid no heed to calls for his ouster. When the pressure became too much to ward off, the Prime Minister told his Defence Minister VK Krishna Menon to resign.

Menon went into oblivion, but Nehru, under whose leadership India had suffered a shameful military reverse, battled on until a year and a half when he died in May 1964. The spirit of democracy demanded that the Prime Minister too should have resigned.

A decade later, Indira Gandhi went as far as declaring a national Emergency instead of resigning in 1975, following an Allahabad High Court verdict that held her election itself to be unlawful. Her dictatorial regime of the next 19 months, with its attendant banishment of democracy itself is much written about. This was followed by her humiliating defeat in the next general election in March 1977. Should she have done what she did? Was that democracy? Why then blame Rahul Gandhi alone? He did resign as President of the Congress following its second humiliating rout in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, and has not returned to the presidency since then.

This is not to say that no change is required at all. It is for the other members of the Congress to hold a meeting and decide what is necessary to be done. What the 23 letter writing mem-

bers – now dubbed the "G-23" – have written is like employees appealing to their employer or owner of the party. If that is their equation with the Gandhi family, it has to be said that they consider the latter to be indispensable. In which case, the party members should quietly accept what the Gandhis do or lump it.

There is nothing else to be done. One has to recall that when Nehru did not budge despite India's humiliation at the hands of China, or when Indira Gandhi threw out democracy itself with the Emergency in 1975, no Congressman revolted or took a public stand.

Surely quite a few Congressmen must have disagreed with both or either of these situations. As it happened, the Congress endured both the crises and the Congressmen proved wise.

The younger generation might or might not be aware that after P V Narasimha Rao ceased to be Prime Minister following the

party's defeat in the 1996 general elections, there were months when it was feared that the party was falling apart and Sonia Gandhi's leadership was the only way to keep it united. She did bring the Congress back to power and ruled by proxy for ten years from 2004-14. She was nothing more than Rajiv Gandhi's spouse, had no experience in political life and is not an ethnic Indian. Yet, her leadership, or more accurately, absolute control, proved finally that the Gandhi dynasty owns the Congress. Rahul and Priyanka are the progeny of Rajiv Gandhi. Take it or leave it. With its long and wide brand equality, it may blossom again or may not. If one does not feel optimistic, she should move another party but should not complain.

Coming to the larger issue, dynasties do not augur well for

France has stuck to democracy after writing a secular constitution in the year 1905. Germany tried democracy from 1920 to 1934, followed by the unfortunate interlude of Adolf Hitler and his Nazis. The country again returned to a democratic system after World War II and has stayed firmly on that path. The Scandinavian countries have been democratic; they are a part of the Anglo-Saxon family.

Some countries call themselves democratic because they have elections, but that is not enough. Even Pakistan claims to be a democracy. Turkey has an elective system monitored by its army. The bald truth is that countries of this kind merely go through the motions of democratic exercise like elections. India though, is one nation which has been sincere in its free democracy.

A MEMBER OF THE ANN ASIAN VOICES

## NGO certification being weaponised

Non-governmental organizations focused on specific industries have developed rapidly over the past 20 years or so. Promoting better treatment of workers and opposing child labor and environmental degradation they provide certification to help companies improve their social responsibility image and provide consumers with a means to identify companies with the best ethical practices. Some of them, that is.

Not all of these industrial NGOs are angels. While there are those that are acting genuinely to promote business ethics and public welfare undertakings, some have more sinister and covert ambitions. The operations of these devilish NGOs target the industries and companies of emerging economies for political purposes. For example, the Better Cotton Initiative, an NGO headquartered in Switzerland, claims that it "exists to make global cotton production better for the people who produce it, better for the environment it grows in and better for the sector's future".

Yet among its funding partners is USAID, the US Agency for International Development, which bluntly admits that its work "advances US national security and economic prosperity". Which explains why the BCI has initiated the "boycott" of Xinjiang cotton based on false allegations of forced labor. The boycott is aimed at striking at China's cotton and textile industry, which are key pillars of the national economy, being both an important part of the country's foreign trade and the provider of a lot of jobs.

Those companies that are upholding the politically motivated boycott should be aware that they are damaging their brand image in China

## CHINADAILY

by doing so. Whether they are unwittingly or unwittingly participants in the political ploy to destabilize China from within, they will only lose the trust of Chinese consumers by assisting the machinations of the BCI. Several major Chinese e-commerce giants have already withdrawn from their platforms well-known brands that have banned the use of Xinjiang cotton; and there have been many angry comments from consumers on social media saying they won't buy these brands any more. This is the price brands have to pay for siding with liars. Chinese consumers are acting of their own volition, but it is important they stay rational in expressing their anger. They should let the world know the true feelings of the Chinese people by shunning the products of these companies, but not fall into the trap of committing acts that can be distorted by foreign media outlets. For the involved brands, the Ministry of Commerce has said that China welcomes foreign enterprises to visit Xinjiang and learn the facts there for themselves, so they can divorce themselves from the BCI with a clear conscience. The cotton war highlights how China must be vigilant to identify and counter those NGOs whose certification systems are being exploited to disrupt the global industrial and supply chains in order to hinder the country's development.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

## Supreme Court's watershed verdict

SIR, Apropos the news item, "SC quashes FIR lodged against Patricia Mukhim" published on 26 March, the Supreme Court after analysing the Facebook post, written by Ms Mukhim, has observ-

ing her opinion boldly on issues concerning the people. In her long and untainted journalistic career with *The Shillong Times*, she groomed herself to call a spade a spade.

Expressing her opinion boldly on issues concerning the people. In her long and untainted journalistic career with *The Shillong Times*, she groomed herself to call a spade a spade.

In fact, in her social media post she had fervently pleaded for the protection and fundamental rights of non-tribal citizens in the state of Meghalaya as enshrined in Articles 19 and 21 of the Constitution.

The State government and the police, influenced by the Dorbar Shnong, made an unethical attempt to brand Ms Mukhim as one who stoked hatred between different communities.

ed that no case of hate speech is made out. The bench of Justices L Nageswara Rao and S Ravindra Bhat has said that free speech of the citizens of this country cannot be stifled by implicating them in criminal cases. The FIR lodged against the veteran journalist for allegedly creating communal disharmony has been quashed.

Ms Mukhim is well known for her stoic resilience and resolute stand in

Justice Rao, who wrote the verdict on behalf of the bench, said that "at times, when in the legitimate exercise of such a right, individuals travel, settle down or carry a vocation in a place where they find conditions conducive, there may be resentments, especially if such citizens prosper, leading to hostility or possibly violence. In such circumstances, if the victims voice their discontent, and speak out, especially if the state authorities turn a blind eye, or drag their feet, such voicing of discontent is really a cry for anguish, for justice denied or delayed. This is what appears to have happened in this case."

In the present restive scenario, when many governments are in the fray to stifle the voices of individuals, the verdict has reaffirmed the constitutional provisions for the protection of citizens. The Supreme Court deserves accolades for this milestone verdict.

Yours, etc., Samares Bandyopadhyay, Kolkata, 29 March.

**FARMERS' FRUSTRATION**  
SIR, I write with reference to Sanjay Chopra's letter, "An unnecessary bandh" (March 29). Mr Chopra laments the inconvenience that the recent bandh caused to com-

muters and business enterprises. In his reckoning, the bandh was a consequence of the farmers' frustration with government inaction. He also suggests that the farmers' protests should not cause any inconvenience to the public. This suggestion is problematic though, because if farmers were to protest quietly the government would continue to ignore them, and so would the public. In disrupting traffic and closing businesses, farmers are using com-

mon and effective practices of protest. Perhaps they hope that such disruptions will make their demands more visible to the average citizen.

Perhaps a groundswell of support for the farmers will force the government to engage with them and treat them more respectfully. Perhaps a more engaged citizenry will help the farmers and the government come to a solution?

Yours, etc., Meenakshi Khanna, Delhi, 29 March.

Expressing her opinion boldly on issues concerning the people. In her long and untainted journalistic career with *The Shillong Times*, she groomed herself to call a spade a spade.

