



Centre, States can work towards reducing fuel prices: Anurag Thakur

Page 9



Security forces kill JeM 'commander' Sajjad Afghani in Shopian

Page 9



Series level 1-1, India and England meet in third T20I today

Page 13

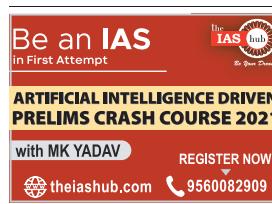
## NEARBY



### Delhi-Ghaziabad carriageway reopens

**NEW DELHI**  
The carriageway of Delhi-Meerut Expressway, directed towards Ghaziabad from Delhi, reopened for motorists on Monday. The road was closed by the Delhi police following the violence on January 26. The other side of the carriageway is still blocked by protesters.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2



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## Judges, scribes, bank employees can get vaccine in Ludhiana

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHANDIGARH

Judges, journalists, bank employees, NGO workers and advocates are among those who can now get the COVID-19 vaccination in Punjab's Ludhiana.

A decision regarding adding new groups of people in the COVID-19 vaccination list was taken by the district administration on Monday.

Ludhiana Deputy Commissioner Varinder Kumar announced the decision of expanding the vaccination ambit.

**Front-line workers'**  
According to the order, all journalists, employees of all government and private banks, government and private schools, workers of food-grain agencies, judicial offic-

ers, court employees, advocates, NGO members who have worked to check the spread of COVID-19, can get the vaccine by registering themselves as "front-line workers".

Punjab has been witnessing a surge in the novel coronavirus cases in recent weeks. The State's infection count has reached 1,97,755, with 6,072 fatalities so far.

"Convict (Khan) on account of his despicable act against her. "My leg will heal in the next few years. I will see whether your legs can move freely on Bengal's soil," Ms. Banerjee said at Jhalsa rally in Purulia.

On the injury she sustained during her campaign in Nandigram on March 10, when she was allegedly pushed to the ground by miscreants, she said she is a "street fighter" and has suffered many injuries in life.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 10

## Will uproot all conspirators: Mamata

### SHIV SAHAY SINGH KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday resumed her campaign in districts with a strong message that she will uproot those who are "conspiring"

in Nandigram on March 10, when she was allegedly pushed to the ground by miscreants, she said she is a "street fighter" and has suffered many injuries in life.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 10

## + Laxity in COVID-19 protocols is fuelling cases

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Cautioning that in India a few States currently account for more than 80% of the daily active new COVID-19 cases, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Monday said, "Negligence towards COVID-19 appropriate behaviour is the main reason behind the rising cases. It is important to ascertain that COVID-19 appropriate behaviour is followed even after the vaccine is available."

He added, "We have to make COVID-19 vaccination programme a Jan Andolan by increasing awareness about the COVID-19 appropriate behaviours and also about the vaccination."

The Minister was speaking at the inauguration of the sixth mega-health camp in Parliament House Annex for super-specialist consultations for parliamentarians.

### 26,291 fresh cases

India, meanwhile, continued to register a rise in the number of cases with 26,291 fresh cases in the past 24 hours along with 17,455 recoveries and 118 deaths, according to data released by the Health Ministry.

Overall, the country has registered a total of 1,13,85,339 cases, 1,10,07,352 recoveries, and has 2,19,262 active cases with a total death toll of 1,58,725.

While the number of COVID-19 cases has shown a consistent declining trend over the past month, Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Gujarat, Karnataka and Haryana have reported a rising trend in infections.

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CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

## Over 60% OBC, SC posts vacant in IIMs

93% of ST posts of professors at Central varsities unfilled

### PRISCILLA JEBARAJ NEW DELHI

More than half of the faculty positions reserved for the OBCs in Central institutions of higher education are vacant while about 40% of those reserved for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes also remain unfilled, Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' told the Lok Sabha on Monday in a written response to a question from three Congress MPs.

The situation is particularly acute in the elite Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), where more than 60% of SC and OBC reserved positions are vacant, while almost 80% of positions re-

### Empty seats

The table lists the share of vacant faculty positions in the posts reserved for OBCs, SCs and STs in central institutes of higher education. For instance, in IIMs, 79% of faculty positions reserved for STs are vacant

FILE PHOTO: IIM AHMEDABAD

| Institution             | SC         | ST         | OBC        |
|-------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 42 Central Universities | 39%        | 42%        | 52%        |
| Sanskrit Central Univ.  | 12%        | 13%        | 13%        |
| IGNOU                   | 41%        | 49%        | 67%        |
| IITs (Non-faculty)      | 36%        | 47%        | 42%        |
| IIMs                    | 62%        | 79%        | 63%        |
| IISERs                  | 39%        | 58%        | 44%        |
| IISc                    | 20%        | 55%        | 90%        |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>38%</b> | <b>43%</b> | <b>52%</b> |

served for the STs have not been filled. This means that out of 24 positions reserved for the STs, only five have been filled. For the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), data has only been provided for non-faculty positions. Both the IITs and the IIMs

have been lobbying for exemption from such faculty quota requirements.

**Assistant prof. posts filled**  
Mr. Nishank's response to another question from Congress MP N. Uttam Kumar Reddy showed that within

the Central Universities, vacancies were higher at the level of professors. Of 709 assistant professor positions reserved for the STs at the 42 universities, more than 500 have been filled. However, when it comes to professors, only nine have been filled of

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

the 137 reserved for the ST candidates. This means that 93% of these posts remain unfilled. Less than 1% of the 1,062 professors in Central universities are from the ST communities.

Similarly, 64% of the 2,206 assistant professor positions reserved for the OBCs have been filled in the Central Universities. However, less than 5% of the 378 professor positions reserved for the OBCs have been filled.

Despite the high levels of vacancies, Mr. Nishank's written response to the first question claimed that, "Now, after implementation of 'The Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act, 2019', the OBC reservation has been implemented at all levels."

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

## Accused gets death for killing inspector in Batla House

### SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Monday awarded the death penalty to Ariz Khan for the murder of inspector Mohan Chand Sharma, while leading a raiding police team at Batla House in Delhi in 2008, terming the offence "rarest of the rare case".

The Special Cell of the Delhi Police had arrested Khan along the India-Nepal

border on February 13, 2018, after he was on the run for about a decade.

Two suspected Indian Mujahideen (IM) terrorists were killed and two others were arrested when a team of the Special Cell raided a hideout of bomb blast suspects at Batla House on September 19, 2008.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

## Bill to define Delhi L-G's powers moved in LS

Home Ministry seeks to amend 1991 Act

### VIJAYA SINGH NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) moved a Bill in the Lok Sabha on Monday in which it proposed that the "government" in the National Capital Territory of Delhi meant the Lieutenant-Governor of Delhi.

The Bill gives discretionary powers to the L-G even in matters where the Legislative Assembly of Delhi is empowered to make laws.

The proposed legislation also seeks to ensure that the L-G is "necessarily granted an opportunity" to give his opinion before any decision taken by the Council of Ministers (or the Delhi Cabinet) is implemented.

Delhi is a Union Territory with a legislature and it came into being in 1991 under Article 239AA of the Constitution inserted by the Constitution (Sixty-ninth Amendment) Act, 1991. As per the existing Act, the Legislative Assembly has the power to make laws in all matters except public order, police and land.

**Delhi govt. vs Centre**  
The Aam Aadmi Party-led Delhi government has on many occasions challenged the BJP-ruled Centre regarding administrative matters in the National Capital.

The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill,



Delhi Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal ■ FILE PHOTO

2021, was introduced in the Lok Sabha on Monday by Union Minister of State for Home G. Kishan Reddy.

The Bill proposes to amend Sections 21, 24, 33 and 44 of the 1991 Act.

The MHA's statement on "objects and reasons" of the Bill stated that Section 44 of the 1991 Act deals with conduct of business and there is no structural mechanism for effective time-bound implementation of the said section. "Further, there is no clarity as to what proposals or matters are required to be submitted to Lieutenant-Governor before issuing order thereon," the statement said.

Section 44 of the 1991 Act says that all executive actions of the L-G, whether taken on the advice of his Ministers or otherwise, shall be expressed to be taken in the name of the L-G.

**'BJP WANTS TO TRIM DELHI GOVT'S POWERS'** ▶ PAGE 3

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Court closes anticipatory bail pleas of 3 in toolkit case

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Monday closed anticipatory bail pleas of Nikita Jacob, Shantanu Muluk and Shubham Kar Chaudhary, the accused in a case of sharing a 'toolkit' on social media related to the farmers' protest.

Additional Sessions Judge Dharmender Rana disposed of the anticipatory bail applications filed by the trio after they withdrew their respective applications following police's assurance that advance notice of seven working days will be given to them in case the arrest is imminent.

The court passed the order after the prosecution and the accused reached the agreement.

**Agreement reached**

The prosecution argued that investigation was at an initial stage that required technical analysis. It said the probe was dependent on foreign-based service providers and that looking at the conduct of the accused, custodial interrogation would be needed.

On February 23, a Delhi court granted bail to climate change activist Disha Ravi, who was arrested in the same case, terming the 'toolkit' shared by her relating to the ongoing farmers' protest against three farm laws "innocuous".

## Street play depicts end result of third contentious farm law

It shows how prices of commodities will rise if not stored by FCI

**HEMANI BHANDARI**  
NEW DELHI

Singhu border on Monday were abuzz with rounds of applause for a 'nukkad natak' that protesting farmers said they could relate to very well. The group travels from village to village to convey their message.

People's Art Patiala performed a 25-minute play, depicting what they believe will be the implications of the third farm law on storage of essential commodities.

It was titled 'Jina di anakh jyondi ae' (Those who have self-respect). They have been performing the play for the last two months and done over 300 shows.

The play portrays how the prices of crops will increase if they are not stored by the Food Corporation of India and by the private players instead. "We visit at least four villages a day, sometimes five, and perform two plays that we have made on the farm laws," said Satpal, director of the play and founder of the group.

**Audience response**

Talking about the response, Mr. Satpal said that people throw shoes at the actor who plays the villain, representing corporates and that's when they feel the play is a hit. He also said that the expenses of travelling and other necessities are borne either by themselves or by their audience who pay them for their performance. "Just like every



Members of People's Art Patiala have performed over 300 shows in the past two months. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

nukkad natak artist, we also circulate our dafli [drum] among the crowd. Thankfully, throughout the period of protest, people have been generous," the director said, adding they call themselves "culture labourers" because the expected earning for the day is about ₹300.

In his opinion, the best outcome of the protest is that it has broken the "limited" caste barriers in Punjab and Dalits and upper-caste landowners have come together.

Members of the group include 22-year-old Jaspreet Singh, who has a degree of Masters in Arts (Theatre). His parents are both labourers. Jatininder Sonu, a 29-year-old, who holds a degree in fashion designing, is also one of the members.

Meanwhile, at the protest site, protesting farmers on Monday continued to build shelters for themselves despite the Samyukt Kisan Morcha announcing against it on

Sunday. Virender Singh (35) from Kaithal, who was constructing a room with iron rods as base, said that they don't have any option other than that if the SKM wants the protest to continue. "Many of our trolleys will have to go back because they are required in the fields at this time of the year. We need a place to stay," he said.

Charanjeet Singh (25), who hails from Fatehgarh Sahib and has beautified the outer side of a trolley with green net and posters to beat the heat, said that they have to take such measures as the protest does not seem to end. "The results of West Bengal elections will have a role to play. Our leaders have gone there to urge people not to vote for the BJP. If they [BJP candidates] lose, they will take us seriously. If they don't, we are even prepared to stay till December," he said.

## Delhi-Ghaziabad carriageway reopens after nearly 50 days

Ghaziabad to Delhi side of NH-24 still closed as it is blocked by protesting farmers

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

The carriageway of Delhi-Meerut expressway, directed towards Ghaziabad from Delhi, reopened for motorists on Monday. The road was closed by Delhi Police after the incident of violence here on Januray 26, the police said.

A senior police officer said that in view of the prevailing law and order situation at Ghaziabad border and keeping in mind the public convenience, the carriageway of NH-24 going towards Ghaziabad from Delhi has been opened in due consultation with policemen of Ghaziabad district, Uttar Pradesh, in public interest.

However, the other side of the carriageway, directed towards Delhi from Ghaziabad, is closed for traffic as protesters have blocked it.

In a tweet, the Delhi Traffic Police said, "Traffic movement is closed on Ghaziabad Border [Ghaziabad to Delhi], Singhu Border, Dhansa Border, Mangeshpur Border, Derawali Border and Tikri Border."

**Travel time**

Sachin Rawat (29), who works at Noida, said it will now take less time for him to reach office. "When the stretch was closed, I used to go to my office in Noida via Indirapuram. Now it will not have much impact on travel time, but NH-24 is more con-



Traffic going from Delhi to Ghaziabad on NH-24 on Monday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

venient," he said.

On March 2, the carriageway was briefly opened and later closed for traffic movement.

The Ghaziabad border is one of the major protest sites where farmers have been sitting and it was temporarily closed. However, the Tikri and Singhu borders are completely closed for traffic movement.

Thousands of farmers, mostly from Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, have been camping at the Delhi border points - Singhu, Tikri and Ghaziabad for over three months, demanding the repeal of farm laws and a legal guarantee

on the minimum support price for their crops.

Farmers present at the Ghaziabad protest site said the carriageway going towards Ghaziabad/ Meerut was opened late on Sunday. "We don't mind if one more carriageway is opened for traffic. It seems the move to close the movement of traffic was to create a negative image of farmers among the locals," said Omvini Singh, a farmer from Aligarh.

**BKU welcomes move**

Dharmendra Malik, media in-charge, Bhartiya Kisan Union, welcomed the move and said they had been demanding the opening of the

carriageway since it was closed after January 26.

Mahendra Singh, SHO, Kaushambi, said the Ghaziabad police had given inputs to their counterparts in Delhi that locals were facing problems. "No untoward incident has been reported so far," he said.

Mr. Singh said there was, however, no information on opening the cut towards Ghaziabad beneath the flyover.

For constable Salek Chand, it remains business as usual. "We are doing 12-hour shifts since last month. The number of farmers has come down but we can't take chance," he said.

## Man wanted in Lucknow murder held

Accused had a bounty of ₹50,000 on his head, say police

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

A 28-year-old man, who was wanted in Ajit Singh murder case in Lucknow, was arrested in the Delhi early on Monday, the police said.

The accused has been identified as Rajesh Tomar alias Jai, a resident of Aligarh district in Uttar Pradesh, they said.

"He was involved in several criminal cases. He was carrying a reward of

₹50,000 on his head and was wanted in the case of Ajit Singh's murder, which took place on January 6 this year, in Lucknow," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer North) Rajiv Ranjan Singh said.

Tomar was arrested on Monday while he was trying to evade police checking in Swaroop Nagar, the police said.

An imported pistol with five live cartridges have been seized from the posse.

session of the accused, the DCP said.

In January, 39-year-old Ajit, who was a notorious criminal of Mau district having 17 cases against him, was killed and two others sustained injuries in a shootout between rival factions in the posh Gomti Nagar area of Lucknow.

Ajit and his accomplice Mohan Singh were travelling in an SUV when three motorcycle-borne assailants opened fire at them.

The Punjab government has said the water supply coming from Bhakra Dam will be halted, because of which there might be a huge shortage, Mr. Jain told reporters when asked about the effect on supply due to cleaning work on Munak Canal.

The water supply in many localities in East and North-East districts was affected on the weekend due to repair work undertaken by the DJB.

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Timings  
DELHI

|                      |
|----------------------|
| TUESDAY, MAR. 16     |
| RISE 06:30 SET 18:30 |
| RISE 08:14 SET 21:09 |
| WEDNESDAY, MAR. 17   |
| RISE 06:29 SET 18:31 |
| RISE 08:44 SET 22:02 |
| THURSDAY, MAR. 18    |
| RISE 06:28 SET 18:31 |
| RISE 09:16 SET 22:55 |

|               |     |     |
|---------------|-----|-----|
| Delhi Weather | max | min |
| Delhi City    | 32  | 16  |
| Safdarjung    | 32  | 16  |
| Palam         | 31  | 18  |

**Delhi Palam Today**  
33°C Marginal rise in temperature. Warm day would continue with partly cloudy sky.

**Delhi Palam Tomorrow**  
34°C Hazy pleasant cool morning and dry warm day with few clouds likely. Light to moderate surface wind likely over the area.

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| Air Quality of Delhi-NCR                             |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| Delhi 206  | Gurugram 187                                     |   |
| Ghaziabad 224  | Faridabad 173                                    |   |
| Noida 182  | Greater Noida 208                                |   |
| ■ Good 0-50 ■ Satisfactory 51-100 ■ Moderate 101-200 | ■ Poor 201-300 ■ Very Poor 301-400 ■ Severe >400 | Air Quality Index at 4 p.m. yesterday (Average of past 24 hours)   Source: CPCB |

## 107-year-old man gets COVID-19 jab

Over 39,000 immunised on Monday

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

A total of 39,742 beneficiaries took the COVID-19 vaccination in the city on Monday, including a 107-year-old man.

Kewal Krishan took the vaccine at Fortis Escorts Heart Institute.

Bidesh Chandra Paul, zonal director of the hospital said, "Today, we administered the COVID-19 vaccine to Mr. Krishan, the oldest person in India to get vaccinated. We hope that this action will encourage people to get vaccinated. The second phase of the vaccine rollout has seen an encouraging response, the numbers are increasing day by day."

Earlier this month, a 104-year-old man had got vaccinated at another private hospital in the city.

Of the total beneficiaries on Monday, 21,622 were people who are 60 years of age and above and 3,429 people were between 45 and 59 years of age, said a Delhi government spokesperson.

The city witnessed 368 new COVID-19 cases in the last 24 hours, taking the total to 6,44,064 on Monday.

Three deaths were reported in the past 24 hours, tak-

## BJP wants to trim Delhi govt's powers: CM

Amendment necessary to curtail 'unconstitutional functioning' of govt. after SC judgment, says BJP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday accused the BJP-led Central government of drastically curtailing the powers of the Delhi government through the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021, tabled in the Lok Sabha.