In fact, in her social media post she had fervently pleaded for the protection and fundamental rights of non-tribal citizens in the state of Meghalaya as enshrined in Articles 19 and 21 of the Constitution.

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Expressing her opinion boldly on issues concerning the people. In her long and untainted journalistic career with *The Shillong Times*, she groomed herself to call a spade a spade.

ANDREW SHENG

**A**pril is the cruellest month", said the poet TS Eliot in his 1920s poem, *The Wasteland*. The April Spring meetings of the IMF/World Bank will be held virtually this year, locked down by the pandemic that is raging into its third wave worldwide.

The world is in a cruel situation, because the uneven arrival of vaccines demonstrate that a few rich countries get them first, whereas the health and economic conditions of the many are dire. The latest available OECD Economic Outlook suggested that the recovery in 2021 will be divergent, meaning that certain countries will do better, but others will continue to struggle. That is polite officialse for devastation.

When the pandemic hit, the rich countries spent roughly three times the stimulus package that applied for the last financial crisis in 2008/9. The poorer emerging market economies (EMEs) could not afford to print money to the same extent, but they witnessed considerable capital outflows. According to the Institute of International Finance (IIF), emerging markets attracted \$313 billion in portfolio flows in 2020, \$48 billion less than the previous year. Furthermore, foreign direct investments (FDI) fell 42 per cent from \$1.5 trillion in 2019 to an estimated \$859 billion, as per UNCTAD Investment Trends Monitor.

With lower export incomes as commodity prices tumbled, many developing countries are facing debt distress. In the last decade, the external debt of developing countries doubled from \$4.5 trillion in 2009 to \$10 trillion or 29 per cent of GDP in 2019. In 2020 and 2021, developing countries face repayments on their public external debt amounting to an estimated \$700 billion to \$1.1 trillion for low-income countries and middle-income countries.

Thus, when official forecasts preach recovery on an "average basis", we should have no illusions that from Mexico to South Africa, the decline in GDP last year was over 7-9 per cent, so the situation for the bottom half of society in many EMEs is deadly serious. The rich do not fear inflation, but when food and energy prices rise once again with massive monetary creation, the poor will be the major victims.

In the 1930s, the English economist John Maynard Keynes identified the liquidity trap where aggregate demand lagged aggregate supply. Put simply, too much savings was stuck in short-term liquid assets, and not enough money put into long-term investments to get jobs going again. Funding is available, but since no one is investing for the long-term and improving productivity, you get "sec-

## Emerging markets must think for themselves



ular stagnation", sliding into slow-growth depression.

We have a similar situation today.

Since the 2008 global financial crisis, the invention of quantitative easing (QE or increasing central bank balance sheets and reducing interest rates) used painless short-term monetary policy to avoid painful fixing of long-term structural deficiencies. Since Wall Street controls Main Street through money politics, no one was willing to tax the rich to deal with the widening inequalities.

At the end of the World War II, the US emerged as the strongest and richest country, and therefore acted as the world's banker, lending dollars to those who needed them to recover, including creating multilateral development banks (MDBs) like the World Bank to provide long-term development funds.

Today's situation has reversed. The US has become the world's largest borrower, with net foreign liability of \$14 trillion as of September 2020 or over 60 per cent of US GDP.

The rest of the world is in effect funding their banker, who is not investing long-term in its own home market, let alone the rest of the world.

Here's how the global balance sheet looks like. The EMEs (including China) hold roughly \$10 trillion out of total \$12 trillion of global foreign exchange reserves, of which 60 per cent is in US dollars. At the same time, the emerging markets owe roughly \$10 trillion in foreign debt, mostly in US dollars. And since they pay a 4 per cent margin (2 per cent higher borrowing costs and 2 per cent lower return on short-term investments and deposits), they provide global bankers and asset managers \$400 billion revenue for not lending them money for long-term investments.

Here's the irony. Since the global rating agencies define credit risks to rich countries as low and emerging risks as high, the EMEs are being starved out of their own money. There is no shortage of short-term money, since the top four reserve currency central bank balance sheets increased

by \$9 trillion in 2020 alone.

The MDBs have total assets of \$1.6 trillion, when the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) investments have a financing gap of \$2.5 trillion annually. The rich countries which have majority control of the MDBs refused to increase their capital to help meet this gap, asking the EMEs to resort to market funding. But the financial markets are only funding the rich. Indeed, stock markets have only 41,000 listed companies, whereas there are millions of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) which cannot access public capital.

The present global financial system is designed for the few and not the many. If the world's bankers refuse to think for their clients, time for the emerging markets to think for themselves.

The recent US and European support for a \$500 billion increase in Special Drawing Rights (SDR) issue by the IMF is a step in the right direction but does not address the structural liquidity trap of who will lead the

investment in long-term green and inclusive infrastructure for the developing world?

The first thing to address is the massive implementation capacity gap. Too much short-term thinking has depleted almost all governments' operational capacity to design, execute and operate long-term infrastructure, with the exception of China. Many private-public partnerships (PPPs) have turned out to be opportunities for corruption or weak project designs. The MDBs complain but they lack today the effective advisory and implementation experience that used to exist before the 1980s, when project engineers dominated operations, rather than present-day macro-economists and MBAs who talk more theory than hard project skills.

Democracy is about the many for the many. It is time for the many in EMEs to think and act for themselves.

The writer, a former Central banker, worked in the World Bank in the 1990s on development finance. The views expressed are personal.

100 YEARS AGO

### OCCASIONAL NOTE

Some further light has been thrown on the scientific measurement of human emotion by a lecture and demonstration given at the Royal Institution by Dr. A.D. Waller, the Director of the Physiological Laboratory of the University of London. It is a matter of common knowledge that emotions lead to physical manifestations, or, to put it in terms of science, all emotions are expressed as neural outbursts from the central nervous system through efferent nerves to muscles and glands. The most familiar manifestations of emotion take the form of intensified physiological activity at the terminations of the nerves, - the shedding of tears, which is just excessive activity on the part of the apparatus for the lubrication of the eyeball. In 1909 Veraguth of Zurich made the observation that emotional conditions are accompanied by a psychogalvanic index which is capable of being accurately measured by means of the galvanometer connected with the palm of the hand. Observations have been made, yielding results which might have been anticipated. It has been found, for example, that the intensity of emotion varies to a large extent not only in different people but in the same people under different conditions. Responses are found to be most active at midday, when physiological activity seems to be at its maximum - in England. In some people the threat of a pin-prick produces a more marked response than the pin-prick itself.

### NEWS ITEMS

#### CHARGE AGAINST EX-POLICE SERGEANT

The hearing of the case in which E.S. Aratoon, an ex-sergeant of the Calcutta Police, was charged with causing the death of Mr. Spalding by throwing sulphuric acid on him, was concluded yesterday before the Police Magistrate of Sealdah. The charge was altered to one of culpable homicide not amounting to murder and, in the alternative, of causing hurt, and of aiding and abetting the offences. The Magistrate in committing the accused to the Sessions observed that the evidence against him was more circumstantial than direct. There was no reliable direct evidence that he threw the sulphuric acid on the deceased man. With regard to some black spots found on the left forearm of the accused, the Magistrate observed that the evidence was not clear that they were caused by acid. Aratoon was remanded in custody.

#### ADMINISTRATION OF SIKH SHRINES

The text of the Gurdwara Bill, which will be introduced and discussed in the Punjab Legislative Council on April 5, is published. The Bill is to make emergent provision for the administration and management of certain Sikh Gurdwaras and shrines in the Punjab, and, with a view to the future legislation relating thereto, to provide for an inquiry into these and other matters. The statement of objects and reasons says that recent events have brought into prominence the fact that the management of the Sikh Gurdwaras and shrines leave much to be desired. The Commissioners, who will be appointed under the Bill, besides inquiring and reporting, are, in order to prevent further tension, empowered to take possession of the Gurdwaras and shrines.

#### PROHIBITION DEBATE IN BIHAR COUNCIL

As the wording of the latter part of the message regarding the proposed amendment of the Hon. Minister in charge of Excise during the recent debate on prohibition is likely to fail to explain exactly the attitude of the Government towards the question, it seems necessary to state that the proposed committee of the Minister was to report with a view to ultimate prohibition as early as possible. But for the merest technical objection, namely opposition to amendments of which notice had not been given, the committee as requested by non-officials would have been formed. It would have been left to the committee to decide as to the period within which prohibition could be effected.

#### SPECIAL CENSUS OF BEGGARS

The Census officer for Bombay city with the help of the police, is arranging for a special census of the beggars of Bombay, with a view to secure more statistics in connection with public health. This special census is expected to throw additional light on the lives of the beggars seen in the Bombay streets, their whereabouts, and the part they play in disseminating disease. It is a well known fact that some of the beggars who ply their calling in the streets of Bombay, which have long been beggars' paradise, earn more money during the day than even the best paid labourers in mills and factories, or at the docks, yet nobody knows where they pass the night or keep their hoarded wealth.

## Perils of unsustainable rice production

ABHIROOP CHOWDHURY, ALIYA NAZ AND ARMIN ROSENCRANZ

**S**ubsidized cheap energy and irrigation water are expanding the commercial growth of rice in northern Indian states. The country is losing its precious ground water, and this is giving rise to stubble burning and disastrous air pollution.

Northern states of India are traditionally known for their wheat cultivation. The annual rainfall range of 80-100 cm is suitable for its cultivation in the states of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Rice is a water-intensive crop that was traditionally grown in the Ganges delta and the eastern coastal plain of India. It requires a rainfall of above 100 cm. Otherwise, irrigation is required.

The green revolution started in India in 1966. Its goals were to modernize the agricultural sector by introducing high-yielding crop varieties, irrigation systems and technological advancements in the states of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. With technological interventions and wider use of chemical fertilizers, the produce from these states increased dramatically over the years. Abundant



irrigation waters were supplied by damming the Ganges watershed.

At the start of the 21st century, the negative impacts of this fertilizer- and irrigation-intensive agricultural model became apparent. One of the greatest impacts is on the water security of the nation due to unplanned and unsustainable crop choices. Rice is being cultivated as a commercial crop. Punjab led the list of rice growing states in 2017-18 by producing 4,366 kg per hectare. In the same year, the average production of rice in India

was only 2,576 kg per hectare.

On 1 January 2019, the nation had 25.8 million tonnes of rice reserve in the granaries. The national requirement is only 7.7 million tonnes.

Northern India is now reeling from an acute water crisis. A 2018 scientific investigation revealed that 42 per cent of India's land area is facing drought. Ground water depletion due to rice production is adding to this water burden. WaterAid India reports that 1 kg of rice production requires approximately 2,800 litres of water.

Most of this demand is supplied by groundwater.

In 2014-15, the nation exported 3 million tonnes of basmati rice which required 10 trillion litres of water. If water consumption is correlated to the yearly rice export, India is exporting about 12 per cent of its ground water to foreign countries. According to WaterAid, this makes India the world's third-largest exporter of ground water. This is alarming as about 1 billion Indians live under the constant shadow of water scarcity.

Some reports suggest that this rice cultivation trend coupled with ground water depletion can turn the green revolution states of Punjab and Haryana into a desert in the next 25 years. In traditional rice growing states of eastern India, there is no subsidy for irrigation or power. Hence, farmers tend to be rational in using both of these precious resources. But in western states, this perspective is reversed owing to subsidies. Availability of cheap energy for farming equipment, water supply and the government's assured purchase of the produce has induced a 'chain reaction' for unplanned cultivation of paddy in these states.

'Punjab Preservation of Subsoil Water Act' and the 'Haryana Preser-

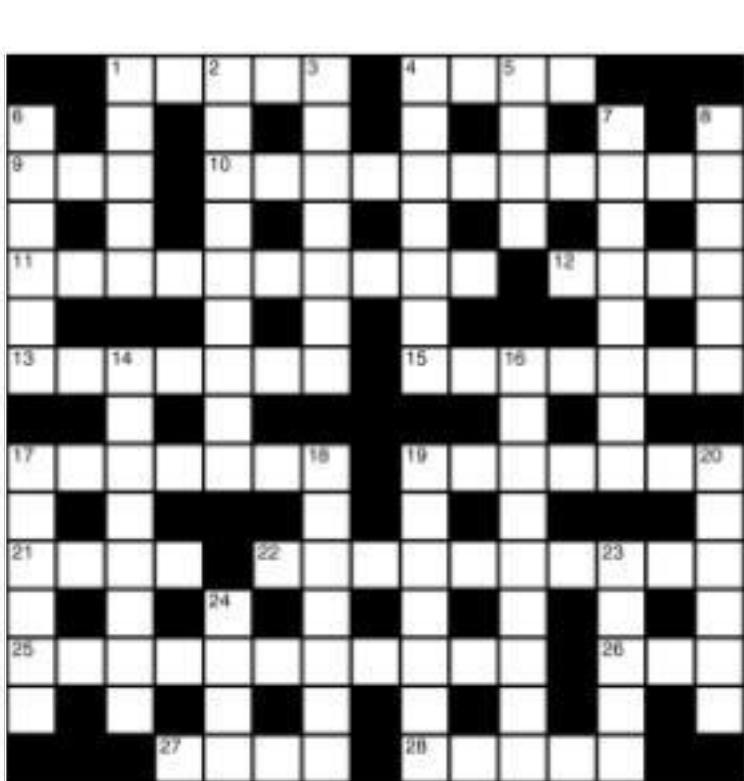
vation of Subsoil Water Act' were enacted in 2009. These acts compelled farmers to delay their rice sowing to reduce the burden on ground water. This resulted in another environmental catastrophe that is engulfing northern India. Delayed sowing of crop means delayed harvesting and the farmers have only a small time until they can start sowing the next crop. This policy failure introduced the problem of stubble burning to get rid of the remnants of the previous year's rice crop. This coincides with the time when the air movement across northern India is halted and pollutants get trapped in the stable, non-moving air. This deteriorates the capital city Delhi's air quality, impacting the health of millions.

Unplanned policies and unsustainable development are the key reasons for environmental degradation across the globe. Scientists and policy makers introducing technologies that maximize yield, are oblivious to their long-term outcomes and social implications. This development model is plunging the nation into an impending water crisis. Without adhering to traditional and environmentally sustainable agricultural practices, India may fail to avert this crisis in time.

The writers are, respectively, Associate Professor, independent researcher and Dean at Jindal School of Environment and Sustainability, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat, Haryana.

NO 28870

### CROSSWORD



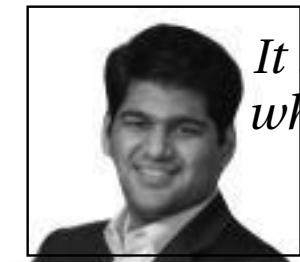
#### YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

- ACROSS**
- 1/4 Must for 1/4, proof all infantry's heading for review? (5,4)
  - 9 Miss con, starting from the end (3)
  - 10 Springer jinks round dog in dangerous races (3,8)
  - 11 Town's football team dropping deep, all but one of them amateur (10)
  - 12 A 1A's husband's kid (4)
  - 13 Might pretentious hosts cut sandwiches and cake at 4pm? (7)
  - 15 Linear C surprisingly needing no decryption (2,5)
  - 17 Leaves children behind at home filling baths? (7)
  - 19 Two classes make up a forme (7)
  - 21 Princess seen on camera clearing lightspeed (4)
  - 22 Spendthrift set get 23 24 with 50% off (10)

- DOWN**
- 25 Stimulating bar in a pub is where march goes (11)
  - 26 Clear where to write solutions, except the first (3)
  - 27 Swallow that flies off when gun is fired (4)
  - 28 Many 18, maybe the bit of Connery that lives on? (5)
  - 1 Chopper's fallen on toe of Hammer film director (5)
  - 2 Romantic country sport played in tiara (9)
  - 3 Old bit of dry grass cut by writer before noon (7)
  - 4 Highly desirable to get on down etc (7)
  - 5 Firm runs through claim in court (4)
  - 6 Say, gallantry medal mounted in holder by soldiers? (6)