The BJP argued that the proposed Bill was necessary to curtail the "unconstitutional functioning" of the AAP-led Delhi government after the Supreme Court judgment on the division of powers of the elected government and the Lieutenant Governor in 2018.

"After being rejected by the people of Delhi [8 seats in Assembly, 0 in MCD by-polls], BJP seeks to drastically curtail powers of elected government through a Bill in LS today. Bill is contrary to Constitution Bench judgement. We strongly condemn BJP's unconstitutional and anti-democracy move [sic]," Mr. Kejriwal tweeted.

"The Bill, for Delhi, 'Government' will mean LG. Then what will elected go-



The Bill gives discretionary powers to the Lieutenant-Governor even in matters where the Delhi Legislative Assembly (pictured) is empowered to make laws. • FILE PHOTO: SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

vernment do? All files will go to LG. This is against July 4, 2018 Constitution Bench judgement which said that files will not be sent to LG, elected government will take all decisions and send copy of decision to LG [sic]," he also stated.

**Bidhuri welcomes move**

Leader of the Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri welcomed the introduction of the Bill in

Parliament and argued that it would help in both – the smooth running of the government and strike at the root of corruption.

"The Bill seeks to clearly define the role of the elected government and the Lieutenant Governor in important matters pertaining to corruption administration and smooth running of the local and civic bodies. It will end the confusion on this issue and in future fast track the

process of development and decision making," he said.

Even after today's amendment Bill, 75% of administrative works and powers will rest with Delhi's local government, said Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta.

Mr. Gupta said the Bill was in compliance of a February 2019 directive of the Supreme Court when the court had observed that it would be better if the Government of National Capital Territory

Bill is contrary to Constitution Bench judgement. We strongly condemn BJP's unconstitutional and anti-democracy move [sic]

ARVIND KEJRIWAL  
Chief Minister

of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021, clarified the division of administrative work and powers between the Central and Delhi governments.

**'Ultimate authority'**

Delhi BJP spokesperson Harish Khurana said that the "ultimate authority", even in the year 1993 when the BJP government came to power in Delhi, has always been the L-G.

"In fact, at that time, Delhi Jal Board, DTC, DESU and others were not with the Delhi government. It was cordial coordination between the Centre and Delhi government that the late CM Khurana ji and Sahib Singh ji brought these departments under the Delhi government," he said.

## Bill will stall Capital's progress, says Sisodia

'BJP manifesto had promised statehood'

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Monday said that the BJP had brought a new law in Parliament by which the Lieutenant Governor will be the "government" and the Chief Minister and the Ministers will have to send each and every file to the L-G.

"Before the election, the BJP's manifesto says that Delhi will be made a full State. After winning the election, they are now saying that the L-G will be the government in Delhi," he said. Mr. Sisodia said that the Bill will "stall" Delhi's progress by giving undue powers to the L-G.



Manish Sisodia

from his office," he added.

He said that the reason why BJP is going "against" the Constitution and keep the L-G in power is because the BJP does not want that the people of Delhi benefit from unique and quality provisions in education, healthcare, free water and electricity.

"The BJP has meddled with the welfare and provisions for the people in various States that it holds power in and now it wants to ensure that the people of Delhi do not benefit from rightful provisions and initiatives of the Delhi government," he said.

Party to hold dharna at Jantar Mantar tomorrow

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Reacting to the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021, introduced in Parliament on Monday, the Delhi Congress said that the amendments would not on-

ly considerably dilute the powers of the Delhi government but would also be a direct assault on the powers of the people of Delhi, who choose the government a democratic process.

**'Murder of democracy'**  
Addressing a press conference, former MLA and former Parliamentary Secretary to Delhi Chief Minister, Anil Bhardwaj, said that if the Bill is passed, it will be a "black day" for Delhi and

"murder of democracy" as it clearly violates the basic tenets of the Constitution.

If the Bill is passed, the BJP will resort to back-seat driving of Delhi through the Lieutenant-Governor as the Delhi government would have to get his permission for each and every administrative action, making the government virtually redundant. The Delhi Congress will strongly oppose it. The party will hold a *dharna* at Jantar Mantar against the

Bill on March 17," Mr. Bhardwaj said.

The Delhi Congress said that it was surprising that the Arvind Kejriwal government did not raise its voice against the Bill earlier although the Union Cabinet had given the go-ahead for the Bill on February 1.

**'Kejriwal fooling people'**  
"Mr. Kejriwal has been fooling the people of Delhi with the promise of bringing in Jan Lokpal, Citizen Charter

## Coal case: SC asks HC to give names of 5 officers

It is looking to replace Judge Parashar

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Judge in the place of Judge Parashar.  
The SC order, referring to the HC official's letter, recorded that Judge Parashar "needs to be replaced, as he has now completed more than six years in the same post after having been posted as Special Judge in the above mentioned court since August 19, 2014."

The court order said the case has been pending for about six years when the law contemplates the disposal of such matters in two years which may be extended four times for six months each.

**Plea to vaccinate people with mental illness**

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Monday asked the Centre to respond to a petition seeking to include people suffering from mental illness in the list of specified co-morbidities to get COVID-19 vaccine on priority basis. The petition clarified that the 20-point list of specified co-morbidities include Persons with Intellectual Disabilities as well as Persons with Disabilities having High Support Needs, but persons with severe mental illness have been overlooked.

ing the death toll to 10,944.

Of the total cases, 6,30,799 people have recovered and there are 2,321 active cases.

## BJP unserious about curbing pollution: AAP

'Air quality commission has become non-functional as Centre failed to table Bill'



Heavy smoke billows from burning garbage near the Delhi University campus on Monday. • SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

with outdated technology. These thermal power plants in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan aren't shut and cause pollution to Delhi. Who will take action against these plants? There are over 5,000 brick kilns in Delhi-NCR that cause massive pollution. Now that the Commission for Air Quality Management has lapsed, who will take action against these brick kilns?" Ms. Atishi said.

Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said the AAP is in a habit of creating propaganda and attacking the Centre to "avoid" its own accountability and Ms. Atishi's statement is a part of its "old dirty trick" to put the onus on the Centre.

Meanwhile, air quality of Delhi was in the "poor" category on Monday, while that of Gurugram and Noida was in the "moderate" level.

"The AQI is likely to stay in the 'moderate' to 'poor' category for next two days. An increase in dust contribution is expected in the coming days," said SAFAR.

**The Central government**

had taken one step towards controlling pollution and allowed even that to fall through. Their seriousness towards the health and well-being of Delhi residents is for everyone to see," said AAP leader Atishi.

The AAP leader said that on one hand, the Delhi government has been taking multiple steps to control and reduce pollution and on the other hand, the Central government is taking "no action" towards controlling pollution coming from other States. "I would like to ask the Central government, what is it doing to control pollution that's coming from

**Submit report**

"After a petition, the Supreme Court had asked the Central government to submit a report on how it plans



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CM YK



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#### OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, SUB TRANSMISSION DIVISION DODA

Email: [xentstdod@gmail.com](mailto:xentstdod@gmail.com) Tel. Fax: 01966-295112 CIN NO. U49301JK2013SGC003898

##### NOTIFICATION CANCELLATION OF E-NIT

Sub- e-NIT No/STD/Doda 16 of 2020, Dated 16.06.2020 for the work of "Design, Engineering, Manufacture, Survey and Route alignment, Supply, Transportation, Erection, Testing & Commissioning of 5 Km 33KV line on 11 Mtr STP with Dog conductor with cement bottoming of all poles from 132/33 KV Grid Khetlani to proposed site, near existing Receiving Station Doda for dedicated 10 MW Receiving Station for GMC Doda, in District Doda under the jurisdiction of Executive Engineer, STD Doda, JPCL, Jammu

In response to above subjected e-NIT this office received seven nos of bids. But due to below mentioned technical reasons the tendering process can not be carried further.

i) As per bid document issued by the Finance Department Jammu & Kashmir civil Secretariat Manager vide No. FD/MI-Bgt/2020 dated - 08.02.2020 no tendering shall be allowed till the availability of funds.

ii) The land identification for the construction has come under dispute.

In view of the above, a meeting of Contract Committee-V held on 08.03.2021 and decided to cancel the tender.

Hence the above mentioned e-NIT stands cancelled, Fresh tender shall be floated shortly.

Sd/- Executive Engineer  
Sub Transmission Division, Doda.

#### OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, JAMMU POWER DISTRIBUTION CORPORATION LIMITED, O&M DIVISION,KATHUA

Email: [xenmkrekathua123@gmail.com](mailto:xenmkrekathua123@gmail.com); CIN No.U40300JK2013SGC003898

##### (Phone/Fax nos: 01922-236945 & 01922-234637 )

##### EXTENSION NOTICE-01

In view of Nil/Limited response, the last date for submission of e-bids of below noted e-NITS is hereby extended up to 16.03.2021 at 11.00 A.M and bid opening shall be on 16.03.2021 at 02.00 P.M:

| S.No. | Particulars of e-NIT                     |
|-------|--|
| 1.    | e-NIT No/KED/40 of 2020-21 Dt.04.03.2021 |
| 2.    | e-NIT No/KED/41 of 2020-21 Dt.04.03.2021 |

Sd/- Executive Engineer  
JPCL, O&M Division, Kathua

#### GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR J&K E-GOVERNANCE AGENCY, IT DEPARTMENT CIVIL SECRETARIAT, JAMMU

Subject: Notice inviting Tender for Design, Development, Implementation, Operation and Maintenance of Web Portal for UT Dashboard, Government of J&K'

NOTIFICATION NO.: 07-JaKeGA/2021 DATED:10-03-2021

Jammu & Kashmir e-Governance Agency (JaKeGA), Information Technology Department, JK&K, invites bids for Selection of Implementation Agency for the Design, Development, Implementation, Operation and Maintenance of Web Portal for UT Dashboard, Government of J&K for the detailed scope of work provided in the RFP Ref No.: JaKeGA / Tech / 05 / 2021 (TAC Approved) Version '1.

Important details for key activities are as under:

| S. No. | Key   | Date and Time   |
|--------|---|---|
| 1.     | Date of Publication of REP  | Start Date: From 02.00 PM of 11/03/2021 on www.jktenders.gov.in   |
| 2.     | REP Document Download Date,   | 02.00 PM of 11/03/2021 onwards  |
| 3.     | Last date/time for submission of written queries by intending bidders through email at: cejakgaj@nic.in | 19/03/2021 till 2:00 PM.  |
| 4.     | Pred Bid Meeting  | 25/03/2021 at 02.30 PM via Online Mode  |
| 5.     | Response to the Queries will be published on www.jktenders.gov.in & www.jakega.jk.gov.in                | 26/03/2021  |
| 6.     | Submission of bids on www.jktenders.gov.in  | Start Date: 27/03/2021 from 10.00 AM End Date: 05/04/2021 upto 02.00 PM   |
| 7.     | Bid Validity  | 180 days from the date of opening of commercial bid.  |
| 8.     | Bid Procedure   | Three stage bidding (Pre-Qualification, Technical & Financial) through e-Tendering mode on www.jktenders.gov.in |
| 9.     | Bid Evaluation Criteria (Selection Method)  | Quality and Cost Based Selection (QCBS)   |
| 10.    | Websites for downloading RFP, Correspondence, Addendums etc. (in case)                                  | Quality and Cost Based Selection (QCBS)   |
| 11.    | Opening of Technical Bids   | 03:00 PM of 05/04/2021 in Civil Secretariat Srinagar/Jammu  |
| 12.    | Date of Technical Presentation  | Will be informed later www.jakega.jk.gov.in   |
| 13.    | Opening of Financial Bid  | Will be informed later.   |

No:JaKeGA/JaKeGA/Tech/05/2021 Dated: 10-03-2021  
Sd/-  
Chief Executive Officer  
J&K e-Governance Agency  
Information Technology Department

DIP/J-13177/20

#### OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

##### DEATH

##### Shri Attavar Ramdass

DOB: 24.03.1947 - DOD: 09.03.2021



Industrialist, Philanthropist and Social Activist  
Founder and Chairperson

Industrial Radiographic Inspection Company (IRICO)

NABL Accredited NDT Laboratories

SITAS GROUP of Companies

Visvesvaraya Industrial Engineering Works (VIEW)

NABL Accredited NDT Laboratories

Recipient Kannada Rajyotsava Award

Former President Kannada Balaga Chennai

Former president Sneha Cultural Association

Instrumental in installation of the great saint poet Sarvagnya statue at Chennai & Thiruvalluvar statue in Bangalore

Founder

Shri Mahalakshmi Temple

HIRANYA GARBHA, Baragur, Channarayapatna Karnataka

Deeply mourned by

Smt Nirmala Ramdass and Family,  
Members of Work Force

9884067776 / 9845451009

##### DEATH ANNIVERSARIES

##### FIRST YEAR ANNIVERSARY



MR. S. VENKATESAN

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# BJP, JJP leaders face farmers' ire in Haryana

They would be boycotted for voting against no-trust motion



VIKAS VASUDEVA  
CHANDIGARH

Even as the BJP-JJP government in Haryana defeated the no-confidence motion moved against it by the Congress last week in the State Assembly, protests by farmers against the BJP-JJP and Independent MLAs who supported the government are only intensifying across the State.

On Monday, a group of farmers, who had been agitating against Centre's farm laws reached party office of Haryana Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala in Jind's Uchana, following which representatives of the Deputy Chief Minister had to leave party office.

Police said a group of farmers shouted slogans at the front gate of the party office and asked the office-bearers and party workers to leave. "They were protesting in support of their demands surrounding farm laws. They asked the party workers and office-bearers not to visit the office till their agitation was over. The party worker and others then left the office through the back gate of the office," Ravinder Kumar, Sub-Inspector at Uchana told *The Hindu*.

Farmer outfits have announced that all legislators including the BJP, the JJP and the Independents who didn't

support the no-confidence motion would be boycotted and won't be allowed entry into villages across the State.

"We will quarantine all MLAs who are not supporting us by not letting them to move freely in our villages. The no-confidence motion has exposed the real face of MLAs. Last week, JJP MLA Ram Karan Kala was suppose to preside over a function at circuit house in Kurukshetra to honour 'safai karamcharis' to mark the birthday of party chief Ajay Singh Chautala but on account of farmers protest he gave it a miss," said Rakesh Bains, spokesperson of Bharatiya Kisan Union (Chaduan).

The BJP-JJP leaders are facing protests almost across the State. On Sunday, at Narwana in Jind district, protesters gathered outside the venue for BJP's district level training camp and staged their protest. Following this, the BJP

workers had to leave the spot, escorted by the police.

Mr. Bains said farmers and village 'panchayats' are collectively expressing their anguish against the BJP-JJP and all others who are supporting the farm laws. "Farmers shouted slogans against Sports Minister and Pehowa MLA Sandeep Singh at Chhappa village of Shahabad where he had attended an event last Saturday," he said. Farmers alleged that the MLA has betrayed the farming community by not supporting the motion.

**55 votes against motion**  
On March 10, 55 MLAs had voted against the no-confidence motion while 32 backed the motion, which the Congress had moved on the pretext that the BJP-JJP government had "lost public confidence" surrounding the ongoing farmers' protest against Centre's farm laws.

Jaste Sandhu, a senior farmer leader of Bharatiya Kisan Union (Tikait) said in Karnal's Ballah village, protest was lodged with a family where JJP leaders had paid a visit secretly last week. "Not just farmer groups and 'panchayats' but even villagers at their personal level have appealed to all to not invite or entertain BJP-JJP leaders at any functions," he said.

Leader of the Opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda said that no MLA of the Congress was instigating any organisation or class to boycott political leaders.

Cong. behind boycott call, alleges CM

##### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal on Monday blamed the Congress for instigating farmers to boycott legislators over the farm laws issue, even as the Congress MLAs staged a walkout.

The State Assembly passed a resolution condemning the boycott of any political party or its leaders. Soon after the question hour, Chief Minister Manohar Lal pointed to the issue and asked opposition leaders to condemn the incidents.

Mr. Lal presented a single line resolution, saying that if any section or organisation of the society announces to boycott any political party or its leaders, then the House will condemn it. He then moved the resolution, which was passed by voice vote in the House.

Mr. Lal said that the responsibility of the ruling party is as much as that of the opposition for the protection of democracy. The Congress party staged a walk out against the resolution, saying that it was presented without any prior notice.

Leader of the Opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda said that no MLA of the Congress was instigating any organisation or class to boycott political leaders.

'Curbs prevented women from getting healthcare'

48% avoided hospitals: Rajasthan survey

##### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT JAIPUR

About 48% of the women in Rajasthan who needed to visit a health facility during the COVID-19 restrictions avoided going to hospitals and 69% of them were shut for a month or a longer duration.

Similarly, 35% of women requiring medical treatment were not able to access health services, according to a Performance Monitoring for Action (PMA) survey undertaken in the State.

Over 4,570 households and 575 health facilities were surveyed in collaboration with the State government for three months during the pandemic as part of a study undertaken by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore, U.S. The study was also conducted in nine other countries, including Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya and Nigeria.

## Odisha completes a year of battle against pandemic

##### PRESS TRUST OF INDIA BHUBANESWAR

Odisha's COVID-19 tally mounted to 3,38,258 after 66 more persons tested positive for the virus on Monday, as the State completed one year of its battle against the pandemic, a health department official said.

On March 15, 2020, the State detected its first COVID-19 case, an Italy returned research scholar at the Capital Hospital here, the official said.

There was panic after the State's Chief COVID-19 Spokesperson Subrato Bagchi announced that the first patient had come in contact with 129 people, including 76 train passengers.

A day before the detection of the first coronavirus case followed a series of measures such as

##### WEATHER WATCH

# ASSEMBLY POLLS

THE HINDU | TUESDAY, MARCH 16, 2021

## NDA gave liberty to Muslim women: Nadda

BJP chief cites outlawing of triple talaq

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI

BJP president J.P. Nadda on Monday said the NDA government gave Muslim women in the country the liberty they deserved by declaring triple talaq illegal.

Claiming that the party has been working for Assam's peace and prosperity, he alluded to "positive changes" in Jammu and Kashmir after the repeal of Article 370 of the Constitution.

"Triple talaq was unacceptable in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and many other Muslim countries, but in vogue in India because previous governments did not dare to touch it for fear of angering their vote bank. The Narendra Modi government made triple talaq go, like Article 370," he said while campaigning for party candidates in Dhakauna, Sotea and Barchalla Assam constituencies.

The positive changes have helped ensure peace in



BJP president J.P. Nadda in Sonitpur on Monday. • PTI

INTERVIEW | BHUPESH BAGHEL

## BJP's 100-plus claim is for Cong., not for themselves'

The ruling party has not implemented any of its poll promises made five years ago, says Chhattisgarh Chief Minister

SOBHANA K NAIR

Congress leader Bhupesh Baghel, who is an observer for the election-bound Assam, speaks about the party's poll prospects in the State, discomfort within cadre about the alliance with Badruddin Ajmal's All India United Democratic Front and dissent by the G-23 group of leaders. Excerpts:

In 2016, there was a gap of 10% in terms of vote share between the Congress and the BJP. How do you plan to bridge this?

The situation in 2016 was very different from today. The Opposition was a divided house. Badruddin Ajmal's AIUDF fought alone, the Left parties were contesting outside the UPA. The BJP, on the other hand, had an alliance with the Bodoland People's Front. This time, we are a cohesive alliance of six parties while the BPF has walked out of the NDA. Moreover, the BJP has not implemented any of the promises it made five years ago. Didn't they say they will deport 50 lakh illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. If you look at the statistics given by the Home

Ministry, this figure does not even reach thousands, forget about the lofty claim of 50 lakh. They said Bangladesh-India border will be sealed. Did that happen? They said the Citizenship (Amendment) Act will be implemented. Assam voters have rejected the CAA, which is why the Centre is dragging its feet on implementing it. They claimed that they will build an expressway along the Brahmaputra river. Not a single stone has been laid so far. The BJP has nothing to show for its five years in the government.

This is the first election without Congress stalwart Tarun Gogoi. You don't even have a chief ministerial face. How will the party fare in such circumstances?

There is a discomfort within

your cadre about the alliance with the AIUDF. The Congress is forced to defend the alliance and only a few days ago, senior leader Sushmita Dev was on the verge of leaving the party over the issue.

I was present when the Congress-AIUDF alliance was sealed and I can say confidently that it was done after extensive consultations within the party. Some senior leaders may have made certain comments because of political compulsions of their constituency. But Ms. Dev is a cherished leader of the Congress and continues to head the All India Women's Congress. As far as the BJP's campaign of branding Ajmal Saheb as communal is concerned, how come they didn't have similar reservations in sharing power with the AIUDF in zilla parishad. The BJP changes its allies as per political convenience. It has tied up with Mehboba Mufti's PDP and Mamata Banerjee's TMC in the past.

The BJP claims it will win 100-plus seats this time in the State. Your comments.



The BJP changes its allies as per political convenience

The BJP claims it will win 100-plus seats this time in the State. Your comments.

Our Home Minister Amit Shahji doesn't ever lie. When he came to Chhattisgarh, he said the BJP will win 65-plus seats. The only difference is that in 2018 in Chhattisgarh, he was not speaking for the BJP, but for us. We won 68 seats. And in Assam too, the claim of 100-plus seats is for us. It is the Congress and its allies who will win more than 100 seats.

Is the Congress worried that

Assam Jatiya Parishad and Rajojor Dal will divide its voters?

No, we have no reason to worry.

These parties have their own following while we are the only other alternative to the BJP in the State.

G-23 has openly declared rebellion against the party. How do you see their recent comments?

Aren't Mukul Wasnik and Prithviraj Chavan part of the G-23 group? Both are actively working in Assam. Every party has some one or the other who raises questions, even the BJP had such voices.

Didn't Uma Bharati speak against the party in the past?

How critical is Rahul Gandhi's return to the party president's position?

There is no leader of his stature with the party. He alone can lead us through these challenging times.

## Former extremists call for driving BJP out

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI

Some leaders of the disbanded National Democratic Front of Boroland have formed a new extremist group to revive the armed movement. They have also called for driving the Bharatiya Janata Party out of Assam.

In a video statement released to the media, the leaders of the National Liberation Front of Boroland (NLFB) said the Centre and the Assam government's indifference to the Bodo issue made them return to the

jungles and take up guns again for their rights. "The BJP is a big threat to Assam, and you have to eject it from Assam," the outfit headed by M.D. Batha said.

He was among the 1,615 extremists who laid down their weapons in January 2020 after the Centre had signed the Bodoland Territorial Region pact with four factions of the NDFB and the All Bodo Students' Union.

The police in BTR confirmed the "serious" development, saying the group may have 25-30 members.

### Demanding their due



BJP workers protesting outside the party office in Kolkata on Monday against the selection of candidates for the upcoming West Bengal Assembly elections. • PTI

## Maharashtra reports 15,051 cases, 48 deaths

Active cases cross 1.30 lakh mark; recovery rate dips to 92.07%

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

PUNE

Maharashtra's case spike continued unabated with the State recording another massive surge of 15,051 new COVID-19 cases on Monday, as its active case tally shot to 1,30,547 – nearly 60% of India's total active cases.

A total of 10,671 patients were discharged in the last 24 hours with the State's recovery rate dipping to 92.07%.

As many as 48 deaths pushed the death toll to 52,909.

While the total case tally has reached 23,29,464, the cumulative recoveries stand at 21,44,743.

"Of a total 1,76,09,248 laboratory samples tested thus far, 23,29,464 (with the case positivity increasing marginally to 13.23%) have returned positive with over 93,000 samples being tested in the last 24 hours," State Surveillance Officer Dr. Pradeep Awate said, adding that the State's case fatality had incrementally dropped to 2.27%.

Pune district reported over 2,100 new cases to take its total case tally to 4,41,745. As per the State Health Department figures, no deaths were reported as the death count stayed at 8,144. However, as per district authorities, 15 deaths were recorded taking the fatality toll to 9,428 while the active case tally crossed the 22,000 mark.

Mumbai city recorded a spike of 1,713 new cases, taking its total tally to 3,45,675 of whom 13,309 are active. Four fatalities took the city's



A pedestrian walks past a wall with pictures of COVID-19 frontline workers displayed along the roadside to honour them, in Mumbai on Monday. • AFP

whom 7,899 are active while its death count rose to 1,294.

Western Maharashtra, however, continued to add relatively low cases and deaths. Satara reported 149 new cases and only a single fatality as the total tally rose to 60,871 of whom 1,617 are active, and the death toll touched 1,859.

Sangli added 47 cases and one death as the district's total cases reached 51,876 of whom only 769 are active. Its death toll went up to 1,801.

Kolhapur reported 30 cases and no deaths as its total case tally reached 50,174 of whom 4,955 are active. The death toll has climbed to 1,543.

Aurangabad in Marathwada reported nearly 800 new cases and five deaths as its total cases reached 60,214 of

## SKM raises farm laws in UN Human Rights Council

Ask Indian govt. to repeal laws, urges Morcha leader

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Samyukt Kisan Morcha leader Darshan Pal raised the issue of India's contentious farm reform laws at the United Nations Human Rights Council on Monday, asking the UN to urge the Indian government to repeal the laws.

Speaking via video message during the general debate at the ongoing 46th session of the Council, Dr. Pal noted that India was a signatory to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and was thus committed to the protection of small farmers.

However, he alleged that

the farm laws will remove such protections by endangering the MSP system, the use of profits for rural infrastructure, and access to the courts. "The few States where similar policies were introduced have seen farmers sinking into poverty, losing their lands and having to work as labourers elsewhere to make ends meet," he said.

"The UN Declaration insists that the country must consult the farmers before laws and policies are enacted. We ask the UN to urge my government to abide by the declaration, repeal the laws and start consultations to start a reform agenda friendly to farmers and good for the environment, as is required by the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants," he added.

A Division Bench of Justices S.S. Shinde and Manish Pitala was hearing a plea filed by Mr. Usmani through senior advocate Mihir Desai, seeking to quash the FIR against him charging under Section 153A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, re-

## Second Elgaar Parishad: govt. to take no coercive action against Sharjeel Usmani

Former AMU student has moved HC seeking to quash FIR

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Monday recorded the statement by the Maharashtra government that it would not take any coercive action against Sharjeel Usmani, an alumnus of Aligarh Muslim University, as long as he appeared before the Pune police for allegedly making objectionable statements at the second Elgaar Parishad.

A Division Bench of Justices S.S. Shinde and Manish Pitala was hearing a plea filed by Mr. Usmani through senior advocate Mihir Desai, seeking to quash the FIR against him charging under Section 153A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, re-

sidence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony) of the Indian Penal Code.

Mr. Desai told the court that there was no dispute that the speech was made; however, the issue was whether it came under Section 153A.

He argued that three things – what was the message sent by the speech, who it was addressed to, and the context in which it was made – needed to be kept in mind to see if it came under that Section.

Referring to a statement made by Mr. Usmani, the Bench said, "We are open to criticism."

Mr. Desai said that the speech had been sent to a forensic science laboratory.

The HC asked public pro-

secutor Y.P. Yagnik if Mr. Usmani had joined the investigation and they would require him to be present again. Mr. Desai assured the court that Mr. Usmani would be present on March 18.

The HC adjourned the hearing to March 22.

Mr. Usmani had on January 30 delivered a speech at Ganesh Kala Krida Manch in Pune. An FIR was registered against him at Swargate police station on February 2, based on a complaint filed by advocate Pradeep Gaware, State regional secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha. The complaint said, "Mr. Usmani has allegedly made offensive statements against the Hindu community, Indian judiciary, and Parliament."

## Report casts doubt on EC autonomy

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

A report by a citizens' group flagged concerns about "significant exclusion" of vulnerable sections of society from the electoral rolls, the increasing criminalisation of

politics and raised doubts over the autonomy of the Election Commission.

The second report by the Citizens' Commission on Elections, chaired by retired SC judge Madan B. Lokur, looked at the question – "Are elections in India free

and fair?" "There is no doubt many names do not figure in the electoral rolls, whether through mischief or oversight: minority communities, the homeless, the disadvantaged, the aged..." the report said.

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## Kerala triangle

The election results will be indicative of a new social compact that is taking shape in the State

The coming Assembly election in Kerala could mark a realignment of the State's political landscape. The Congress, which leads the United Democratic Front (UDF), the CPI (M) that leads the Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the BJP that leads the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), are all betting on an outsize impact the small southern State may have on their respective national plans. Kerala is one State where Rahul Gandhi is miles ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in popularity and a victory of the UDF could set the scene for his return as Congress president. Mr. Gandhi has been investing considerable time in the State. The BJP, long seen as a north Indian party, has made significant inroads in the State, and is hoping to emerge as the third pole through social engineering that includes wooing a section of Christians. A notable performance in Kerala can give a fillip to its southern ambitions and buttress its claim of being a national party. The incumbent Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan is experimenting with daring political moves to win a second consecutive term, unusual in Kerala. His moves could be highly rewarding politically, but could unsettle the implicit power-sharing arrangement among Kerala's elites.

Though they are playing for high stakes in Kerala, all three parties are in turmoil within and in tussles with allies. The CPI (M)'s decision to deny ticket to several of its veterans has not been taken kindly by its cadres, who have taken to the streets and social media to challenge it. The party wooed Kerala Congress (Mani) from the UDF into the LDF, in an embarrassing somersault that it finds difficult to explain. Charges of corruption and nepotism, including a multi-agency investigation into the links between the former Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister and a smuggling racket have taken the shine off the governance record of the LDF government. Mr. Vijayan, however, is trying to turn this in his favour, by claiming to be at the receiving end of machinations by Central probe agencies at the behest of the BJP. The Congress is trying to keep the leadership squabbles within by not formally announcing a leader, but signalling that former Chief Minister Oommen Chandy could get another term should the party win. It is also struggling hard to hold on to traditional bases. The BJP in Kerala had never imagined itself as a serious contender for power, and the opportunity in sight has intensified internal factional rivalries. The campaign and outcome of the Assembly election will be indicative of a new social compact that is taking shape in Kerala, and in that sense, it is not merely about electing a new government this time.

## Poll position

Supreme Court has boosted independence of SECs in holding local body elections

Even though more than a quarter century has elapsed since the Constitution was amended to make urban and rural local bodies a self-contained third tier of governance, it is often agreed by experts that there is inadequate devolution of powers to them. This may somewhat explain their relative lack of autonomy. However, an entirely different facet of the way these local bodies function is that the manner in which their representatives are elected is often beset by controversies. Local polls are often marred by violence, and charges of arbitrary delimitation and reservation of wards. A key factor in any local body polls being conducted in a free and fair manner is the extent to which the State Election Commissioner, the authority that supervises the elections, is independent and autonomous. Unfortunately, most regimes in the States appoint senior bureaucrats from among their favourites to this office. In practice, SECs frequently face charges of being partisan. Routine exercises such as delimiting wards, rotating the wards reserved for women and Scheduled Castes and fixing dates for the elections become mired in controversy as a result, as the Opposition tends to believe that the exercise is being done with the ruling party's interest in mind. Even though this cannot be generalised in respect of all States and all those manning the position, it is undeniable that SECs do not seem to enjoy the confidence of political parties and the public to the same extent as the Election Commission of India as far as their independence is concerned.

It is in this backdrop that the Supreme Court's judgment declaring that a State Election Commissioner should be someone completely independent of the State government acquires salience. It has described the Goa government's action in asking its Law Secretary to hold additional charge as SEC as a "mockery of the Constitutional mandate". By invoking its extraordinary power under Article 142 of the Constitution, the Court has asked all SECs who are under the direct control of the respective State governments to step down from their posts. In practice, most States appoint retired bureaucrats as SECs. Whether the apex court's decision would have a bearing on those who are no more serving State governments remains to be seen. However, it is clear that these governments will now have to find a way to appoint to the office only those who are truly independent and not beholden to it in any manner. The verdict will help secure the independence of SECs in the future. More significantly, the Court has boosted the power of the election watchdog by holding that it is open to the SECs to countermand any infractions of the law made by the State government in the course of preparing for local body polls. Regimes in the States would have to wake up to the reality that they cannot always control the local body polls as in the past.

# Reinventing radical politics, by looking Left

The Left needs to actively pursue agents of change such as secularism, the Green, ethnic and national movements



SHELLEY WALIA

In recent years, radical politics has faced a number of new challenges, not least of which has been the re-emergence of the aggressive, authoritarian state. Hyper-masculine nationalism, and a systemic assault of racist and religious politics on the marginalised are the latest rationales for the aggressive assertion of indiscriminate control of all democratic institutions. Add to this the hegemony of the neo-liberal corporate world along with the demise of the Left and you have the free play of muscular majoritarianism of the Far Right. The Left finds itself in an ideological vacuum.

### Anti-globalisation

In the face of the disenchantment with 'free-market' style liberalism and centralist socialism, a need arises to reinvent far-reaching alternatives. The anti-globalisation movement has been in recent years a bulwark against the practices of neo-liberal globalisation in all its signs of voracity, ecological devastation and genetically-modified food. This movement is relative, geographically and temporally, varying in the multifarious contests in which the dark reality of its operation is felt by the public at large. Though universal, it remains relative to varying local conditions but with the common goal of emancipation for all.

In the context of neo-liberalism, the crushing of national dignity by hunger and violence, the unrelenting siege of many developing nations by bankers and by the 'commercial masters of the world', as Eduardo Galeano put it, are some of the factors that must prompt contemporary Marxist critics to

not only condemn the systems that have usurped socialism but also recognise that the Left must look into the future for redefining the nature of power and the conditions of existence in a rapidly developing world, thereby striking a balance between technological dominance and liberatory politics.

### Marxist thought now

Post-Marxists, having realised this, have moved away from the strait-jacketing of orthodox Marxism that lays emphasis on the predominance of the central role of the proletariat. The orthodox Marxist model favouring the economic determinism of history and consciousness that overlooks the role of political movements stands revised and reformulated with the trend in Marxist thought moving towards the examination of wider processes of society, especially the role of the media and the building of a new alliance between feminists, marginalised groups, gays, lesbians, ethnic groups, teachers, thereby developing a radical movement for social transformation.

The focus is therefore on a more decentralised, pluralistic, and inclusive political system. In many ways, the target is not merely capitalism but other contested areas such as racism, privatisation, workplace surveillance, bureaucratisation, etc. The irrational mystifications of the dominant discourse of religion and ethnicity stand deconstructed by a more conflictual social existence that is experienced in all aspects of our social and political world.

Inevitably, the spectre of Marx lurks at those moments of history when economic deprivation becomes rampant and where progressive struggles gear up for political and economic reorganisation. It is clear, therefore, that the predicament of reinventing and restructuring the Left remains acute within the context of the right-wing regimes with the corporate



complexion as in India or the United States or Chile that are faced by serious issues of communalism, caste oppression, environmental degradation, gender discrimination and poverty. A serious consideration of the re-evaluation of economic progress, of the future of Marxism, and, more than anything else, of the reenergising of the organisational strength through mass mobilisation is consequently imperative for the success of mitigating mass unemployment, homelessness, violence, famine and economic oppression.

### A phase of hope

The theoretical position of Marxism, thus, will have to be revised ensuring that more than the belief in the working class revolution ushering in a classless society, it is the agents of change such as secularism, the Green movement, and ethnic and national movements that need to be aggressively pursued. Though the struggle of the Left against the state has often led to its defeat, it has managed to regain its vigour by aligning itself to the liberal forces and its imperceptibly growing political awakening as is visible in the farmers' strike or the awakening of radical student consciousness. Its strength in the coming days would depend on the consolidation of Left forces not on any grounds of expediency, but on ideological grounds with the aim of working together for an innovative and transformed future free of right-wing authoritarianism.

The Left, thus, is passing

through a new phase of hope and forward-looking expectation with newfound passion for a complete turnaround through new strategies of mobilisation. The revival of people's movements in Latin America, in Greece and in Spain along with the fury of the Arab Spring gave a new impetus to the wilting Left so as to challenge the neo-liberal moral high ground that has failed to offer any solution to a fragile, and the appalling present. It is hoped that the politics of the Left will impact a polarised nation ravaged by ethnic, religious and nationalist conflicts, offering a viable alternative to the emerging demise of democracy.