- 7** People long to be muddled; alternative answers accommodate that (8)
- 8** Book that woman's carrying is in French (6)
- 14** Couple out of love cheerful after one relatively dark period (8)
- 16** Prank company welcomes 23 1, showing Fourfold increase at the end of the month (9)
- 17** Woody Allen's heart breaks seconds before turning blue (6)
- 18** Silver darling? Maybe bride expected this to be gold (7)
- 19** Match up bony bits of 18 Indian meals (7)
- 20** Temperature rising in sweaty journalist's wool clothing (6)
- 23/24** Pair tucks into French garlic dessert, a possibility for 1/4 (5,4)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)



It is a momentous occasion for TVS Motor as our international two-wheeler business achieved a sales milestone of 100,000 units in March

JOINT MD, TVS MOTOR COMPANY

## THUMBNAILS

**Digital payments:** The Reserve Bank of India on Wednesday extended the timeline by six months to comply with its guidelines related to recurring online transactions with Additional Factor of Authentication (AFA), but reprimanded players that the non-compliance is a 'serious concern'. The RBI had directed all banks, including RRBs, NBFCs, and payment gateways, to comply with AFA for automatic recurring payment by 31 March 2021, in order to make digital transaction safe and protect customers from fraudulent transactions. However, some of the players failed to meet the deadline and approached the RBI seeking extension of the deadline.

PTI

**BPCL acquisition:** Privatisation-bound Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) on Wednesday said it has acquired partner OQ's entire stake in the Bina refinery project in Madhya Pradesh for Rs 2,400 crore. BPCL signed a sales purchase agreement with OQ, formerly known as Oman Oil Company Ltd, to acquire its 36.6 per cent stake in Bharat Oman Refineries Limited, the company said in a statement. With this, BPCL now has full control over BORL, which runs a 7.8-million-ton-per annum capacity oil refinery at Bina in Madhya Pradesh.

PTI

**Foreign trade policy:** The government on Wednesday extended the existing foreign trade policy (FTP) for six more months up to 30 September this year, according to a notification. FTP provide guidelines for enhancing exports to push economic growth and create jobs. On 31 March 2020, the government had extended the Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20 for one year till 31 March 2021, amid the coronavirus outbreak and the lockdown.

PTI

**Current account deficit:** India's current account swung to a deficit for the first time in the current fiscal, with the gap coming at \$1.7 billion or 0.2 per cent of the GDP in the December quarter. In the current fiscal, as the pandemic impacted trade, the current account had been in surplus in the previous two quarters, at \$15.1 billion and \$19 billion, respectively, as per the data on balance of payments released by the RBI on Wednesday.

PTI

**Core output falls:** The output of eight infrastructure sectors contracted by 4.6 per cent in February with all the core segments, including coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products and fertilisers, witnessing a decline, according to official data released on Wednesday. The growth rate of the eight infrastructure sectors - coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilisers, steel, cement and electricity - stood at 6.4 per cent in the same month last year.

PTI

# ₹10,900-cr incentive scheme for food processing sector

It will create 2.5 lakh jobs, boost exports and facilitate expansion of food processing capacity

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

## ABOUT THE SCHEME



The government today approved a production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for the food processing sector, entailing an outlay of Rs 10,900 crore.

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the scheme which will help create 2.5 lakh jobs by 2026-27, boost exports and facilitate expansion of food processing capacity to generate processed food output worth Rs 33,494 crore.

The incentive under the scheme would be paid for six years ending 2026-27.

"The PLI for the food processing sector with Rs 10,900 crore incentive has been approved. The decision is a fitting tribute to our farmers," food minister Piyush Goyal said while briefing the media about the Cabinet decisions.

The effort is to take the country's food processing to a next level amid the rising global demand for Indian ready-to-eat foods, organic

products, processed fruits and vegetables, marine products and mozzarella cheese.

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► The second component relates to support for branding and marketing abroad to incentivise emergence of strong Indian brands.

► The first component under the scheme relates to incentivising manufacturing of four major food product segments: ready-to-cook/ready-to-eat foods, processed fruits and vegetables, marine products and mozzarella cheese.

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## WEATHER

CITY	MAX	MIN
SINGAPORE	29°C	25°C H
HONG KONG	25°C	20°C H
TOKYO	16°C	12°C R
LONDON	20°C	15°C S
DUBAI	23°C	19°C H
SAN FRANCISCO	15°C	09°C S
NEW YORK	10°C	07°C S
MOSCOW	06°C	03°C H

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

## THUMBNAILS



Britain's Queen Elizabeth II at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Air Forces Memorial in England on Wednesday. ■ AP

**Australia missile plan:** Australia announced Wednesday it would begin building its own guided missiles in close collaboration with the US as it seeks to boost its defense capabilities. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said it would spend \$761 million on the plan as part of a huge 10-year investment in defense and the defense industry. ■ AP

**BBC journo leaves China:** A veteran BBC correspondent whose coverage angered China has left the country amid concerns for his safety, the BBC and a journalist organisation said. The BBC said that John Sudworth had relocated to Taiwan and would continue to be the British public broadcaster's China correspondent. ■ AP

**Nazi guard probe:** German prosecutors said that they have dropped an investigation of a 95-year-old former Nazi concentration camp guard after he declined to be questioned following his deportation from the US. Friedrich Karl Berger arrived in Germany in February after being ordered deported by a court in Memphis last year. ■ AP

**Gordon Liddy,** Watergate mastermind, dies at 90

WASHINGTON, 31 MARCH

G Gordon Liddy, a mastermind of the Watergate burglary and a radio talk show host after emerging from prison, has died at age 90. His son, Thomas Liddy, confirmed the death on Tuesday but did not reveal the cause, other than to say it was not related to Covid.

Liddy, a former FBI agent and Army veteran, was convicted of conspiracy, burglary and illegal wiretapping for his role in the Watergate burglary, which led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. He spent four years and four months in prison, including more than 100 days in solitary confinement. "I'd do it again for my president," he said years later.

Liddy was outspoken and controversial as a political operative under Nixon. He recommended assassinating political enemies, bombing a left-leaning think tank and kidnapping war protesters.

One of his ventures -- the break-in at Democratic headquarters at the Watergate building in June 1972 -- was approved. The burglary went awry, which led to an investigation, a cover-up and Nixon's resignation in 1974.

Liddy also was convicted of conspiracy in the September 1971 burglary of the office of the psychiatrist of Daniel Ellsberg, the defence analyst who leaked the secret history of the Vietnam War known as the Pentagon Papers. After his release from prison, Liddy became a popular, provocative and controversial radio talk show host. ■ AP

# Biden announces additional actions to respond to anti-Asian violence

## Suspect in attack on Asian American woman in NYC arrested

The suspect wanted in the brutal attack of an Asian American woman has been arrested and charged with felony assault as a hate crime, according to the New York Police Department. The arrest, posted on the NYPD Hate Crimes' Twitter account early on Wednesday, comes after the man was seen on video kicking and stomping the woman near New York City's Times Square on Monday. The tweet did not release the man's identity. The 65-year-old woman, whose name has not been made public, was discharged from the hospital Tuesday after being treated for serious injuries, a hospital spokesperson said. Police on Tuesday blanketed the midtown Manhattan neighbourhood with wanted posters and offered a \$2,500 reward for information leading to the whereabouts of the man seen on surveillance video Monday brutalizing the woman as she walked to church. At the same time, officials admonished bystanders for doing nothing to stop the man as police say he kicked the 65-year-old woman in the stomach, knocked her to the ground, stomped on her face, shouted anti-Asian slurs and told her, you don't belong here. ■ AP

including establishing an initiative at the Department of Justice to address anti-Asian

crimes. These attacks are wrong, un-American, and must stop." The announce-

ment also include allocation of USD 49.5 million from the American Rescue Plan to a new

grant programme for community-based, culturally-specific services and programmes for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault who face additional barriers, such as language access barriers, to services and safety.

Biden, who during his prime time address had said anti-Asian violence and xenophobia was wrong and must stop, also announced to set up a COVID-19 Equity Task Force committee on addressing and ending xenophobia against Asian Americans and establishment of a Department of Justice cross-agency initiative to address anti-Asian vio-

lence. "A harm against any one of us is a harm against all of us," Vice President Kamala Harris tweeted. The president and "I will not be silent which is why our administration is taking steps to address the rise in violence against the Asian American community, including an initiative to combat anti-Asian violence," Harris said.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said that in the coming weeks, the administration will meet with AAPI leaders to hear their input in how it can play the most constructive role possible in the community. Biden will name

a high-level Asian American member of the AAPI community to a position in the White House, she said.

"That's something we're working to do through consultation with a range of officials and elected officials as well. That person will be a commissioned officer and will be working on both policy and outreach," Psaki said.

"A big part of our effort has also been on taking actions to address the rise in anti-Asian violence and bias, and underscoring the commitment of our entire administration to working in partnership with the AAPI community," she said.

# Pfizer says its vaccine protects younger teens

Pfizer, BioNTech to ask FDA & European regulators to allow emergency use starting at age 12

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON, 31 MARCH

Pfizer announced Wednesday that its Covid vaccine is safe and strongly protective in kids as young as 12, a step toward possibly beginning shots in this age group before they head back to school in the fall. Most vaccines being rolled out worldwide are for adults, who are at higher risk from the coronavirus. Pfizer's vaccine is authorised for ages 16 and older. But vaccinating children of all ages will be critical to stopping the pandemic and helping schools, at least the upper grades, start to look a little more normal after months of disruption.

In a study of 2,260 US volunteers ages 12 to 15, preliminary data showed there were no cases of Covid among fully vaccinated adolescents compared to 18 among those given dummy shots, Pfizer reported.

It's a small study, hasn't yet been published, so another important piece of evidence is how well the shots revved up the kids' immune systems. Researchers reported high levels of virus-fighting antibodies, somewhat higher than were seen in studies of young adults.

Kids had side effects similar to young adults, the company said. The main side effects are pain, fever, chills and fatigue, particularly after the second dose. The study will continue to track participants for two years for more information about long-term protection and safety.

Dr Philip Landrigan of Boston College said the results are encouraging. It's hard to get kids to comply with masking and distancing, so something that gives them hard protection and takes them out of the mix of spreading the virus is all for the good, said Landrigan, who was not involved in the study. Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech in the coming weeks plan to ask the US Food and Drug Administration and European regulators to allow emergency use of the shots starting at age 12.

We share the urgency to expand the use of our vaccine, Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla said in a statement. He expressed the hope of starting to vaccinate this age group before the start of the next school year" in the United States.

Pfizer isn't the only company seeking to lower the age limit for its vaccine. Results also are expected soon from a US study of Moderna's vaccine in 12-to-17-year-olds. But in a sign that the findings were promising, the FDA

already allowed both companies to begin US studies in children 11 and younger, working their way to as young as 6-month-old.

We are longing for a normal life. This is especially true for our children, BioNTech CEO Ugur Sahin said in a statement.

AstraZeneca last month began a study of its vaccine among 6- to 17-year-olds in Britain. Johnson & Johnson is planning its own pediatric studies. And in China, Sinovac recently announced it has submitted preliminary data to Chinese regulators showing its vaccine is safe in children as young as 3.

While most vaccines being used globally were first tested in tens of thousands of adults, pediatric studies won't need to be nearly as large. Scientists have safety information from those studies and from subsequent vaccinations in millions more adults.

One key question is the dosage: Pfizer gave the 12-and-older participants the same dose adults receive, while testing different doses in younger children.

It's not clear how quickly the FDA would act on Pfizer's request to allow vaccination starting at age 12. The agency has taken about three weeks to review and authorize each of the vaccines currently available for adults. That process included holding a public meeting of outside experts to review and vote on the safety and effectiveness of each shot. The process for reviewing data in children could be shorter, given FDA's familiarity with each vaccine. An agency spokeswoman said the FDA had no information to share on the process, including whether additional public meetings would be required.

Another question is when the country would have enough supply of shots and people to get them into adolescents' arms to let kids start getting in line.

Supplies are set to steadily increase over the spring and summer, at the same time states are opening vaccinations to younger, healthier adults who until now haven't had a turn. Children represent about 13 per cent of Covid cases documented in the US. And while children are far less likely than adults to get seriously ill. Additionally, a small number have developed a serious inflammatory condition linked to the coronavirus.

Caleb Chung, who turns 13 later this week, agreed to volunteer after his father, a Duke University pediatrician, presented the option. He doesn't know if he received the vaccine or a placebo.

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Caleb Chung, who turns

# Giving legal wings to healthcare

**The NCAHP Act passed by Parliament is a landmark legislation which will go down in the history of the healthcare revolution in India as a game-changer, says DEVENDER SINGH ASWAL**



**T**he National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill, 2020 (NCAHP Act) was passed by Parliament during the just concluded budget session after a long and anxious wait particularly by the health professionals. The Act provides for regulation and maintenance of standards of education and services by allied and healthcare professionals, assessment of institutions; maintenance of a Central Register and State Registers; creation of a system to improve access; research and development and adoption of latest scientific advancement, and for matters connected.

The Act defines 'allied health professional' as an associate, technician, or technologist trained to support the diagnosis and treatment of any illness, disease, injury or impairment. Dr Harsh Vardhan, the Minister for Health & Family Welfare, explained the reasons and objects of the Bill, thus - "Hon. Members, I would say that most of you must have had a visit to a hospital at some point of time in your life and I wish not, but you might have had to. [...]. Please recall those days and remember the people who took care of you and who brought you out of your illness. You may remember the name of the doctor. You may remember the name of the hospital. But do you also remember the name of the persons who took your blood samples, gave you physiotherapy, took your x-ray, advised you on what you should eat, checked your eye sight, assisted your doctor or surgeon, looked into microscopes, and bid you a farewell with a smile. Who are these people? They are varied health professionals - the lab technicians, physiotherapists,

radiographers, dieticians, record keepers, optometrists, x-ray technicians, and many more, who are a critical part of the healthcare system and the foundation of the pyramid of the entire healthcare system."

According to studies, the role of doctors, undoubtedly critical, varies between 25 to 50 per cent in the entire health care chain. A wag once said, "Doctor is next to God, Nurse is next to the doctor and pharmacist is closest to the patient", but there are others who are as vital, and as integral a part of the health care chain. In fact, the health care professionals are the bedrock of the growingly complex health care system.

After enacting the National Medical Commission Bill, 2019 - which was fiercely contested by a large body of medical practitioners - another transformative piece of legislation, NCAHP Act, has been enacted which covers a wide range of healthcare professions that were unrecognised or unregulated till date. The Act is a paradigm shift in healthcare delivery as it recognises the specialised skills and contributions of more than 56 types of the allied and healthcare professionals.

The nation, nay the world, has witnessed the invaluable contribution of these professionals during Covid-19 as the frontline health workers who risked their lives every day fighting the pandemic. The need for development and maintenance of standards of services and education of these professionals through a national regulatory body has been long overdue. As early as 1948, the Bhore Committee had stressed the importance of 'human resources for health with right skills

and training', followed by a host of committees over the years. The first attempt at such a legislation was made as early as 1953 but the proposal never received the priority that it deserved, perhaps for lack of unanimity and the dominance of a Doctor-centric healthcare system.

The Minister told the Rajya Sabha on 16 March while responding to the debate on the NCAHP Bill that Bills were introduced in this behalf under different names in 2007 and 2011 which lapsed, and between 2015 and 2021 the legislative proposal was re drafted as many as 75 times.

The NCAHP Bill, 2011, was introduced in Rajya Sabha in December 2011. However, there was opposition to this Bill from the existing regulatory bodies. The Standing Committee on Health made wholesale recommendations on the Bill. A new Bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha on 31st December 2018. It was referred to the Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare on 4 January 2019. Based on the recommendations made by the Committee in its 117th Report in January 2020, a fresh Bill titled the NCAHP Bill, 2020 was introduced in the Rajya Sabha on 15 September 2020 by withdrawing the pending Bill of 2018.