Consider, for example, Marx's prediction of how the inherent conflict between capital and labour would manifest itself. As he wrote in *Das Kapital*: "Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery.... When the richest 1% hold more wealth than the bottom 90%, change is inevitable. The rise of the Bernie Sanders phenomenon, for example, has significantly brought a fundamental shift in the Democratic Party towards left of centre. The burgeoning sea of young supporters behind Mr. Sanders will demand this change towards a progressive agenda clamouring for a shift towards the 90% languishing in low paying jobs and sunk in debt.

Undoubtedly, the Republicans in the United States, or the right-wing forces in India, are invertebrate in following a pattern of relentlessly reproaching progressive thinkers only because of the oppositional voice that comes into clash with its larger inherent proclivity. This neo-liberal high ground expressed in the sham of the loud claims of a better tomorrow comes in direct conflict with a rational and an open knowledge-driven society connected with the masses in a symphony of free expression stimulating a debate on the successive structural crises of inequality, in-

dustry and global finance.

### The task ahead

A multiracial society, therefore, must aim for a more democratically functional system as opposed to the vicious politics of division perpetuated and practised in most of the democracies across the world. Transformative racial policy, on the other hand, will ensure the fostering of an equitable and indiscriminate society at a juncture when a rabid form of ultra-nationalism is resulting in creating a fragmented world. A new progressive movement for an open and participatory form of socialism must be the objective espoused on the Left for a tenacious resolve to seek reform through measures of putting jobs at the top of the economic agenda, increasing the funding for public health care, ending police brutality, and gearing up movements at the grassroots.

The task before radical activism therefore, is to examine and question the formulation of public policies with the foremost attention on their relevance to the masses as opposed to the scourge of neo-liberalism as well as the elitist forms of knowledge. The sooner we realise the cataclysmic crisis of capitalism the better equipped we will be to confront a murky future. Like Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the Labour Party, the message sent out by a progressive leadership must rise above cheap populism of laying the solutions on a platter for the public, and instead, reason with them to begin realising that the answers to the problems lie with them and that they need to collectively get more organised. With a new 'people's powered politics' of sharing and debating, self-confidence could be inculcated to shape a social environment deeply unbiased and just.

*Shelley Walia has taught Cultural Theory at Panjab University, Chandigarh and is the author of 'Humanities at the Crossroads'*

# An odd political hybridisation, with historical precedent

In Kerala, the BJP's invitation to the IUML is not outlandish given their predecessors' pragmatic politics of the past



FAISAL C.K.

The State of Kerala recently witnessed what many would call an odd political moment. In the middle of the bustle of preparations for the State Assembly elections, a senior leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Kerala, Sobha Surendran, recently extended an invitation to the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) to join the National Democratic Alliance fold, with a rider – this was provided the IUML shed its 'communal' policies.

### A communal ecosystem

But viewed from a historical perspective, such a proposal is not outlandish. Prof. Bipan Chandra in his *Communalism in Modern India* has identified three species of communalism, namely communal nationalism, liberal communalism and extreme communalism or fascist communalism. In a concluding paragraph, he observes: "Communal nationalism fed liberal and extreme communalism and made it difficult to carry on political struggle against them... They, in turn, constantly generated communal nationalism within the national ranks. Similarly, the logic

of liberal communalism inexorably led to extreme communalism." This process clearly exposes the symbiotic relationship between the three species of communalism. The BJP may belong to the species of extreme communalism, and the IUML to liberal communalism. But to maintain the communal ecosystem, both parties need each other.

If one goes back in time, to colonial India, the All-India Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha were the major communal players. The IUML and the BJP are the direct descendants of these two parties, respectively. Both Savarkar and Jinnah were arch enemies on stage since they catered to two separate vote banks. But off-stage, the common thread for both parties was anti-Congressism. "Pragmatic politics" made them odd bedfellows to fill the vacuum created by the Congress following the "Do or Die" cry of the Quit India movement.

### The colonial era

A media article titled 'Hindu Mahasabha with Muslim League', is illuminating. It says: Both the Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha opposed the Quit India movement and preferred to join hands with the British under the garb of the 'pragmatic politics'. Even when most of the Congress leaders including Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad were in jail,

Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the second in command of the Hindu Mahasabha, with the blessings of Savarkar, had joined the Fazlul Haq ministry in Bengal as the Finance Minister in 1941 and remained in the ministry of the mover of the Pakistan Resolution for nearly 11 months. It was the same personage who launched the Jan Sangh, the precursor to the BJP in October 1951 with the blessings of Madhav Dasashiv Golwalkar, the second Sarsangh *chalak* of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

The article mentioned above continues: Savarkar defended this strange hybridisation in his presidential speech to the Kanpur session of the Hindu Mahasabha, in the following words: In practical politics also, the Mahasabha knows that we must advance through reasonable compromises. Witness the fact that only recently in Sind, the Sind-Hindu-Sabha on invitation had taken the responsibility of joining hands with the League itself in running [a] coalition Government. The case of Bengal is well known... Wild Leaguers, whom even the Congress with all its submissiveness could not placate, grew quite reasonably compromising and sociable as soon as they came in contact with the Hindu Mahasabha and the Coalition Government, under the premiership of Mr. Fazlul Huq and the able leadership of our esteemed Mahasabha leader Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerji, functioned successfully for a year or so to the benefit of both the communities (<https://bit.ly/3rQGozZ>).

### Politics of the north

The article has more to say. It says, the Sindh Assembly was first to pass the Pakistan Resolution moved by G.M. Sayed in 1943 when the Province had a coalition government with diametrically opposite political forces, i.e. the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha. The Hindu Mahasabha members walked out and the three Hindu Mahasabha Ministers voted against the resolution; but the resolution was passed 24 versus 3 in the Sindh Assembly on March 3, 1943. Even after passing the Pakistan resolution, none of the three Hindu Mahasabha Ministers resigned from the Ministry headed by Sir Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah of the Muslim League. They were Rao Saheb Gokaldas Mewaldas, Dr. Hemandas R. Wadhwan and Lolumal R. Motwani.

In the provincial elections held in 1937 in the North West Frontier Province, the media article adds, the Congress won the majority of the seats in the Provincial Assembly. In 1939, when the Congress Ministry headed by Khan Abdul Jabbar Khan resigned, Sardar Aurangzeb Khan of the Muslim League with the support of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Akalis formed the coalition government. Mehr Chand Khanna of the Hindu Mahasabha was the Finance Minister. Even in Punjab, says the article, there were serious efforts to have the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha coalition government installed. Both Savarkar and Dr. B.S. Moonje were very much active for the same. Jinnah had declared that the Hindu Mahasabha was to have a coalition government with the Muslim League as Savarkar and Dr. B.S. Moonje had directed to form a coalition government with the Muslim League "if it was inevitable". Here too, the article, 'Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha in Coalitions', by Dr. Hari Desai, and published in the *Asian Voice* (September 25, 2017), is illuminating.

The All India Muslim League-Hindu Mahasabha alliance during the Quit India movement was the dark side of the tragedy of Partition. In the present context, one wonders what the proposal in Kerala could portend.

*Faisal C.K. is an independent researcher*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

### Politics in Tamil Nadu

I have been an observer of elections in Tamil Nadu since 1951-52, first as a student, then as an employee, and now as a retired man. The huge promises and freebies that parties in Tamil Nadu make in their manifestos to garner votes in their favour still remain unmatched in India (Page 1, "Ruling AIADMK promises washing machines for all", March 15). In today's elections, promises and freebies come first, while assessing governance comes a distant second, which is against democratic principles. By reading through the AIADMK's mind-boggling sop list, one is sceptical whether these promises

will be implemented. One wonders whether their financial implications have been factored in. People need to exercise their voting right judiciously to elect clean and sincere law makers.

D. SETHURAMAN,  
Chennai

■ I was in for a shock when the DMK promised many measures but that has now paled into insignificance after reading what the ruling AIADMK has pledged to do. A rough estimate of the cost of most of the doles would work out to ₹30,000 per person. Can the AIADMK bear such a gargantuan expenditure? The exchequer will be empty in a matter of months. Promises are made

solemnly before any election but these are not kept. It is well known that MLAs, once elected, are hardly seen in their constituencies.

MANI NATARAJAN,  
Chennai

■ It is regrettable that no party has promised clean administration and good governance, free of corruption and nepotism. The electorate is too mature to be hoodwinked by such fleeting sops. The people should weigh the credentials of election candidates and exercise their franchise with discretion lest they should suffer in silence over possible mis-governance for another five long years.

P.K. VARADARAJAN,  
Chennai

■ In Tamil Nadu, the man on the street is left wondering whether two of the political players in the fray, Seeman and Kamal Haasan and their parties, are the B teams of the Bharatiya Janata Party. One aspect makes one feel they are: the money both parties are spending on their election campaigns and huge rallies. Will the leaders who are speaking about honesty and corruption-free governance give us a convincing reason on how they manage the amounts they are now splurging or who is funding them?

THARCUS S. FERNANDO,  
Chennai

■ It bodes well for India and the other members of the

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or the Quad, that the first-ever leadership summit turned out to be a meaningful exercise. However, China should realise that if the Quad has gained momentum today, it has only itself to blame. The fact that time-tested India-Russian ties have lost some of its warmth, with Moscow strengthening ties with Pakistan and China, also seems to have played a role in New Delhi looking elsewhere for support. China's grandiose ambition of becoming the next superpower is understandable, but it should attain this by peaceful means.

NALINI VIJAYARAGHAVAN,  
Thiruvananthapuram

Vaccination drive It has been reported that some private hospitals have started issuing a false certificate for comorbidities to those between the ages of 45 years and 60 years to get vaccinated out of turn – and all for a grand fee. This is shameful and unethical and I earnestly request members of the medical fraternity not to encourage this. In the larger interest of the country, the central government should stop the export of COVID-19 vaccines till every Indian is vaccinated. There are many on the fringes of society who are in need of the vaccine.

Dr. SUNIL CHOPRA,  
Ludhiana, Punjab

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# A giant leap forward for the Quad

The productive dialogue and substantive joint statement of the summit show the grouping's significance



RAJIV BHATIA

The maiden Quadrilateral Security Dialogue summit of the leaders of Australia, India, Japan and the U.S. on March 12 was a defining moment in Asian geopolitics. That it was a meeting at the highest political level, occasioned a productive dialogue, and concluded with a substantive joint statement is indicative of its immediate significance. The summit showed that the "Quad has come of age", as underlined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. If it leads to tangible action and visible cooperation, it will impact the whole region.

The Quad is no longer a loose coalition. The Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 triggered cooperation among the navies and governments of the Quad powers. They sought to forge diplomatic cooperation on regional issues in 2006-08, but gave up mainly because China objected to it and the hostility to China was not yet a potent enough glue.

This began to change in 2017 when Beijing's behaviour turned hostile, climaxing in multiple challenges in 2020, including its adventurism in eastern Ladakh. The Foreign Ministers of the Quad met thrice between September 2019 and February 2021. This time, U.S. President Joe Biden moved swiftly to host a virtual summit, drawing immediate response from the other three leaders.

## Five highlights

The Quad's new approach may be somewhat different from the Trump era. The former U.S. President's tough line on China is now indispensable, but without the name-calling of Beijing. A more sophisticated approach is being invented, with enhanced emphasis by the U.S. on carrying its allies and strategic partners together. The summit's outcome, therefore, merits close attention for at least five reasons.

First, past debates over diverse, even differing, visions of the Indo-Pacific are over. The joint statement struck a neat compromise: to please the U.S. and Japan, it refers to a "free



Clockwise from top left: U.S. President Joe Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the virtual Quad meeting on March 12, 2021. • AFP

and open" Indo-Pacific, but in the very next sentence it offers an elaboration - "free, open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion" - that amply satisfy India and Australia.

Second, the summit leaders have secured an adequate alignment of their approaches towards China, even without mentioning the 'C' word in the document. Senior officials gave sufficient hints on this score, reinforced by phrases such as "security challenges" and "the rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas" in the joint statement.

The context and the subtext need to be appreciated for a full understanding. Given the bipartisan consensus in Washington and the state of China's fraught relations with the other three capitals, a clear-eyed assessment of the threat from China is shared by all. But instead of unidimensional antagonism, the Quad members have preferred a smart blend of competition, cooperation and confrontation. Further clarity should emerge after discussions between the top officials of the U.S. and China, set for March 18.

Third, the Quad has placed a premium on winning the battle for the hearts and minds of people in the In-

do-Pacific region. The aim is to convince the nations of Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands and the Indian Ocean region that the Quad is a benign grouping, committed to solutions for their development and well-being. This explains the special initiative to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for every person in need in the region from the western Pacific to eastern Africa. It is both a laudable and doable objective, given the firm commitment of financial support by the U.S. and Japan, logistics and some funding from Australia, and the manufacturing and managerial capabilities of India. This new synergy is a real highlight that should result in the production of one billion vaccine doses in India by 2022.

Fourth, the establishment of three working groups on vaccine partnership; climate change; and critical and emerging technologies (such as telecom and biotechnology) and their new standards, innovation and supply chains is a welcome step. Joint R&D projects may become essential. All this should get the four national establishments into serious policy coordination and action mode, creating new capacities. The careful choice of themes reflects a deep understanding of the long-term chal-

lenge posed by China and has global implications.

Finally, the March 12 summit will not be a one-off. The leaders have agreed to meet in-person later this year, possibly at an international event within the region. Foreign ministers will gather at least once a year; other relevant officials, more often. Thus, will grow the habits of the Quad working together for a common vision and with agreed modalities for cooperation.

## Other aspects

The summit has been watched closely by the ASEAN capitals. A few of them may express cautious welcome. Beijing seems rattled but resigned to the Quad's new momentum. The Chinese see it in negative terms, targeting New Delhi in particular. The refrain of "India is moving too close to the U.S." has, after the summit, become India is "a negative asset of BRICS and SCO", as claimed by a Chinese government mouthpiece. Such views should be dismissed as inconsequential.

Among other issues discussed, the Korean Peninsula drew particular attention. The commitment to the "complete de-nuclearization" of North Korea as per the United Nations Security Council resolutions was reiterated - a reference to the importance of South Korea as a partner of the Quad. On Myanmar, Washington headed wise counsel from Asia. The call "to restore democracy and the priority of strengthening democratic resilience" is unexceptionable. It may help ASEAN in carrying forward its diplomatic initiative to promote reconciliation in Myanmar.

The lucid joint op-ed in *The Washington Post* by the four leaders projects the Quad as "a flexible group of like-minded partners dedicated to advancing a common vision and to ensuring peace and prosperity".

The summit and 'The Spirit of the Quad' - the inspired title of the joint statement - represented a giant leap forward. Now is the time to back political commitment with a strong mix of resolve, energy, stamina and the fresh ideas of stakeholders and experts outside of government to fulfil the promise of the Quad.

Rajiv Bhatia is Distinguished Fellow, Gateway House, and a former Ambassador to Myanmar and DCM in Jakarta

# The limits of POCSO

A recent judgment highlights the need to reconsider POCSO's absolutist approach to adolescent sexuality needs



SHRADDA CHAUDHARY

A single bench of the Madras High Court recently allowed a petition seeking to quash a case of kidnap, aggravated penetrative sexual assault and aggravated sexual assault of a minor. Aggravated penetrative sexual assault under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 is the equivalent provision for aggravated rape. A person can be charged with this offence in certain aggravating circumstances, such as if the rape occurs within a relationship of trust or authority, or if it leads to pregnancy, among others. Under POCSO, the consent of a person under the age of 18 is irrelevant, regardless of the nature and circumstance of the sexual interaction, or the particulars of the person with whom it takes place. This means that any sex with a minor is rape.

## Sexual tendencies of adolescents

The judgment echoes the arguments that child rights activists have been making for years: by ignoring the natural sexual tendencies of adolescents, POCSO can and does become a tool for the persecution of young people in consenting sexual relations. The court reasoned that adolescence and young adulthood form a continuum because of the physical, biological, neurological, and social changes that occur during this time. The implication is that people within this age group may be clubbed together notwithstanding the legal line drawn at 18. This informed the court's view of the relationship of the minor 'victim' with the accused respondent as being a loving, rather than an abusive, one.

The judgment concluded that the case could be quashed because it was purely individual in nature and doing so would not affect any overriding public interest. However, in doing this, it ignored the established precedent against quashing cases of rape, a heinous and serious offence, held by the Supreme Court to be a public concern, and not a private matter. Perhaps the court was persuaded in taking this course because of its observation that POCSO could not have been intended to bring such cases within its scope. In making this observation, the court relied on the Statement of Objects and Reasons of POCSO, which states that the law was enacted pursuant to Article 15 of the Constitution, which allows the state to make special provisions for women and children, and

the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to protect children from sexual assault, sexual harassment, and pornography.

However, neither the founding documents nor the listed categories of offences give a sense of what the limits of POCSO were meant to be. The Parliamentary Committee (Rajya Sabha) which considered the POCSO Bill, 2011 had, in fact, criticised the clause providing for the possibility of consent in cases of sexual intercourse with minors between the ages of 16 and 18. It believed that a uniform age of 18 would ensure that trials of child rape would focus on the conduct of the accused and the circumstances of the offence, instead of putting victims on trial as is often the case when the consent of the victim is in question. This would indicate that adolescent sexuality was not meant to be an exception to POCSO's bright-line approach.

The five State studies on the functioning of Special Courts under the POCSO Act, conducted by the Centre for Child and the Law, National Law School of India University, Bengaluru, have demonstrated that these de facto consensual cases are complicated. While adolescents can and do choose to have sex, it is a fact that they are still children, and their nascent sexual autonomy is susceptible to abuse. This contradiction created by the very nature of adolescence has led to inconsistent and unprincipled adjudication. The absolute age line of POCSO has not prevented the insensitive assessment of minors' consent. At the same time, it has forced courts to choose between applying the law and doing justice, especially in cases where the minor victim has willingly eloped with or married the accused or is carrying his child, for imprisoning him would only do her harm.