The Committee made 110 recommendations and the Government accepted 102. The Minister assured Parliament that some recommendations and the observations of many of the members who participated in the debate would be suitably incorporated in the rules to be framed under the Act. The Act would regulate and leverage the qualified allied and healthcare workforce and ensure high quality

multidisciplinary care 'in line with the vision of Universal Health coverage moving towards a more care accessible and team-based model'. The Act would reform and regulate this entire sector in order to give these professionals their due, increase their employment opportunities, and more importantly, enhance their dignity by recognising their true worth, within the country and globally.

According to a WHO report, there would be a demand of 1.80 crore such professionals by 2030 and qualified Indian professionals would cater to global shortage. Further, their potential can be utilised to reduce the cost of care and to make quality healthcare services accessible to all. The Act envisages establishment of a Central Statutory Body as a National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions.

The Commission will frame policies and standards, regulate professional conduct and prescribe qualifications for all these professions. It will be supported by ten broad Professional Councils, each comprising one or more professions. The institutional structure would enable assessment and rating of all the allied and healthcare institutions to ensure uniform standards and quality assurance. The Act provides for registration of all the allied and healthcare professionals. All the professions have been coded as per the International Labour Organisation's International standards for classification of occupations which also allows global recognition and mobility for them.

A National Allied and Healthcare Advisory Council to advise the National Commission with representation

from all the States is provided under the Act to enable adequate representation from all States and Union Territories. Further, each State will be having a separate State Council with four autonomous Boards pertaining to under-graduate education, post-graduation education, assessment and rating and ethics and registration.

At a time when there is acute need for critical reforms in public health, the Act will provide a robust institutional mechanism to improve access to health by focusing on preventive, promotive, curative and rehabilitative need of the population.

While doctors, nurses dentists and pharmacists in India are regulated through their respective regulatory bodies, the allied and healthcare professions are still unstructured, unregulated. The potential of these professionals can be harnessed to reduce the cost of care and to make quality of healthcare services accessible to all. A healthcare professional includes a scientist, therapist, or any other professional who studies, advises, researches, supervises, or provides preventive, curative, rehabilitative, therapeutic, or promotional health services. Such a professional should have obtained a degree under this Act. These are mentioned in the Schedule to the Act and they include life science professionals, trauma and burn care professionals, surgical and anaesthesia related technology professionals, physiotherapists, and nutrition science professionals, etc. Anyone who contravenes the provisions of the Act shall be punished.

Globally, most of the countries have a regulatory framework for standardised education and training. But in India, there was an absence of a

regulatory framework and lack of standardised education curriculum as well as training for these allied and healthcare professionals, a void now removed.

Also, the Act makes a significant shift from the doctor-led model to a more care-accessible and team-based model which is very much in line with the vision of Universal Health Coverage as laid down by the National Health Policy rolled out in 2017 and also by Ayushman Bharat.

NCAHP Act, 2020 is a landmark legislation which will go down in the history of healthcare revolution in India. It will go a long way to transform the healthcare scenario as it makes a paradigm shift in the ministration of the entire healthcare system. India is on course of wholesale health sector reforms. Apart from the two transformative laws enacted, and referred to above, the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act, 2021 has been passed during this budget session.

But the arch of reform would come to a full circle with the enactment of the National Nursing and Midwifery Commission Bill, the National Dental Commission Bill, the Surrogacy Bill, and the Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Bill. Hopefully, the Government would complete the remainder of health sector reforms, mindful of the fact that health care costs hit the voters hard and, if ignored it will hit the politicians harder. Health care is no more a benevolence but an integral part of the right to life, and for electoral politics a game changer.

The writer is ex-Additional Secretary, Lok Sabha and a public policy expert. Views expressed are personal.

## Lawyers spoilt for choices

**Today's young lawyer is offered a wide range of career options, says NACHIKETA MITTAL**



**L**aw is one of the most rewarding career options. It has traditionally been very noble and respectable profession. And with the passage of time, need for lawyers in almost every walk of life has only increased manifold. We need legal consultancy in almost every major decision of our lives involving property, financial transactions and even marital or live-in relationships of all genders.

However, several law students in our country are still unaware of the umpteen opportunities and promising career options available for a law graduate. Many of these career opportunities can be opted even without enrolling with the Bar Council by appearing for the All India Bar Examination (AIBE) conducted by the Bar Council of India (BCI), after comple-

tion of a law degree.

Every law graduate has to appear for AIBE which examines candidate's capability to practice the profession of law in India. This exam assesses candidates' analytical abilities and understanding of the basic knowledge of law. It is a basic level test. An AIBE qualified candidate is awarded a "Certificate of Practice" by BCI. AIBE is conducted in almost 40 cities across the country. It is

an open book exam with multiple choice questions as the exam format.

This means a law graduate can enrol as an advocate after qualifying in the AIBE. This opens floodgates of opportunities for a lawyer. Foremost, is the traditional opportunity of starting a law practice in any court in India. Generally, it is advisable to start law practice from the trial court or judicial magistrate's court at the district level or from the district and sessions court. This enables a candidate to grasp the foundation of law practice. For a lawyer to be effective and successful at the High Court and the Supreme Court level, it is vital to have a deep understanding of civil and criminal litigation at the district courts. It is these finer details of law practise that enable a High Court and Supreme Court lawyer to successfully fight a case when it goes in appeal.

A law graduate can also join a law firm which has a litigation department or a team. Almost every law firm has a team which handles only courtroom litigation work. Starting law practice independently in the beginning is generally quite tough as a beginner lacks experience and does not enjoy the confidence of the clients. So one should either join a private lawyer's chamber as a junior associate or a law firm to get a stable salary and learn the craft of litigation.

In addition, many companies in varied sectors recruit law graduates who have cleared AIBE and have enrolled as advocates with the Bar Council. Working as a legal executive is one of the very stable job opportunities these days. Companies have a proper work profile for a lawyer, competitive salary structure, generally fixed job hours and other perks and benefits. This attracts many young lawyers. AIBE provides extra edge to a law grad-

uate as these companies can utilise the legal knowledge of the candidate effectively in the court once a person is AIBE qualified and eligible to practice. Many AIBE qualified candidates also appear for judicial service examination of several State judiciaries in India.

However, it does not mean that candidates who have not qualified in the AIBE have no career options or very limited career choices. AIBE is needed only when a law graduate wants to undertake court room advocacy. Otherwise, these days' law graduates have wide range of exceptionally high paying job opportunities even without AIBE.

One of the most promising job opportunities without AIBE is to work as a legal researcher. Legal research is traditionally seen as an underpaying job. But this myth is now breaking. Many think-tanks, Non-Governmental Organisations and even research centres of Universities like National Law Universities offer rewarding salaries to law graduate. Many such organisations work on policy matters or have grant-based legal research projects from Government of India, State Governments or international organisations.

Another impressive job opportunity without AIBE is to work as a law teacher. But this requires an additional qualification of Master of Laws and Qualifying National Eligibility Test (NET). But joining academics as a law teacher is seen as an increasing trend among young law graduates these days. This is because now the pay scale as provided by the University Grants Commission (UGC) has improved considerably and is quite promising.

Some of the major Public Sector Undertakings like Indian Oil Corporation Limited; National Thermal Power Corporation Limited; Oil India Limited; Oil and Natural Gas Corporation,

Power Grid Corporation of India Limited and others also sometimes recruit through Common Law Admission Test (CLAT) for Post Graduate level. This varies from Memorandum of Understanding between the PSUs and the CLAT Consortium. Besides, law graduates can appear for the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) examination, which is one of the most competitive but highly rewarding socially as well as professionally.

Law graduates without AIBE also join as law clerks in the Supreme Court or the High Courts. These are generally one year contractual jobs where a selected candidate assists the Judge of the Supreme Court or the High Court in legal research. The Supreme Court of India conducts a national level entrance test generally in the month of April every year. And for the High Courts the method of selection may vary. This is one of the very coveted contractual job opportunities for fresh law graduates.

Lawyers also make exceptional law makers and policy makers. Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and several others from the independence struggle to the contemporary senior lawyers who are members of legislatures clearly lay a path for every law graduate to join hands in contributing to nation building. Law graduates are today blessed with greater job opportunities than ever before. Identifying suitable job opportunity needs every law graduate to plan in advance and seek right career guidance from their teachers or mentors. Job avenues are wider and fulfilling even without AIBE and law graduates must act wisely in choosing correct fit of job profile for themselves.

The writer is founder of Judicial Preparation & Advisory Center and a Legal Education expert.



## THE NEW STAR

The player who could top Manchester City's wish-list as the replacement for Sergio Aguero, when he leaves them at the end of the current season, is Erling Haaland (photo, left), of Borussia Dortmund. The 20-year-old Norwegian has been scoring goals faster than Messi and Ronaldo at that age.

For more updates

www.thestatesman.com

## THUMBNAILS

**Cummins backed:** Michael Clarke said Pat Cummins was the ideal candidate to take over as Australia's skipper in all formats. The job has been in the news recently after Steve Smith said he was willing to play a second innings in the role he had lost after a scandal.

**Virus passports:** The England and Wales Cricket Board is exploring the possibility of using coronavirus passports to allow fans into county games. The ECB is open to any measure to get spectators back, including fans having to prove they have been vaccinated.

**Covid-19 scare:** The 11th junior women's hockey nationals has been postponed until further notice owing to a surge in Covid-19 infections. The tournament was scheduled to be held from 3 April to 12 April at Simdega in Jharkhand. Hockey India put it off.

**Qualifier cancelled:** Benin were reported to have refused to play a decisive African Cup of Nations qualifying game in Sierra Leone after disputing that five of their players had tested positive for Covid-19 just before kick-off and should be ruled out of the match.

**Cash control:** Approval of the revamped Champions League format has been stalled as elite clubs seek more control over the sale of commercial and broadcasting rights to the competition. There is a broad agreement between European clubs and domestic leagues.

**Gundogan's tip:** If Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola ever became available, Germany should instantly sign him as their national coach, Germany midfielder Ilkay Gundogan said on Tuesday. He plays for City under the widely acclaimed Spaniard.

**Referee collapses:** In Abidjan, Ivory Coast, Charles Bulu, the referee in an African Cup of Nations qualifier, collapsed and was stretchered off the field, resulting in the game between the hosts and Ethiopia ending with around 10 minutes still to play on Tuesday.

**New lights:** A new lighting system installed at Athens' Panathenaic stadium has been unveiled. The marble main venue of the first modern Olympic Games of 1896 is now illuminated with thousands of LED bulbs to reduce light pollution and save energy.

**Mick happy:** Michael Schumacher's son, Mick, who made his Formula One debut with a spin at Turn 4 on the first racing lap at the Bahrain GP, said he was 90 per cent happy with his showing. His father had a worse debut as his first race lasted less than a lap.

**Ban likely:** Champion Salwa Eid Naser will have a hearing next month that could lead to a ban from the Tokyo Olympics for breaking anti-doping rules. The Court of Arbitration for Sport said on Tuesday it would hear the case of the 400m runner on 22 April and 23 April.

**Bagan coach:** Head coach Antonio Habas was on Wednesday signed a one-year extension of his contract with ATK Mohun Bagan. "We are delighted to announce that coach Antonio Lopez Habas has signed a one-year contract extension with ATK Mohun Bagan," the club said.

**Aston Martin Racing:** Aston Martin Racing Driver Academy product Akhil Rabindra announced his participation for the 2021 season of the coveted European GT4 Championship. He will be back with the AGS Events Racing team this year, a team he represented for the first time last year at the French GT4 Championship.

## Can't afford to take on cricketers: Giles

## PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

LONDON, 31 MARCH

**D**irector of cricket Ashley Giles (in photo) says the England and Wales Cricket Board would like to obviate a conflict with players on their participation in the Indian Premier League as it could well mean losing the top ones if they are forced to choose between franchise and national duty.

The former spinner, who played 54 Tests and 62 One-Day Internationals between 1997 and 2006, is of the opinion that any stand-off with the players on the matter could have dangerous implications for English cricket. "Right now I think our players love playing for England," Giles said on the \*\*\*BBC\*\*\*'s \*\*\*Tuffers and Vaughan\*\*\* show. "I don't want that to be a kiss of death. I think we have to understand that it could be a danger in the future. We don't particularly

want to go toe to toe with our players over IPL participation in the long run because we may face losing some of our best players," he added.

England rotated their all-format players for the tours of Sri Lanka and India in view of the busy schedule through the year. However, all of them have been waved through for the entirety of the IPL, which means those involved in the final stages are most likely to miss the opening Test against New Zealand, slated to begin on 2 June. The series against the Black Caps was planned after no objection certificates were given to the players.

"That window was clear for anyone who got to the later stages of IPL to play in the whole competition," Giles said, adding: "That is how their contracts were agreed on. We don't think it is right to renege on that agreement."

Currently, there are 12 England cricketers, some with mil-



lion-dollar contracts, playing in the IPL. These include Jos Buttler, Ben Stokes, Johnny Bairstow, Moeen Ali, Sam Curran, Tom Curran, Sam Billings, Dawid Malan and Jofra Archer, if deemed fit.

The IPL is slated to begin on 9 April with the final of its scheduled to be played on 30 May.

## Dhoni praised

Chennai Super Kings all-rounder Moeen Ali today spoke in praise of Mahendra Singh Dhoni's captaincy, revealing that most cricketers looked forward to playing under him as he helped them improve their game. Dhoni is gearing himself up to lead CSK in the IPL. "I've spoken to players who have played under MS and they tell me how he improves their

game. I believe a great captain does that," the England all-rounder was quoted as saying by the CSK website. "I think it's something on every player's wish-list - to play under MS. I think it's the confidence and the clarity he gives people. It's exciting," he added.

Ali, who said that he was looking forward to playing under Dhoni, said that it was very important to have a strong leadership and coaches who stayed calm. "They take the pressure off the players as much as they can and are consistent. We are very lucky we have that," he added. "At CSK I feel the reality is there for us to win the competition. I'm excited about playing with the players we have here," the 33-year-old said. Ali, who previously turned out for Royal Challengers Bangalore, added: "I think what differentiates CSK from other teams is actually how they structure everything, from the squad they

have to the way they do things. They look a very calm franchise that doesn't panic." CSK players are currently training in Mumbai, where they play their first five matches of IPL-14, beginning with a game against Delhi Capitals on 10 April.

## Ponting's hope

Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting is convinced that leading the side in the IPL's forthcoming season will make him a sensational form across the formats this year. He played match-winning knocks of 97 and unbeaten 89 in the third and the fourth Tests against Australia to help India clinch the Border Gavaskar Trophy Down Under.

I'm convinced captaincy will make him an even better player," Ponting tweeted.

The highly-rated Pant has been in sensational form across the formats this year. He played match-winning knocks of 97 and unbeaten 89 in the third and the fourth Tests against Australia to help India clinch the Border Gavaskar Trophy Down Under.

He followed that up with a brilliant century against England in the fourth Test in Ahmedabad, forcing the selectors to include him in the white-ball squads. Making a comeback into the contingent, Pant was promoted to No 4 in the series against England, and the 23-year-old did not disappoint.

He scored half-centuries in the two One-Day Internationals he featured in. This season will mark the wicket-keeper-batsman's debut as an IPL captain. Pant has led Delhi's state team in the past.

## Mumbai Indians could do with spinners who make themselves useful

## PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI, 31 MARCH

A batting line-up packed with power-hitters coupled with a solid pack of death bowlers make five-time champions Mumbai Indians a formidable unit in the Indian Premier League's forthcoming edition.

But the absence of quality spinners could hurt them in pursuit of a hat-trick of title wins. Here is a look at what works and what doesn't for the outfit led by Rohit Sharma (in photo), who open their campaign by taking on Royal Challengers Bangalore in Chennai on 9 April.