## A just verdict

Therefore, the judgment was intuitively just, even though it was not in line with precedent. It highlighted the urgent need for a reconsideration of the absolutist approach of POCSO when it comes to the sexual interactions of adolescents with other young people. Courts need to be able to strike a balance between the limited but developing capacity of adolescents to consent to sexual interaction and their vulnerability to being groomed, abused, and exploited. For this to be possible, the legislature must provide clarity on the core wrongs that POCSO is meant to address, so that valid conclusions may be drawn about what is the intent of the law, and what is clearly outside its purpose.

Shraddha Chaudhary is Lecturer, Jindal Global Law School, Sonipat, and PhD candidate at the Faculty of Law, University of Cambridge. She was a researcher for two of the five State studies referenced here

# Global leader in the post-Covid era

During the pandemic, India has initiated education reforms and become the pharmacy of the world

RAMESH POKHRiyAL 'NISHANK'

By virtue of extensive immunity due to oral vaccination, the last polio case was reported in India in January 2011. Subsequently, India was declared polio-free in 2014. The Government of India observes National Vaccination Day every year on March 16 to convey the importance of vaccination to its people. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the significance of this day becomes even more pertinent. The firm conviction of Prime Minister Narendra Modi ensured that Aatmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) has its own COVID-19 vaccine. I also congratulate my colleague Dr Harsh Vardhan and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for their perseverance and hard work. Indians will finally become healthier than before. This will help India emerge as a global leader in the post-COVID-19 era.

## Medicines are global goods

The Prime Minister realised early on that the challenges being posed by the pandemic would require a global solution. As most developed nations ramped up their efforts to vaccinate their respective populations, the developing countries ran dangerously behind, which could have meant another year of humanitarian and economic crisis for them. While developed countries engaged in vaccine nationalism, it became imperative that a universal, equitable, and affordable supply of vaccines was ensured for developing countries. I am proud that our initiative of making vaccines widely available for other developing countries firmly established India as the 'pharmacy of the world' and sent out the message that medical products must be dealt with as global public goods. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have been leading global efforts to mitigate the challenges by supplying medicines and generic drugs to other countries. This shows that while becoming *aatma nirbhar*, we are proving our mettle at the global level. As of March, we have supplied vaccines to over 70 countries while ensuring that our domestic demand is met.

I am proud that our educational institutions took the lead and transformed the challenges into oppor-

tunities. The IITs came up with incredible innovations like low-cost portable ventilators, affordable AI-powered COVID-19 test kits, drones for sanitisation, and cheap and effective PPE kits and masks. With the help of these innovations, we were able to provide healthcare facilities to our people. We even exported this equipment to different countries, which reflects our long adage philosophy of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*.

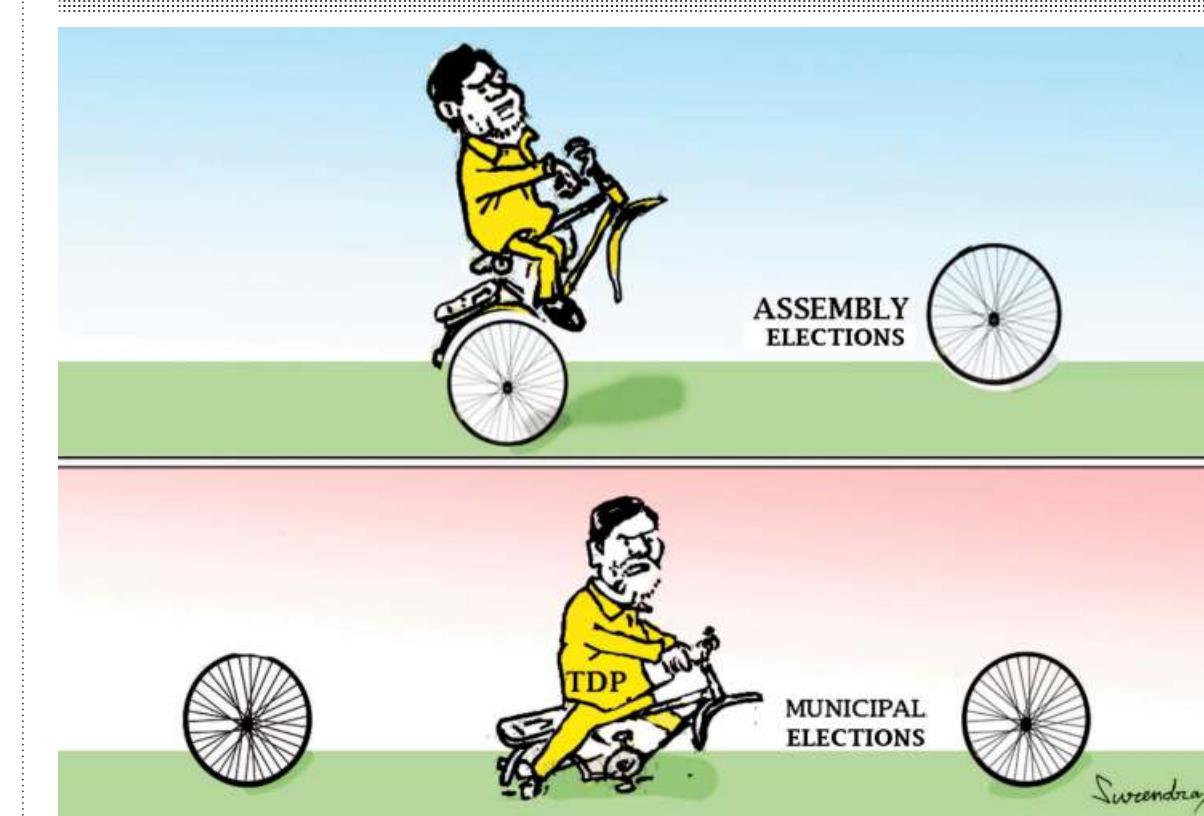
## Research and innovation

As we now step into a post-COVID era, it becomes more imperative to strengthen research and innovation. Through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, we have already taken a step forward in this direction. The NEP aims at improving the research and innovation landscape in India. It proposes that higher education institutions (HEIs) should focus on research and innovation by establishing start-up incubation centres, technology development centres and interdisciplinary research. The HEIs should also focus on developing mechanisms and organising competitions to promote innovation among student communities. To attain the highest global standards in education, the NEP also recommends setting up Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities, which will be on a par with IITs and IIMs.

Before the commencement of the next academic session 2021-22, the National Research Foundation (NRF) will be established under the Principal Scientific Adviser, which will transform India's research culture. I am glad that an outlay of ₹50,000 crore for the next five years has been allocated for NRF in the Budget.

The world will remember us for initiating the largest education reforms and emerging from the pandemic as a global leader. By taking the COVID-19 vaccine, the Prime Minister has given a solid boost to our vaccination drive and instilled confidence in the nation. I appeal to my dear citizens to come forward and be a part of the vaccine drive because it is only together that we can build a 'Swarnam Bharat (A Golden India)'.

Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' is Union Education Minister, Government of India

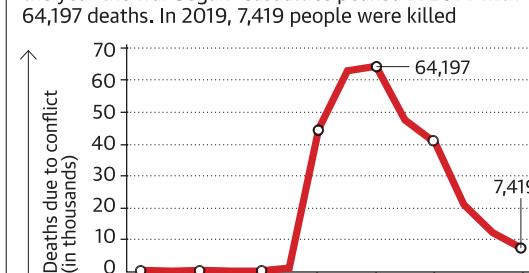


## DATA POINT

### Ten years of Syrian conflict

The civil war in Syria has claimed over 3.8 lakh lives, many of whom were civilians. It triggered a mass exodus of Syrians to nearby nations. The crisis also reduced Syria's international trade value to a fifth of what it was before the conflict

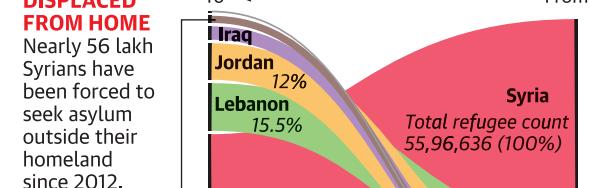
**CASUALTY COUNT** | The number of conflict-related deaths in Syria has decreased consistently since 2014, the year the war began. Casualties peaked in 2014 with 64,197 deaths. In 2019, 7,419 people were killed



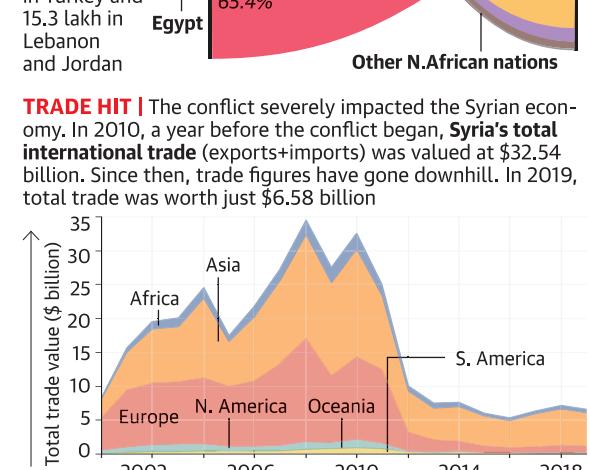
**HEAVY TOLL** | Over 1.17 lakh civilians, including 36,109 women and children, have died in the civil war since 2011. Around 2.71 lakh pro-regime and anti-regime forces have also been killed. The recorded death toll as of March 14 is 3.8 lakh

|            |        |          |        |                    |        |
|------------|--------|----------|--------|--------------------|--------|
| Men        | 81,279 | Children | 22,254 | Syrian militia     | 54,779 |
| Soldiers   | 68,308 | Women    | 13,855 | Jihadists          | 68,259 |
| Dissidents |        |          |        | Arab-Kurd alliance | 77,079 |

**DISPLACED FROM HOME** | Nearly 56 lakh Syrians have been forced to seek asylum outside their homeland since 2012. Of them, 36.6 lakh have sought refuge in Turkey and 15.3 lakh in Lebanon and Jordan



**TRADE HIT** | The conflict severely impacted the Syrian economy. In 2010, a year before the conflict began, Syria's total international trade (exports+imports) was valued at \$32.54 billion. Since then, trade figures have gone downhill. In 2019, total trade was worth just \$6.58 billion



Source: AFP, Syrian Observatory for Human Rights

The Hindu

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 16, 1971

Mujib takes over control in East Pak

Bangla Desh, as East Pakistanis have been calling their troubled land, was on the verge of unilateral independence to-day [March 15] with Awami League leader Sheikh Mujibur Rehman announcing that he was taking over control from the military authorities. Mr. Rehman made the announcement just as the ultimatum given by the Martial Law authorities to employees of defence undertakings who had been staying away from work in response to his call for non-co-operation was about to expire. He had earlier asked the employees to defy the ultimatum which threatened them with dismissal and imprisonment if they did not resume by 10 a.m. to-day. Mr. Rehman along with his announcement issued a 35-point directive for the administration of the province.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 16, 1921

Professor and his prejudice  
(From an editorial)

Professor F.J.C. Hearnshaw, a well-known student of European history and a great admirer of the orthodox variety of democracy, writes, in a recent book of his, with reference to Egypt and India: "I believe that if the real will of the inarticulate multitudes of both countries could be accurately ascertained, it would be found that what they ardently desire is not the setting up of a constitutional apparatus which they have not as yet

## FROM PAGE ONE

## Over 60% of OBC, SC posts are vacant in IIMs

In the second response, Mr. Nishank noted that the Ministry of Education and University Grants Commission continuously monitor vacancies, but put the final blame on universities themselves.

"However, the onus of filling up the teaching posts lies on Central Universities, which are autonomous bodies created under Acts of Parliament," he said.

In fact, in June 2019, Un-

iversity Grants Commission had written to all Universities, giving them a six month deadline to fill up their vacancies, and warning that grants would be withheld if its directions were violated.

According to the data presented in the Lok Sabha on Monday, there are now 6,074 vacant positions at the 42 universities, of which 75% are in reserved categories.

## One gets death for killing inspector in Batla House

Khan and another alleged IM operative Shehzad were also present at the hideout but had managed to escape.

"It has been proved on record that convict along with his accomplices fired at police officials on duty without any provocation. It is pertinent to mention here that the police team led by deceased Inspector Mohan Chand Sharma had gone to the place of occurrence only to nab the persons involved in Delhi blast cases," the court said.

**'No intention to kill'**  
"Police officials had no intention to kill the occupants of the flat," the court said, adding, "This is clear from the fact that the deceased Inspector Mohan Chand Sharma, who was leading the police team, knocked the door at the flat and disclosed his identity saying 'darwaza kholo, police hai'."

The court highlighted that some of the members of the advance team were not even carrying arms and that police officials did not fire at accomplice Mohd. Said, who had locked himself inside the bathroom and surrendered before the police officials.

"It is, therefore, obvious that convict Ariz Khan, along with his accomplices,

fired at police officials without being challenged, instinctively and while doing so killed one of the raiding police officials," it said.

**'Crime against State'**  
"The offence proved against accused is not an ordinary act but a crime against the State. Convict, while committing offence acted like a dreaded and well-trained terrorist who does not deserve any leniency," the court said.

It also reminded that deadly weapons like AK-47 and two pistols were retrieved from the flat where the shoot out took place.

"Considering the nature of devastation that these weapons can cause, it will be safe to conclude that these weapons were kept in the flat with a view to indulge in terrorist and anti-social activities," the court said.

The court also imposed a total fine of ₹1 lakh on Khan out of which ₹10 lakh will be released as compensation to the wife of the deceased officer.

A trial court in July 2013 had sentenced IM terrorist Shahzad Ahmed to life imprisonment in connection with the Batla House encounter case.

His appeal against the trial court's verdict is pending in the High Court.

## Laxity in COVID-19 protocols fuelling cases'

"Five States of Maharashtra, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu cumulatively account for 78.41% of the new cases reported in the past 24 hours with Maharashtra reporting the highest daily new cases at 16,620 (accounting for 63.21% of the daily new cases).

"It is followed by Kerala with 1,792 while Punjab reported 1,492 new cases," said the release.

**Three States**  
It added that three States – Maharashtra, Kerala and Punjab – cumulatively account for 77% of India's total active cases and Maharashtra alone accounts for more

than 58% of the total active cases in the country.

The State also accounts for the maximum number of single day recoveries at 8,861.

Six States account for 82.20% of the new COVID-19 deaths and Maharashtra saw the maximum casualties (50), Punjab followed with 20 daily deaths and Kerala reported 15 deaths in the last 24 hours.

"Sixteen States/UTs – Assam, Chandigarh, J&K (UT), Odisha, Jharkhand, Lakshadweep, Sikkim, Ladakh (UT) – have not reported any COVID-19 deaths in the last 24 hours," added the Ministry.

A pilot project launched in Kodagu entails installing bee boxes along the periphery of the forest and the villages with the belief that the elephants will not venture anywhere close to the bees and thus avoid transgressing into human landscape. This idea stems from the elephants' proven fear of the bees.

An initiative of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), Project RE-HAB (Re-

ducing Elephant-Human Attacks using Bees) intends to create "bee fences" to thwart elephant attacks in human habitations using honeybees.

The pilot project was launched at four locations

around Chelur village in Kodagu district by KVIC chairman Vinai Kumar Saxena on Monday.

These spots are located on the periphery of the Nagarhole National Park and Tiger Reserve, known conflict zone. The total cost of the

project is ₹15 lakh and Project RE-HAB is a sub-division of the KVIC's National Honey Mission.

The KVIC has set up 15 to 20 interspersed bee boxes at each of the four locations. The bee boxes are set up in the passage ways of human-elephant conflict zones to block the entrance of elephants to human habitations. The boxes are connected with a string so that when elephants attempt to pass through, a tug causes the bees to swarm the elephant herds and dissuade them from progressing further.

### Night vision cameras

Bee boxes have been placed on the ground as well as hung from the trees. High resolution, night vision came-

eras have been installed at strategic points to record the impact of bees on elephants and their behaviour. The biggest advantage of Project RE-HAB is that it dissuades elephants without causing any harm to them. It is extremely cost-effective as compared to various other measures such as digging trenches or erecting fences, according to Mr. Saxena.

Between 2015 and 2020, nearly 2,500 people have lost their lives in elephant attacks across India, of which 170 human fatalities have been reported in Karnataka alone, says the KVIC.

The KVIC has roped in the College of Forestry under the University of Agriculture and Horticultural Sciences, Ponnamperum, for impact assessment of the project.



Jumbo project: Bee boxes installed across the elephant paths by the KVIC as part of Project RE-HAB in Kodagu.

## Kerala CM Pinarayi files papers

LDF campaign picks up at Dharmadom; UDF yet to decide on candidate

C.P. SAJIT  
KANNUR

For the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Dharmadom in Kannur is its invincible bastion where none other than its Polit Bureau member and Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan is seeking re-election.

While the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front's (LDF) election campaign in the constituency is already on, the United Democratic Front (UDF) is yet to commence election work there as uncertainty continues over its candidate in the segment.

The Chief Minister, who is contesting from Dharmadom for the second time, filed his nomination papers at the Collectorate here on Monday.

Deemed a pocket borough of the CPI(M), Dharmadom epitomises for the party its sense of certainty about continuity of the LDF govern-



Re-election bid: Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan filing his nomination at the Kannur collectorate on Monday. ■ S.K. MOHAN

ment. Whereas in the UDF, uncertainty still prevails as G. Devarajan of the All India Forward Bloc, an ally of the front, has reportedly refused to take on Mr. Vijayan in the constituency.

### Strong candidate

Mr. Vijayan won the Assembly seat in 2016, defeating Mambaran Divakaran of the Congress with a huge margin

of 36,905 votes. Mr. Divakaran has made it known to the party leadership that he was not interested in contesting in the constituency this time.

Considering the need for a strong candidate in Dharmadom, some Congress leaders, including Mr. Divakaran, are learnt to have even suggested that Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee working president K. Sud-

hakaran be fielded against Mr. Vijayan.

In sharp contrast to the UDF's predicament in Dharmadom, the LDF's campaign continues apace after Mr. Vijayan started his public meeting soon after his arrival in the constituency on March 8.

A star campaigner of the LDF, he is expected to conclude his campaign tour there by March 16. He would be visiting the other districts in the coming days.

Meanwhile, the BJP, which is yet to begin its campaign in the constituency, has decided to field 71-year-old C.K. Padmanabhan, former State president of the party. Mr. Padmanabhan is a native of Kannur.

On Monday, Mr. Vijayan filed three sets of papers. He was accompanied by CPI(M) district secretary M.V. Jayarajan and CPI national council member C.N. Chandran.

## NIA raids 8 locations in Kerala terror case

Agency files case against 7 persons

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOCCHIKKAD

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) conducted simultaneous searches at eight locations in Kannur, Malappuram, Kollam and Kasaragod districts on Monday in connection with an alleged case of terror activity.

A group led by Mohammed Ameen, alias Abu Yahya, has been running various Islamic State (IS) propaganda channels on various social media platforms such as Telegram, Hoop and Instagram for propagating the ideology of the banned organisation and radicalising and recruiting new members to the IS module.

On Monday, Mr. Vijayan filed three sets of papers. He was accompanied by CPI(M) district secretary M.V. Jayarajan and CPI national council member C.N. Chandran.

18, 1B, 20, 38 and 40 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and Sections 120B, 121 and 121A of the Indian Penal Code.

In Kannur, raids took place at four houses belonging to members of a family. The search operations began at 4 a.m.

A communication from NIA said the group of radicalised individuals under the leadership of Mohammed Ameen, who owed allegiance to the proscribed terrorist organisation IS, had identified certain individuals in Kerala and Karnataka for targeted killing. They had also planned to undertake Hijra (religious migration) to Jammu and Kashmir for engaging in terrorist acts. Searches were conducted on the premises of Mohammed Ameen and his associates, the release said.

### IN BRIEF



Kathakali maestro Kunhiraman Nair no more  
KOZHIKODE  
Guru Chemancheri

Kunhiraman Nair, a recipient of Padma Shri, died here on Monday at the age of 104. He was a seasoned Kathakali actor and played a significant role in making Bharatanatyam popular in north Kerala.

### 14 woodcutters from T.N. held near Tirupati

CHITTOR  
The Andhra Pradesh State Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force personnel on Monday apprehended 14 woodcutters from Tamil Nadu and seized axes, provisions and liquor bottles at a forest location between Panapakkam and Ithepalle villages, the entry points to the Seshachalam hills.

### Jagan launches Temple Management System

VIJAYAWADA  
Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy inaugurated a comprehensive 'Temple Management System' on Monday, bringing all temples under one system of the Endowments Department. Devotees can access the services by logging on to the website <https://tms.ap.gov.in/>

### Tusker found dead on govt. land in Hassan

HASSAN  
A tusker aged between 15 and 18 was found dead in an abandoned government land near Uduvare in Sakleshpur taluk of Karnataka's Hassan district. The carcass, which was in a decomposed state, was noticed on Saturday. The tusks, 50 cm in length, were intact. Officers suspect that the death could be due to injuries due to infighting.

## Tamil Nadu CM, Stalin file nominations

State poised for five-cornered contest

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI

With Tamil Nadu poised for a five-cornered Assembly election, AIADMK co-coordinator and Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami, DMK president and Leader of the Opposition M.K. Stalin, other prominent leaders and several Ministers filed their nomination papers before the Returning Officers of their respective constituencies on Monday.

Mr. Palaniswami, the Chief Ministerial candidate of the ruling party, filed his nomination in the Edappadi constituency in Salem, from where he made his electoral debut in 1989. He has since represented the constituency thrice – 1991, 2011 and 2016.

He had begun his most recent Parliamentary election campaign, too, from there.

MNM founder Kamal Haasan, who is making his electoral debut, filed his nomination in the Coimbatore South constituency.

Mr. Stalin, who also entered the Assembly for the first time in 1989 from the Thousand Lights constituency, submitted his nomination papers before the Returning Officer of the Kolathur constituency, from where he was elected in 2011 and 2016. After filing his nomination, he headed to Tiruvarur, which elected his father and former Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi, and commenced campaigning.

He had begun his most recent Parliamentary election campaign, too, from there.

MNM founder Kamal Haasan, who is making his electoral debut, filed his nomination in the Coimbatore South constituency.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
BENGALURU

A city-based model and makeup artist, who accused a Zomato delivery man of attacking her over alleged delayed service, was booked by the police on Monday.

Hitesha Chandran has been charged with wrongful restraint, assault, intentional insult, and criminal intimidation based on a complaint by the delivery man.

"An FIR was registered against Hitesha, who claimed to be attacked by a Zomato delivery man," a police officer said.

According to the officer, Zomato delivery man Kamaraj had stated that Ms. Hitesha had hit him with slippers, accused him of defaming her and hurled

abuses at him on March 9.

Ms. Hitesha, meanwhile, deleted her video from Twitter that went viral based on which the police had arrested Mr. Kamaraj on March 10.

The model claimed in her video that she lodged a complaint with the Zomato customer care asking them to either deliver food free of cost or cancel the order after it was delayed.

Zomato, which initially assured Ms. Hitesha that it would help her with the police investigation, later clarified it was also with Mr. Kamaraj, extending all possible support. "As per protocol, we have temporarily suspended Kamaraj," Zomato founder Deepinder Goyal had said in a statement.

## HC orders issue of notice to Karnataka in Sasikala case

Plea seeks final report on probe into prison rules violation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
BENGALURU

The Karnataka High Court on Monday ordered issue of notice to the State government on a PIL petition seeking a direction to submit final report on alleged corruption in providing preferential facilities to V.K. Sasikala and her sister-in-law, Ilavarasi, who was undergoing sentence in a corruption case against former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalithaa.

A Division Bench, comprising Chief Justice Abhay Shreenivas Oka and Justice Suraj Govindaraj, passed the order on the petition filed by K.S. Gita, a 65-year-old social

worker and an educationist from Chennai.

The petitioner's counsel pointed out that a retired IAS officer, Vinay Kumar, had conducted an inquiry and submitted a 295-page report with several findings on the allegations of preferential treatment to Ms. Sasikala and her sister-in-law, Ilavarasi, who was undergoing sentence in the prison in the same case.

The petitioner contended that a criminal case related to alleged corruption in the Bengaluru Central Prison for providing preferential treatment to Ms. Sasikala and Ms. Ilavarasi was registered but no final report on the probe was submitted so far.

Following this, the advocate said he would find out the registration number of the criminal case and submit it to the court.

The Bench adjourned further hearing till April 22.



Jumbo project: Bee boxes installed across the elephant paths by the KVIC as part of Project RE-HAB in Kodagu.

around Chelur village in Kodagu district by KVIC chairman Vinai Kumar Saxena on Monday.

These spots are located on the periphery of the Nagarhole National Park and Tiger Reserve, known conflict zone. The total cost of the

### Night vision cameras

Bee boxes have been placed on the ground as well as hung from the trees. High resolution, night vision came-

# Centre to expand air bubble pact with more countries

Govt. expects Gulf countries to facilitate return of Indians: Jaishankar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Monday told the Rajya Sabha that the government wanted to expand the "air bubble" arrangement with more countries, and the priority would be Saudi Arabia, Kuwait in the west and Japan, China and Singapore in the east.

"These are the countries where bubbles have not worked so well," Mr. Jaishankar told the Rajya Sabha.

Under the air bubble scheme, commercial airlines from specific countries are allowed to travel to and from India on a limited basis – an arrangement that was solely reserved for the Air India under the Vande Bharat mission – as full-scale international commercial air operations are yet to resume after the COVID-19 restrictions were implemented last year.



Point of view: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar speaking in the Lok Sabha on Monday. PTI

partner countries.

He said, so far, air transport bubble arrangements had been concluded with 27 countries.

The Minister said India was fully aware of the employment concerns of people working abroad and expected Gulf countries to facilitate the early return of those people who were compelled to return home.

"From our recent interactions, we have reason to expect that partner governments in the Gulf would be helpful in facilitating the early return of many who were compelled to go back because of the pandemic," he told the Lok Sabha.

## 45 lakh repatriated

Calling it as the world's biggest repatriation exercise that saw more than 45 lakh people return home under the Vande Bharat Mission, Mr. Jaishankar said the focus had now shifted to Indians going back to their usual places of work, study and domicile and restoring employment opportunities abroad with the help of

the U.K., we also have concerns about its repetitious impact," the Minister said, responding to an incident of racism faced by an Indian student.

BJP's Ashwini Vaishnav mentioned during Zero Hour that Rashmi Samant was "cyberbullied" and forced to resign as president of the Oxford University Students Union.

The Minister said while

international crude price stood at \$19 per barrel in March 2020, it was now \$65 per barrel.

# No proposal to bring petrol, diesel under GST: Nirmala

Centre, States should work together to reduce fuel tax: Thakur

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

External Affairs minister S. Jaishankar told the Rajya Sabha on Monday that India will take up incidents of racism with United Kingdom "with great candour when required".

"I do want to say, that as the land of Mahatma Gandhi, we can never ever turn our eyes away from racism wherever it is, particularly, so when it is in a country where we have such a large diaspora. As a friend of the U.K., we also have concerns about its repetitious impact," the Minister said, responding to an incident of racism faced by an Indian student.

"If any State feels that petroleum products should be brought under GST then the Centre has no objection in discussing it," Mr. Thakur said.

However, while answering a supplementary question during the Question Hour, Mr. Thakur said the government was ready to discuss the issue.

"If any State feels that petroleum products should be brought under GST then the Centre has no objection in discussing it," Mr. Thakur said.

"They [migrant workers] did not get the benefits they

If any State feels that petroleum products should be brought under GST, then the Centre has no objection in discussing it

The Centre is ready to consider the idea of reducing the tax on petrol and diesel, the States should also consider it

ANURAG THAKUR,  
MINISTER OF STATE FOR FINANCE



international crude price stood at \$19 per barrel in March 2020, it was now \$65 per barrel.

"The Centre is ready to consider the idea of reducing the tax on petrol and diesel, the States should also consider it," Mr. Thakur added.

"There were instances where someone donated the entire pension amount to PM Cares Fund. Even those who got wages through MNREGA scheme also donated money to the PM Cares Fund just to help others," Mr. Thakur said.

"But there is one family in the country who created the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation and did the job of filling their accounts..."

Key road in Ladakh being constructed'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Centre has informed a parliamentary panel that a "standalone project" to build a critical road along the border with China in Ladakh is going on.

The panel was also informed that all along the China border, the construction of 57 roads, construction and refurbishing of 32 helipads, development of 47 outposts and twelve staging camps for the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, and the construction of 18 foot tracks in Arunachal Pradesh were currently under progress.

The details were mentioned in a department-related standing committee report on demands for grants for the fiscal year 2021-22 that was presented in the Rajya Sabha on Monday. The committee is headed by Congress leader Anand Sharma.

India and China are engaged in a face-off in various pockets in eastern Ladakh since April last year after China stopped Indian patrols in the Finger area of Pangong Lake. While the Indian and Chinese troops have disengaged from the north and south banks of the lake in February, the build-up continues at Depsang plains, Galwan, Gogra-Hot Springs.

Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla informed the panel that the Ministry of Home Affairs had focused on "border infrastructure" and in the 2020-21 fiscal, the government had sanctioned the Phase II of the Indo-China Border Road (ICBR-II) programme. "This programme covers many roads, foot tracks and border out posts," the report said. The panel held sittings on February 16, 17 and 22, where officials apprised that there are 11 demands for grants administered by the Ministry.

The report said till November 2020, the total length of road constructed along the China border stood at 538.50 km.

# Railways ignored the plight of migrant workers: Opposition

MP from Arunachal raises lack of infrastructure at borders

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The mass exodus of migrant labourers on foot and the subsequent running of Shramik Express trains, while the treasury benches lauded the provision of trains and their frequency.

Congress MP Deepak Bajaj said the "government only woke up when the common man came on to the streets".

Anurag Sharma of the BJP, however, said the Lalitpur-Jhansi area saw the running of eight trains to transport nearly 4.5 lakh people returning home during the lockdown.

Interestingly, BJP MP from Arunachal Pradesh Tapir

charge labourers returning to their home towns on Shramik Express trains, while the treasury benches lauded the provision of trains and their frequency.

Congress MP Deepak Bajaj said the "government only woke up when the common man came on to the streets".

Anurag Sharma of the BJP, however, said the Lalitpur-Jhansi area saw the running of eight trains to transport nearly 4.5 lakh people returning home during the lockdown.

Mr. Goyal will reply to the debate on Tuesday.

# Haryana, T.N. institutes get national importance tag

Govt. allays fears over reservation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha on Monday passed the National Institutes of Food Technology Entrepreneurship and Management Bill, 2019, that confers the status of national importance on two food technology institutes at Kundli in Haryana and Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu.

Congress leader L. Hanumanthaiah and DMK's Tiruchi Siva expressed doubts over the implementation of the reservation policy in the institutions. Replying to the debate, Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar said

all policies of national importance would be implemented and reservation would be applicable in the institutes. He also assured that all people working in food technology have representation. The law provides for Parliament to have a say in them too, Mr. Tomar said.

"This bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha in February, 2019. Thereafter it was referred to the Standing Committee. There were certain amendments there which were approved by the Cabinet. Now it again came up for discussion in the House."

# ₹2,000 notes not printed since 2019, govt. tells LS

Fall in quantum of notes in circulation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

As of February 26, 2021, 2,499 million pieces of ₹2,000 notes were in circulation, constituting 2.01% and 17.78% of banknotes in terms of volume and value, respectively.

Printing of banknotes of a particular denomination is decided by the government in consultation with the RBI to maintain desired denomination mix for facilitating transactional demand of the public. "During the years 2019-20 and 2020-21, no indent has been placed with the presses for printing of ₹2,000 denomination banknotes," he said.

In a written reply, Minister of State for Finance Anurag Singh Thakur said 3,362 million currency notes of ₹2,000 denomination were in circulation on March 30, 2018, constituting 3.27% and 37.26% of the currency in terms of volume and trade respectively.

Any such classification will be discriminatory, it tells SC

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Centre told the Supreme Court on Monday that prioritising COVID-19 vaccination on the basis of profession will amount to "discrimination" and is against larger national interests. It was responding to a PIL to include judges, lawyers and court staff in the "prioritised group of population who will get the COVID-19 vaccine first".

"Any specific classification, either based upon the nature of trade, profession or otherwise, is neither possible nor advisable," the Union Health Ministry said in its affidavit.

Those in the legal fraternity who were above 60 or between 45 and 59 and suffering from a very long and exhaustive list of comorbidities would in any case be covered by the vaccine drive, the government, represented by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, reasoned.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, for Bharat Biotech, said it would become an impossible situation "if every High Court starts asking us questions about the vaccination – 'like how much drug will you give, when will you give, etc, etc'". It will be better if Your Lordships call forth all the cases and decide them finally". Chief Justice Bobde agreed to hear them on March 18.

# GOVERNMENT OF INDIA MINISTRY OF AYUSH

Invites applications for the post of  
DIRECTOR GENERAL

CENTRAL COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH IN HOMOEOPATHY  
For details log in to: <http://www.ayush.gov.in> or <http://ccrhindia.nic.in> or refer to detailed advertisement published in the Employment News issue dated 13th March, 2021.

Applications should reach the undersigned within two months from the date of publication of the advertisement in the Employment News.

Dr. S. R. Chinta, Dy. Adviser (H)  
Ministry of AYUSH

Asking for the post of  
DIRECTOR GENERAL

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NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER

No. NIIST/65/ESD-C/E-NIT (1)/2021-22 Dated: 15-March-2021

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Ministry of AYUSH

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

GUVNL invites Tenders for procurement of 100 MW

Solar Power through Competitive Bidding (followed by e-

reverse auction) from grid connected Solar PV Power

Projects to be located in 700 MW Raghunesda Solar

Park, Gujarat through RFS No. GUVNL / 100 MW / Solar

(Phase X-R) dated 15.03.2021. For tender documents

(RFS, PPA) please visit the website <https://www.bharat-electronic-tender.com> and [www.guvnl.com](http://www.guvnl.com). The last

date of bid submission is 12.04.2021.

Date: 15-03-2021

General Manager (IPP)

DIPR/626P/CL, Dt:15.03.2021 Sd/- Chief Engineer / Zone / KADAPA

TRANSMISSION CORPORATION OF ANDHRA PRADESH LIMITED

E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE

The APTRANSCO invites bids online. APT (Const-KADAPA) e-02/2021-

Erection of 132 KV Kalasamudram RTSS and connected line from

132 KV Kothapalli SS and 2nd strg on 132 KV DC/SC Line from 220KV

Mutyalacheruvu to Kottpalli SS in Anantapuram (Dt) on turnkey basis.

Date & Availability of tenders in <http://www.aptronco.com> on 13-03-2021 at 5.00 PM. Officer inviting bids - Chief Engineer / Zone / KADAPA

Kadapa Ph: 0856-241319, 9490153079.

DIPR/626P/CL, Dt:15.03.2021 Sd/- Chief Engineer / Zone / KADAPA

TRANSMISSION CORPORATION OF ANDHRA PRADESH LIMITED

e-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE

The APTRANSCO invites bids online. APT (Const-KADAPA) e-02/2021-

Erection of 132 KV Kalasamudram RTSS and connected line from

132 KV Kothapalli SS

Follow 2015 rules for quota in panchayat polls in U.P.

OMAR RASHID  
LUCKNOW

The Allahabad High Court on Monday directed the Uttar Pradesh government to implement reservation and allotment of seats in the panchayat polls as per the 2015 rules as it quashed a recent government order regarding reservation in the rural body polls.

The Lucknow Bench also directed the State government to complete the entire exercise of reservations by March 27 and hold the elections by May 10.

**'Govt. order ignored'**

The order was passed by the court on a PIL seeking quashing of the government order dated February 11 arguing that it proceeded to reserve seats by taking 1995 as the base year instead of 2015, ignoring the government order of September 2015.

Counsel for the petitioner Ajay Kumar said that in the government order of September 16, 2015 it was indicated that due to substantial demographic changes in the districts of the State in the Gram panchayat and Kshetra Panchayat territories in view of the census of 2001 and 2011, it was no longer conducive to have 1995 as the base year for purposes of applying reservation as per Rule 4 of Rules of 1994.