**Strengths**  
After winning the trophy in 2019, Mumbai were victorious also in 2020 when the league was shifted to the United Arab Emirates owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. The win was attributable to the team's strength: their core had remained the same over the years. MI's batting is their biggest strength and they possess a solid opening duo in skipper Rohit Sharma and South African Quinton De Kock, and if needed, have an option in Australian hard-hitting batsman Chris Lynn. Suryakumar Yadav and Ishan Kishan, both of whom starred on their India debuts, the Pandya brothers -- all-

rounders Hardik and Krunal -- and West Indian Kieron Pollard constitute a very strong middle order.

On the fast bowling front, the team possess Jasprit Bumrah, and the India paceman would be raring to go once again after a break from the game. Last season's new addition, New Zealand's Trent Boult, proved his worth by taking wickets in powerplay sessions. Add Australia's Nathan Coulter-Nile to the mix and it becomes a superb pace

attack.  
**Weaknesses**  
Their problems could lie in the spin department, which is a bit light, especially for Chennai's Chepauk track. Lack of a wicket-taking spinner could hurt the Mumbai Indians' prospects.

Left-arm spinner Krunal, who was taken to the cleaners by the visiting England side in the recent One-Day Internationals series, is a restrictive option and there is Rahul Chahar, one of the finds of the

team. Left-arm spinner Krunal, who was taken to the cleaners by the visiting England side in the recent One-Day Internationals series, is a restrictive option and there is Rahul Chahar, one of the finds of the team. Conditions were tough at Miami Open.

The top seeds, however, were up to the challenge. World No. 1 Ash Barty of Australia won the final nine points to finish off the seventh-seeded Sabalenka in a three-set women's quarterfinal Tuesday, while men's top-seeded Daniil Medvedev of Russia reached the quarters with a straight-set win over Tiafoe -- part of a day where the American men's contingent was pased from four to one, with Sebastian Korda the lone round-of-16 survivor for the U.S.

The 20-year-old Korda stunned fifth-seeded Diego Schwartzman of Argentina 6-3, 4-6, 7-5 for the biggest win of his career to date. And it'll make for an interesting Thursday for the Korda family: he'll be in the Miami quarterfinals that day while his sisters, Jessica and Nelly, will be playing in the first round of the first women's golf major of the year, the ANA Inspiration.

"Sebi is a guy who is going to be special, man," Tiafoe said. Barty didn't wilt, ousting Sabalenka 6-4, 6-7 (5), 6-3 for her third three-set win in four matches at the tournament. Medvedev beat Tiafoe 6-4, 6-3, and has gone 10-1 in sets against the American in their past four head-to-head matchups.

Korda, whose father Petr Korda reached No. 2 in the world during his stellar career, put on a show to delight the evening crowd. He was broken at 5-4 in the third to give Schwartzman hope, then responded by breaking the Argentine right back and finally serving out the match.

By then, it was maybe a bit cooler than the brutal conditions that players endured in the day session, but still tough, which Korda appreciated.

"I love the heat and I love the humidity. The hotter it is, the more humid it is, the happier I am," said Korda, who faces fourth-seeded Andre Rublev of Russia in the quarterfinals.

Rublev beat Marin Cilic 6-4, 6-4 on Tuesday night.

After some early clouds cleared out and bright sunshine started pouring down, the mid-afternoon temperature reached the mid-80s Fahrenheit (upper 20s Celsius) at Hard Rock Stadium and the humidity made it feel even hotter.

Barty didn't wilt, ousting Sabalenka 6-4, 6-7 (5), 6-3 for her third three-set win in four matches at the tournament. Medvedev beat Tiafoe 6-4, 6-3, and has gone 10-1 in sets against the American in their past four head-to-head matchups.

## Glut of goals in European WC qualifiers

## ASSOCIATED PRESS

MADRID, 31 MARCH

Belgium and the Netherlands scored 15 goals combined in big routs in World Cup qualifying, while Portugal got one from Cristiano Ronaldo (in photo) in their victory against a Luxembourg team that tinkered with another shock result.

Belgium crushed Belarus 8-0 to stay at the top in Group E, while the Dutch trashed Gibraltar 7-0 to go second behind Turkey in Group G on Tuesday.

Minnow Luxembourg, which opened with a surprising win against Ireland, looked on their way to pulling off another upset after they took the lead against Portugal, but the visitors came from behind to stay at the top of Group A along with Serbia, which earlier defeated Azerbaijan with another double by Fulham forward Aleksandar Mitrovic.

It was a difficult first half, Portugal mid-fielder Renato Sanches said. "Luxembourg started well, but I think we controlled the game. They had a set-piece and scored, but I think that from that point on we controlled the game.

After being held scoreless in the first two qualifiers this year, Ronaldo scored his 31st goal in World Cup qualifying early in the second half in Portugal's victory at Luxembourg.



He has now scored for Portugal in every calendar year since his first international goal in 2004, and moved six away from tying the all-time scoring record for a men's national team. The record of 109 goals is held by former Iran striker Ali Daei, the only other male soccer player to surpass the 100-goal milestone.

Gerson Rodrigues had put the hosts ahead in the 30th minute but Diogo Jota equalized for Portugal in the second minute of stoppage time before Ronaldo and Joao Pedro added second-half goals. Portugal was coming off a 2-2 draw against Serbia. Both teams are tied with seven points each from three matches.

Ireland, the other Group A team, played a friendly against World Cup host Qatar and was held to a 1-1 draw, staying win-

less in 11 games under coach Stephen Kenny.

Hans Vanaken and Leandro Trossard both scored a pair of goals as Belgium trounced Belarus with four goals in each half.

I'm delighted with what I've seen from every player," Belgian coach Roberto Martinez said. "I've seen players taking decisive roles, I was very pleased with the performance of the young guys and how this group works together.

The home victory left Belgium three points ahead of the Czech Republic, which lost 1-0 at Wales thanks to late Daniel James' goal after an assist by Gareth Bale.

Wales and Belarus are a point behind the Czech Republic, which played a friendly against World Cup host Qatar and was held to a 1-1 draw, staying win-

less in the second half on the artificial turf of Vicente Calderón Stadium.

The visitors added to their 1-0 halftime lead with four goals by the 64th, then got two more closer to the end.

Memphis Depay had a double for the Dutch, which trails Turkey by a point after three matches. The goals came later than we had hoped, but at least they came, Depay said. "We remained positive, and things came good in the end. The team spirit is great, and we have belief in ourselves."

Turkey missed a chance to earn its third straight win after squandering a 2-0 lead in a 3-3 draw with Latvia. Mitrovic continued his hot streak by scoring a double in Serbia's win at Azerbaijan.

He has scored five goals in the first three qualifiers. He also had a double in the opening 3-2 win against Ireland, and found the net once in the 2-2 draw against Portugal.

Mitrovic opened the scoring in the 16th and netted the winner in the 81st after Azerbaijan had scored in the 59th. Like Turkey, Russia also missed a chance to win three straight to start their qualifying campaign, losing 2-1 to Slovakia.

The result left the Russians tied at the top of Group H with Croatia, who got their second victory by beating Malta 3-0. Cyprus earlier defeated Slovenia 1-0 for their first win in the group.

## 30 found COVID positive in SAI tests

## PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Thirty sports persons and support staff across disciplines were found to be COVID-19 positive after 741 precautionary tests were conducted at the National Centres of Excellence in Patiala and Bengaluru, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) said on Wednesday.

However, the positive results in both the centres do not include any Tokyo Olympic-bound athlete.

India's men's boxing chief coach CA Kuttappa and shot put coach Mohinder Singh Dhillon are among those who have tested positive for the virus in the recent drive at the National Institute of Sports (NIS), a SAI source confirmed.

Later, SAI also issued a statement which said that 313 and 428 tests were conducted in Patiala and Bengaluru respectively. While 26 were found to be positive in Patiala, the Bengaluru count stood at 4. "Keeping the safety of Olympic-bound athletes, coaches and support staff in mind, the SAI conducted precautionary RT-PCR tests at National Centres of Excellence in Patiala and Bengaluru. All Olympic-bound athletes at both centres are COVID negative," the SAI statement read.