**Reservation cap breach**  
It was also submitted by the counsel for petitioner that the provisions for reservation as brought by the fresh government order would result in more than 60% seats in a district being reserved, which would be violative of various judgments of the Supreme Court and that it would also violate the maximum cap fixed with respect to reservation of Backward Class, 27%.

## Will uproot all conspirators: Mamata

'Well-being of people important than my own pain'

SHIV SAHAY SINGH  
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday resumed her campaign in districts with a strong message that she would uproot those conspiring against her.

"My leg will heal in the next few years. I will see whether your legs can move freely on Bengal's soil," she said at the Jhalda rally in Purulia.

On the injury she sustained during her campaign in Nandigram on March 10, when she was allegedly pushed to the ground by miscreants, she said some may have thought "I will not be able to go out at all with my broken leg, but [for me] people's well-being is far more important than my own pain". She said she was a "street fighter" and had suffered many injuries in life.

**'PM cannot run nation'**  
At another rally at Balarampur in the same district, she also raised the issue of the



**Open challenge:** West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee at a rally in Purulia on Monday. ■ PTI

BJP nominating four sitting MPs in Bengal. She said they had done nothing for the welfare of the State and wondered if they would be "peddling lies and engineering riots".

Ms. Banerjee asked what

the 18 MPs of the BJP had done for the State. She raised the issue of rise in fuel prices and disinvestment of PSUs. "Their Prime Minister cannot run the country, [he is] totally incompetent."

She also targeted Union

Home Minister Amit Shah for addressing the rally at Jhargram virtually. She alleged that the rally was called off because of lack of response. "Had he requested, we would have sent some people to the venue," she said.

**Reject her nomination, says Suvendu**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
KOLKATA

Suvendu Adhikari, the BJP candidate pitted against Mamata Banerjee in Nandigram, said on Monday that he had sought the rejection of the West Bengal Chief Minister's nomination for not declaring the six criminal cases filed against her, while filing her papers.

The petition said candidates 'rejected' by voters should not be fielded again in the fresh polls.

Mr. Adhikari, a former confidant of Ms. Banerjee, claimed that she had suppressed information about five cases filed in Assam and another lodged by the CBI in West Bengal.

He said he had mentioned the case numbers in his complaint to the Election Commission (EC), but did not elaborate on the offences allegedly committed by the Trinamool Congress supremo. A senior EC official said the matter was being looked into.

No immediate reaction was available from the Trinamool Congress.

## Call for fresh polls if NOTA tops count

SC seeks response from Centre, ECI

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday asked the Centre and the Election Commission of India to respond to a plea that fresh elections should be conducted in constituencies where the highest number of votes polled are NOTA (None Of The Above).

The petition said candidates 'rejected' by voters should not be fielded again in the first place...

The petition noted how parties spent crores of rupees on the candidates.

The CJI also flagged during the hearing the issue whether a political party could influence voters to not vote in a particular constituency.

However, Ms. Guruswamy prevailed, which led the court to agree to examine the issue raised in the petition. "Political parties choose contesting candidates in a very undemocratic manner without consulting electors. That is why many times people are totally discontented with candidates presented before them. This problem can be solved by holding a fresh election if maximum votes are polled in favour of NOTA," the petition said.

"It is a constitutional problem. If your argument is accepted and there is a certain number of NOTAs, then the constituency will go unrepresented in the Parliament... How will the Parlia-

## Mahajot loses sleep over new party in Assam

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI

The Assam United Democratic Front formed by AIUDF leaders denied ticket has put up two candidates in central Assam and are likely to field a few more in western Assam.

Nurul Amil Choudhury, contesting the Rupophiha seat, said the AUDF candidates would be contesting as Independents but under +

Denied tickets, some AIUDF leaders have formed a party with a similar name – Assam United Democratic Front (AUDF). They have put up two candidates in central Assam and are likely to field a few more in western Assam.

Days after adding two more parties to its Mahajot or grand alliance, a new minority-based party has made the Congress and ally All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) lose sleep in a few constituencies.

## What about pain of kin of slain BJP cadre: Shah

130 workers were killed in politics of violence, Home Minister tells Mamata

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday broke his silence on the injury of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and wished her speedy recovery but asked why she could not feel the pain of the families of 130 BJP workers killed because of the politics of violence," Mr. Shah said at a public meeting at Ranibandh in Bankura district.

Mr. Shah said while the Trinamool Congress leadership claimed that there was a big conspiracy behind Ms. Banerjee's injury, the Election Commission said it was an accident. "Only God knows what the truth is," the Home Minister said.

The Trinamool leadership

after the leg injury. But I want to ask you if you feel the pain of the families of 130 BJP workers killed because of the politics of violence," Mr. Shah said at a public meeting at Ranibandh in Bankura district.

Mr. Shah said while the Trinamool Congress leadership claimed that there was a big conspiracy behind Ms. Banerjee's injury, the Election Commission said it was an accident. "Only God knows what the truth is," the Home Minister said.

The Trinamool leadership



**Mission Bengal:** Home Minister Amit Shah addressing a meeting at Ranibandh in Bankura district on Monday. ■ ANI

had questioned the silence of senior BJP leaders, particularly Mr. Shah and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the injury.

Ms. Banerjee was injured

while campaigning in Nandigram on March 10. She was discharged from hospital on March 12 and started campaigning on March 14 on a wheelchair.

Mr. Shah tried to woo the tribal population by promising among other things hassle-free tribal certificate. "The Trinamool seeks cut money even for a tribal certificate. We will ensure the land rights of the tribals. Special focus will be given to education, health and drinking water for the tribals," he said.

Mr. Shah was scheduled to address a rally in Jhargram district but could not make it to the venue after his helicopter developed glitches.

Many Assembly seats located in Purulia, Jhargram and Bankura districts located in south-west Bengal will go to the polls in the first phase on March 27.

## 10 lakh bank employees on two-day strike

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Public sector bank employees under the banner of the United Forum of Bank Unions, an umbrella organisation of nine trade unions, on Monday struck work to protest against the government's plan to privatise public sector banks.

In a statement, the All-India Bank Employees Association said nearly 10 lakh employees, officers and managers began a two-day strike on Monday. "In view of the decision announced in the Budget that in addition to IDBI Bank, two public sector banks would be privatised, the UFBU has given the call for strike on March 15 and 16," the statement said.

In its complaint, the Defence Ministry said there was sufficient evidence of culpability of the service personnel and others named. The racket was detected following an input received by the Army on February 27.

The union said privatisation of banks would lead to loss of employment.

## India's arms imports down by 33%

Drop seems mainly due to complex procurement process: Swedish think tank

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Arms imports decreased by 33% between 2011-15 and 2016-20 while India continues to remain the second largest arms importer after Saudi Arabia, according to a report from Swedish think tank Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

"The overall drop in arms imports between 2011-15 and 2016-20 seems to be mainly due to its complex and lengthy procurement processes, combined with its attempts to reduce its dependence on Russian arms by diversifying its network of arms suppliers," the report released on Monday said.

### Russia largest supplier

The report said Russia was the largest arms supplier in both years. "However, Rus-



One of the Rafale jets India bought from France. ■ R. V. MOORTHY

sia's deliveries dropped by 53% between the two periods and its share of Indian arms imports fell from 70 to 49%."

The U.S. was the second largest arms supplier to India in 2011-15 but in 2016-20 India's arms imports from the U.S. were 46% lower than in the previous five-year period, making the U.S. the fourth largest supplier in 2016-20.

France and Israel were

the second and third largest arms suppliers in 2016-20. "India's arms imports from France increased by 70% while those from Israel rose by 82%," the report said adding that combat aircraft and associated missiles made up more than 50% of arms imports.

The report said as India perceives increasing threats from Pakistan and China and as its ambitious plans to produce its own major arms

have been significantly delayed, it is planning large-scale programmes for arms imports. "Based on its outstanding deliveries of combat aircraft, air defence systems, ships and submarines, India's arms imports are expected to increase over the coming five years," it said.

### Pak. imports

Arms imports by Pakistan between 2011-15 and 2016-20 decreased by 23%. China accounted for 61% of its imports in 2011-15 and for 74% in 2016-20.

Like India, Pakistan too has several large outstanding orders for arms, according to the report. They are scheduled for delivery by 2028 and include 50 combat aircraft, eight submarines and four frigates from China and four frigates from Turkey, the report said.

"The team has traversed a total distance of 20 km in super high-altitude conditions scrupulously crossing the Baralacha La in the Zanskar range on foot amidst sub-zero freezing conditions, frequent avalanches and slides with 15 to 20 feet snow accumulation," the statement said.

## BRO plans to open key pass to Leh ahead of schedule

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

For the first time ever, the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has started work on reopening the crucial Baralacha Pass in Himachal Pradesh much before schedule to restore connectivity to Leh in Ladakh, an Army statement said.

Amid the stand-off with China in eastern Ladakh last year, the BRO had kept crucial passes open for longer duration enable the Army to undertake advanced winter stocking for the thousands of troops deployed in Ladakh.

"The team has traversed a total distance of 20 km in super high-altitude conditions scrupulously crossing the Baralacha La in the Zanskar range on foot amidst sub-zero freezing conditions, frequent avalanches and slides with 15 to 20 feet snow accumulation," the statement said.

### Adverse weather

Stating that the air recce for air induction of the snow clearance team from Sitingiri to Sarchu was carried out on March 3, the statement said the aim of this induction was to clear Baralacha Pass using two attack points from Patsio and Sarchu side each to achieve connectivity to Leh. However, air induction of the team could not take place in the subsequent days due to inclement weather.

To avoid further delay, it was decided to march the party on foot with rations, spare parts and communication equipment. After two failed attempts, it finally reached the destination on March 14.

They took bribes for recruitment'

DEVESHK PANDEY  
NEW DELHI

The CBI on Monday conducted searches at 30 locations across 13 cities in connection with a case against 23 people, including five Lieutenant Colonels, two Majors and others, for their alleged involvement in a recruitment scam in the Army.

The case involving 17 Army officers and personnel has been registered on a complaint from the Defence Ministry's Integrated Headquarters, alleging that they took bribes for the selection of officers and other ranks through the Service Selection Board (SSB). "Searches were conducted in Delhi, Lucknow, Gorakhpur and Bareilly; Kapurthala and Bathinda; Kaithal and Pal-

wal in Haryana; Jaipur; Guwahati, Jorhat and Chirgaon in Assam and Visakhapatnam," said a CBI official.

The FIR identifies Naib Subedar Kuldeep Singh of the Base Hospital at Delhi Cantonment as the middleman. He allegedly sought the assistance of Lt. Col. MVNSA Bhagwan of the Army Air Defence Corps, currently on a study leave in Visakhapatnam, in helping some candidates clear SSB. Lt. Col. Bhagwan is accused of being the mastermind.

In its complaint, the Defence Ministry said there was sufficient evidence of culpability of the service personnel and others named. The racket was detected following an input received by the Army on February 27.

The union said privatisation of banks would lead to loss of employment.

The court discovered that the divertors, with their recurring costs, would end costing more than installing and maintaining underground lines. But the court

submitted that only low voltage lines can go underground but not the high voltage ones.

The court found further that an alternative mechanism – to install flight bird divertors – to guide the birds

away from the power lines would be expensive.

The court agreed to further hear the case next week.

Attorney General K.K. Venugopal, appearing for the Power Ministry, however

stated that the air recce for air induction of the snow clearance team from Sitingiri to Sarchu was carried out on March 3, the statement said the aim of this induction was to clear Baralacha Pass using two attack points from Patsio and Sarchu side each to achieve connectivity to Leh. However, air induction of the team could not take place in the subsequent days due to inclement weather.

To avoid further delay, it was decided to march the party on foot with rations, spare parts and communication equipment. After two failed attempts, it finally reached the destination on March 14.

CM YK

It mists underground cables to prevent deaths due to collision with power lines



**Death trap:** Power companies say a diminishing habitat is the bigger threat for the birds.

submitted that only low voltage lines can go underground but not the high voltage ones.

The court discovered that the divertors, with their recurring costs, would end costing more than installing and maintaining underground lines. But the court

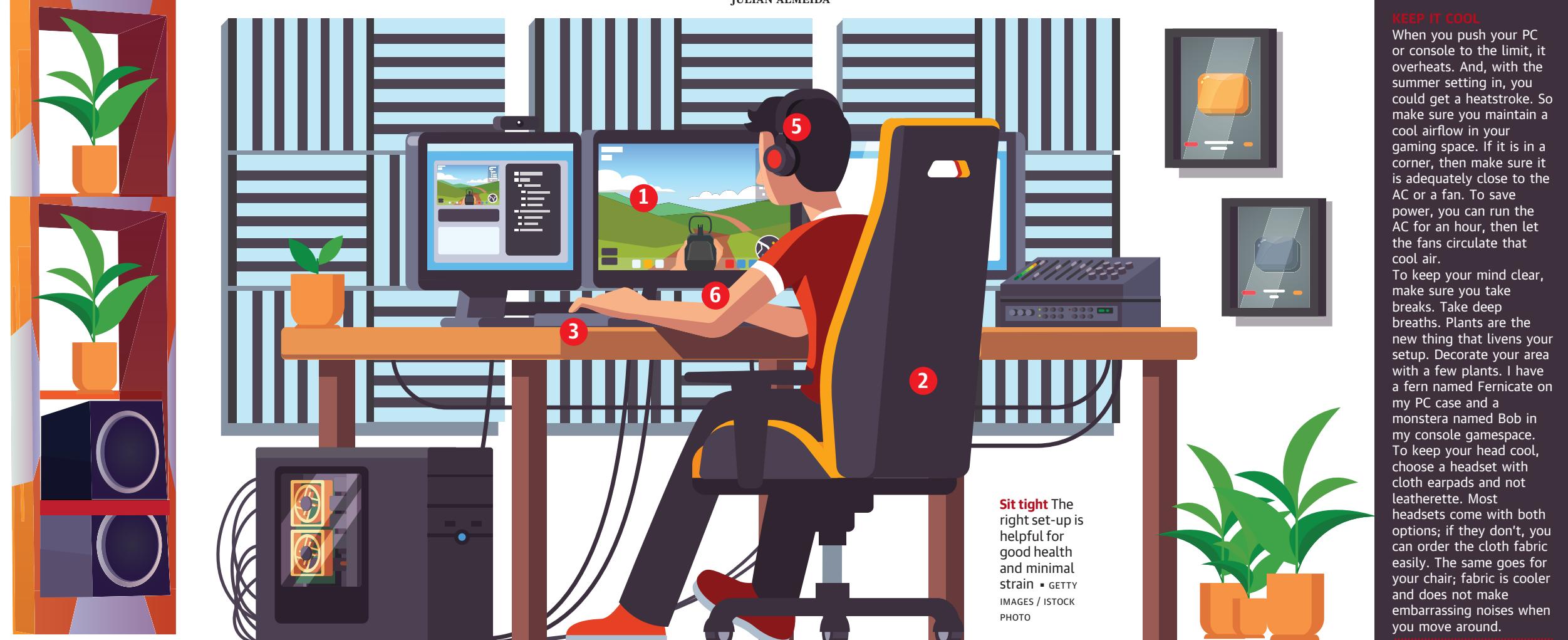
submitted that only low voltage lines can go underground but not the high voltage ones.

The court found further that an alternative mechanism – to install flight bird divertors – to guide the birds

# How to build the ULTIMATE GAMING CRIB

Set-up is everything. Here's some advice on how to kick off a love for video games, for any budget

JULIAN ALMEIDA



**Sit tight** The right set-up is helpful for good health and minimal strain ■ GETTY IMAGES / ISTOCK PHOTO

**KEEP IT COOL**  
When you push your PC or console to the limit, it overheats. And, with the summer setting in, you could get a heatstroke. So make sure you maintain a cool airflow in your gaming space. If it is in a corner, then make sure it is adequately close to the AC or a fan. To save power, you can run the AC for an hour, then let the fans circulate that cool air.

To keep your mind clear, make sure you take breaks. Take deep breaths. Plants are the new thing that livens your setup. Decorate your area with a few plants. I have a fern named Fernicate on my PC case and a monstera named Bob in my console gamespace. To keep your head cool, choose a headset with cloth earpads and not leatherette. Most headsets come with both options; if they don't, you can order the cloth fabric easily. The same goes for your chair; fabric is cooler and does not make embarrassing noises when you move around.

## 1. Monitor

Having a good monitor can make all the difference. You do not, however, need to break the bank and buy a massive 4K monitor. You could go with a 2K setup up to 32 inches. You would benefit more from a 4K setup if you are going for something bigger than that. But remember: with 4K, the prices will increase significantly. Instead, you could save yourself some money and get a 2K high refresh-rate monitor with GSync or FreeSync. Curved and Ultrawide monitors are another story. Ultrawide is perfect for productivity. Go for them if you like your games to extend up to your peripheral vision. Curved monitors are worth buying only in larger sizes. It will reduce neck strain. But you have to get used to the curve though. If you are looking at a 27-inch curved display, do not bother buying it unless it is ultrawide. Also, prioritise a refresh-rate of 75hz and above; your eyes will thank you later.

## 2. Gaming chairs

Gaming chairs, modelled after racing car seats, have grown in popularity. With styles and colours to match your gaming setup, it screams out you are a serious gamer to anyone who happens to spot it on a video call. Buying a gaming chair online can be a daunting task as you cannot test it. It is important to check if it has an adjustable lumbar support in addition to the height and backrest settings. Also, these chairs tend to be heavy. So, make sure you look at the support and base – it should be made of metal with a low percentage of plastic; else it will not last long and could even cause injury. You could go for the ones with the back massagers. Gaming chairs are usually expensive. Make sure you research a bit, or consult a sports medicine doctor for more specifics.

## 3. Keyboard

Get yourself a large anti-chafing desk mat, first. There are many options with snazzy prints and RGB lighting that will be perfect for placing your mechanical keyboard. You can either opt for an off-the-shelf mechanical keyboard or you can go down that rabbit hole of building your own – from mechanical switches to keycaps to body in 60% to numpad-less 100%



## 4. Lighting

A good lighting setup will accentuate your gaming experience. With the smart bulbs and LEDs available, your setup will look amazing. There are other benefits to a good RGB lighting setup other than making your gamespace look like a Navratri party. Having a backlight reduces eye strain, especially if you like gaming in the dark to avoid glare. There are several kits to get you started. Some of the advanced ones sync the lighting to what you see on screen (check out the Philips Ambilight solutions). Just make sure you position the light so it bounces off your walls to create an aesthetic ambience. Also, choose warmer colours at night.

## 5. Sound

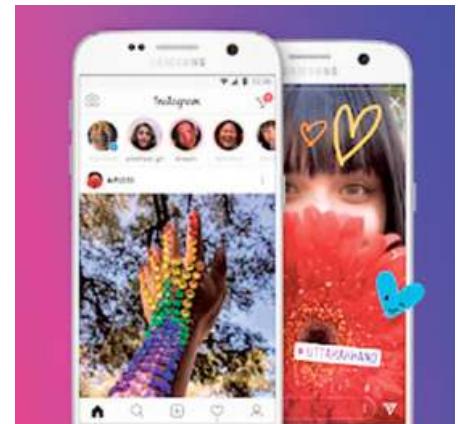
There are way too many options out there for sound. You can opt for a system that fits your budget. I use a 1984 Bose Acoustimass, which is the perfect music and gaming companion. When you are buying, think about the desk space and placement so that you get the perfect sound. If a speaker system is far too expensive for you, you could consider a good gaming headset. SteelSeries and HyperX have some beautiful wired and wireless options. If you want one of the best though, you can go for the Audeze Mobius with Planar Magnetic drivers and head tracking.

## 6. Mouse

Gaming mice are varied and too many to list. When choosing one, make sure you know which grip you use. Choosing the wrong grip could cause discomfort and sometimes worse – like carpal tunnel syndrome.



## Same Instagram, different size



ISHAN PATRA

Instagram, as an app, eats up data like the hungriest of Pacmans. Now, Facebook has launched 'Instagram Lite' in 170 countries to provide access to its popular photo and video sharing platform to people living in rural and remote communities, using minimal data. The new app requires only 2 megabytes to download on Android, considerably less than the full-sized version, which is closer to 30 megabytes, but retains the key features that people using entry-level devices want, the Facebook-owned company said in an official release.

Facebook's post continues, "Slightly more than 63% of the world's population is online, as opposed to nearly 90% in North America. And many of the regions that are connected do not possess the most up-to-date mobile devices, robust internet networks, or affordable data plans needed for the swift delivery of the data-rich videos and images found on Instagram. For instance, only around 50% of households in India have access to the Internet."

Instagram Lite is available for download in Google Play Store in 170 countries, and will be rolled out globally soon, it added. To keep the features on the smaller app, the team took a page from Facebook Lite, by offloading much of the code from the app into the cloud. Facebook removed much of the ornate, data-rich animation, such as cube transitions and the AR filters. However, it retained features that need less data, such as GIFs and stickers.

# Forever PRESSING PLAY

DIVYA KALA BHAVANI

Last week Lou Ottens, inventor of the cassette tape, passed away. We speak with collectors about why this medium will always remain special

For radio loyalists, vintage music collectors, and historians, the passing of Lou Ottens was a sobering moment.

Hyderabad-based Bass artiste, DJ and RJ Bala Subramanyam, better known as Daka Dub, says he was taken aback by how truly upset he was when he heard the news of Ottens' death on March 6. "I looked at my collection of tapes and was amazed at how one person changed the lives of musicians, tech experts and others with one tiny invention."

Bala is especially intrigued by the history of Ottens' love for audio. The Dutch inventor in-

dulged a curiosity in experimenting with radios when he was a teenager, even going so far as to build one himself from scratch so that he and his parents could tune into the Radio Oranje in the Netherlands in the late 1930s. He modified the radio with a directional antenna to avoid Nazi German radio jammers.

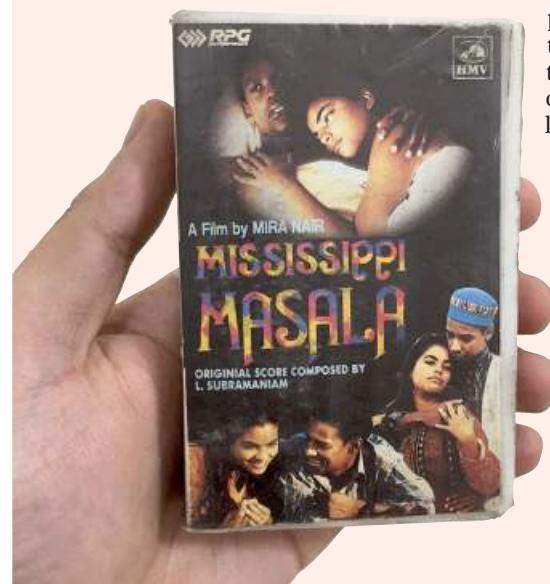
In the 1950s, Ottens' love for tech would take him to university where he earned an engineering degree and then a career at Philips. This was where he would develop the EL3585, Philips' first portable tape recorder. Like the

light bulb and Coca Cola, Ottens' cassette tape would be an 'accidental invention', that was actually born out of annoyance with the bulkier tape systems of the time.

In 1963, he would stun the



**The cassette tape's status as a cultural artefact has encouraged a new generation of collectors across India in the recent years**



**Rewind, please** Lou Ottens; Nishant's 'Mississippi Masala' soundtrack cassette tape ■ AFP, SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

world at an electronics fair with the cassette tape that was "smaller than a pack of cigarettes," as per his catchy slogan. He quickly patented the technology with Sony and Philips once the technology was recreated in Japan, at a lower standard.

**A new generation**  
Since then, the cassette tape remains a beloved medium for music and other audio experiences, especially in India when the cinema boom was happening in tandem. Its status as a cultural artefact has encouraged a new generation of collectors in the recent years, reminding us of belt-hooked Walkmans and painstaking efforts in manual rewinding and fast forwarding.

Now, e-commerce seller sites sell 'mint condition' cassette tape collections for up to ₹15,000 – a far cry from the ₹30 to ₹50 price range for tapes at the time. And these items are a favourite for said collectors.

Bala's tiny studio has towering towers of cassette tapes and vinyl records as well as console players. "Don't ask me how many I have," Bala laughs, "but I can tell you they are in the thousands because I started when I was a child." He has them all: Bob Marley, Burning Spear, Jimmy Cliff and more.

Another collector is 25-year-old Delhi-based DJ and entrepreneur Nishant Mittal, who is well-known as his alias 'Digging In India' on Instagram where he showcases an array of vintage music collections, from posters to vinyl records to cassette tapes. Nishant, who has collected more than 800 unique cas-

sette tapes since 2013, started out collecting records from the likes of Nirvana and Radiohead, but then eventually gravitated towards Indian pop and Indian funk genres.

"It is such a thrill to find more obscure things I didn't know existed," he explains. He also enjoys the process of sharing these finds through his Instagram account @digginginindia, with followers in and out of India. "One of my most treasured ones is a tape of Hindi-language covers of Michael Jackson songs. I recently found a cassette of children's songs by Zeenat Aman. Another great find was a soundtrack to Mira Nair's 1991 film *Mississippi Masala*," he describes.

Probably one of the big lures of these tapes is the maximalist artworks on these cassette tape covers, reminiscent of the posters we see in older homes and vintage films. "Most were hand-done: cut, collaged and painted or drawn," says Nishant, "and computers and editing applications were not abundant at the time so this effort makes it more meaningful. It's easier to take care of cassettes compared to vinyl and much more easier to maintain, though both formats are fantastic in their own ways."

Bala says, "Ottens' cassette tape is powerful because musicians have poured their lives into cassette tapes to make mixtapes to send to record labels or keep as musical diaries for ourselves. The power of the cassette tape is never going to go away, that much is true, no matter how advanced our recording or streaming technology may get."

# It's pack up time



SHILPA NAIR ANAND

Photographs and videos are chosen with care. Drone shots and filters add to the drama. The focal point of their affection, veneration or obsession, depending on how one sees it, is unexpected: Kerala State Transport Corporation (KSRTC) buses, affectionately called 'aanavandi' (loosely translated as 'elephant vehicle'), a reference to the two elephants in the KSRTC logo.

The 'aanavandi' has close to 100 dedicated fan pages on Instagram, while KSRTC's official Instagram handle has only a few thousand fol-

Kerala State Transport Corporation buses, with their distinct logo featuring two two elephants, have inspired almost 100 fan pages

lowers. Fans see them as a gateway to childhood nostalgia, while others see it as love born out of frequently travelling in these buses. For many, it is a mixture of both.



## Memory serves right

"My first memory of a KSRTC bus is when I was in Class V...I remember seeing the bus and thinking it was majestic. It almost seemed like an elephant walking down the road," says Thiruvananthapuram-based Akshay Krishna. He is one of the admins of the page @ilovemyaanavandi, which was formed in 2019 and has about 36,000 plus followers.

**Join the ride** Photographs posted on @aanavandi\_ishtam, one of the many KSRTC bus fanning pages

■ AKSHITHA RAJ, SIDDHARTH

There are photographs and videos being posted on these 'bus fanning' pages dedicated to KSRTC buses. "However, it is not just 'fan' stuff...we like to see ourselves as a resource for information: timing, routes etc. We get DMs asking for help and we even help book tickets online," says Amal Roy of @aanavandi\_ishtam. Started as a page on Facebook, it then moved to Instagram in 2017 and now has 55,000 followers.

Amal, who works in an oil rig in Mumbai, has been to almost all bus depots in Kerala (there are 28), and can identify which depot a KSRTC bus belongs to. He started the page when he was a student and had time on his hands. "Every time I board a bus, I head straight to the seat next to the driver. If it is a long journey the conductor, too, joins in and we talk. That is how I discovered a lot of things about transportation."



**Destination doesn't count** Buses and their depots, the sound of the engine – all these have made their way into the fan pages. Unlike Facebook, which relies more on textual information, the pages are more visually-driven on Instagram, most of which is contributed by followers, "For instance images of buses in the High Ranges (the hilly parts of Kerala such as Idukki) are stunning and we get a lot of those," says Amal. The popularity of pages such as @aanavandi\_ishtam invites collaboration requests. Amal says he declines these offers, "I built this page out of my passion for buses, not to monetise from it."

No payments are made for photographs and videos, however, contributors are given photo credits. Same goes for videos, which are edited by the team for 'dramatic effect'. "We enhance the visual... speed up or slow down the pace so that it has more masala. We also get flak for it since we are accused of glorifying rash driving. It is just spicing up the video for more hits and traction," Akshay says.

A means of racking up 'likes' is through "captions that pack a punch", thanks to cinema-inspired posts.

"The captions have to be catchy..." says Vishnu Vishwanath, admin of @ksrtc.official, from Pathanamthitta. "Compare a bus with Mohanlal or use a 'mass' dialogue and plenty of hashtags," echoes @aanavandi.online's Athul Ravi, from Thiruvananthapuram.

Most of these pages are started by students, many of whom lose interest when they start working and get busy. "It is not easy, as there is a lot of work," says Amal. "We get so many DMs, 200 to 300 everyday. It is impossible to respond to all, but I will keep at it for as long as I can."

## Now, be chic for your shots

DIVYA KALA BHAVANI

Vaccine fashion: it is a thing, especially since most of us are looking for any excuse to dress up. Dolly Parton made cold-shoulder shirts and dresses chic, to the point that shoulders shivered their way through 2019 and 2020. On March 2, the country musician was pictured getting her vaccine wearing the very shirt style she helped popularise. This catalysed the conversation, 'What do I wear when I get the shot?'

On e-commerce sites such as Myntra and Nnnow, you may notice sleeveless styles are pushed up the landing pages by the in-house algorithms but you may not

ice bell sleeves, off-shoulder dresses, loose-sleeved T-shirts and waterfall-sleeved kurtis are pushed up, too. In fact, according to fashion search platform Stylist, in the first two months of 2021, international clicks for off-shoulder dresses increased 68% compared to November and December 2020. Plus, clicks for off-shoulder tops also increased by 63%.

Social media has helped people find inspiration. Dhruv Mantra, a DJ in Delhi, says making a vaccine style statement is a little more challenging for men. "I do not want to be stripping off my shirt in front of people at the clinic; a tank underneath a button-down is getting stale. So I scroll through Instagram under certain hashtags for ideas." These include #VaccineFashion and #COVIDFashion, which have a little more than 60,000 posts.

Meera Joseph, a 56-year-old home-maker in Hyderabad, is waiting to get her vaccine. Her daughter-in-law has urged her to buy a cold-shoulder top, just for the occasion, she says. "I used to think they were so trashy! Now, they have function."

## I don't want to be standing next to the hero doing nothing'

Bhumika Chawla will be seen in a bunch of films soon, but admits that not enough interesting roles are written for women of her age

SANDEETHA DEVI DUNDOO

There was a restraint and calmness with which Bhumika Chawla used to speak when she was one of the most sought-after leading women in Telugu and Tamil cinema, a few years ago. The tide might have changed and she might be doing fewer films now, but the calm demeanour is intact even when she speaks her mind, without mincing words.

This summer will see her in two Telugu films; she has completed filming a third one. "I take up a film only if it is worth my time. I want characters that give me scope to perform and make some impact. Not every



story or character needs to have the potential to change society; sometimes I can do a film for fun, but there has to be something in it for me. I don't want to be standing next to the hero doing nothing," she says.

### Short but pivotal

First up is director Sampath Nandi's *Seetimaarr*, releasing on April 2, in which she is cast as Gopichand's sister. She is then filming for a cameo appearance in director Naresh Kuppili's *Paagal* starring Vishwak Sen, which is scheduled to release on April 30. "Kabaddi plays an important part in *Seetimaarr* and I motivate Gopichand to do his best. In *Paagal*, I have very few scenes, but they are intense."

Bhumika divides her time between Mumbai and Hyderabad.

When she had to begin work for the new Telugu film *Idhe Maa Katha* in October,

I crave for the kind of films that Tabu or Vidya Balan get to do. Recently, I was smitten by Sushmita Sen's performance in *Aarya*

BHUMIKA CHAWLA

amid the pandemic, she approached it with trepidation: "I discussed it with my family and we agreed that invariably, we all have to step out. Film units were also working with all the necessary precautions. Any time I spotted someone without a mask, I wouldn't hesitate to tell them. I would wash hands frequently, do steam inhalations and drink turmeric milk."

She had spent the lockdown months near Nasik, with her father, and says it was the best thing that had happened to her in years. "It was a tough time for everyone. I am thankful to God that I could spend time amid greenery, and it had a healing effect on me. We all forgot that we need to slow down. We have no



Looking ahead Bhumika Chawla ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

time to stand and stare," she says, quoting WH Davies' poem 'Leisure'.

### Rider's high

Director Guru Pawan's *Idhe Maa Katha* is a road film in which Bhumika is one of the four prin-

cipal characters. For this, she had to ride a heavy-duty bike. "I have ridden lighter bikes in the past, but never a Bullet. I trained for this film and discovered that there is better stability while riding at a speed of 60 to 80 kilometres/hour than at 20 to 40 ki-

lometres/hour. I loved the adrenaline rush. Riding with the wind on my face gave me a high."

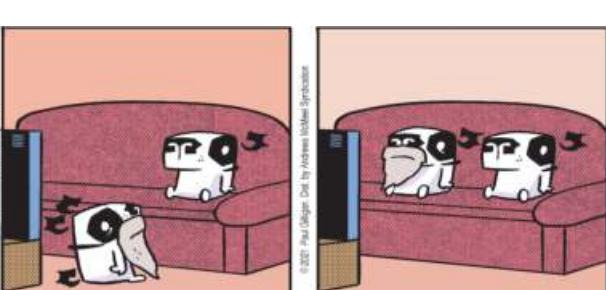
She doesn't want to divulge more about the story or her character, but states that she liked how it shows that women need to rediscover themselves and realise their dreams, when life overwhelms them with responsibilities.

Bhumika is also part of Tamil film *Kannai Nambathey* and the Hindi film *Operation Majnu*. She discloses, however, that she doesn't come across interesting roles often.

Film industries tend to slot female actors above 40 into sister or sister-in-law roles and she emphasises that those characters need to have depth and merit: "I am grateful for the opportunities I have had so far, but I also crave for the kind of films that Tabu or Vidya Balan get to do. Recently, I was also smitten by Sushmita Sen's performance in *Aarya*. More stories and characters need to be written for women in our age group."

She adds, "It is not the audience that slots you, but the industry. As an actor, I want to do things I haven't done before."

### POOCH CAFE



### PEANUTS



### HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



### CALVIN AND HOBBES



### TIGER



### PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



# 'Small cliques will destroy global order'

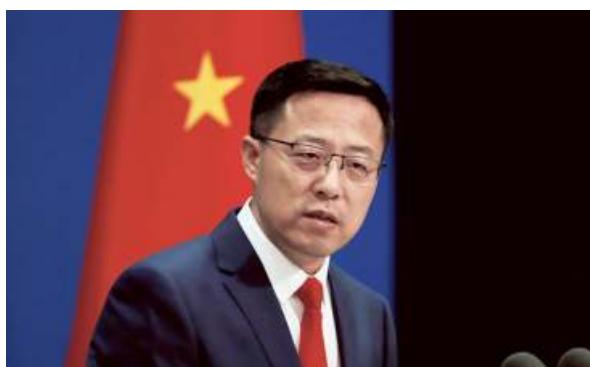
Taking aim at Quad, official says certain countries are keen to exaggerate and hype up the 'China threat'

ANANTH KRISHNAN

In a strong reaction to Friday's first leaders' summit of the Quad – India, the U.S., Japan and Australia – and the upcoming visits this week of the U.S. Secretary of Defence to Japan, South Korea and India, China's Foreign Ministry hit out at countries "forming enclosed small cliques", describing it as "the sure way to destroy the international order".

Monday's statement from China was the latest that took aim at the four-country grouping, and the strongest one so far. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian accused "certain countries", without naming them, of being "keen to exaggerate and hype up the so-called 'China threat' to sow discord among regional countries, especially to disrupt their relations with China."

"However, their actions, running counter to the trend of the times of peace, development and cooperation and the common aspirations of the countries and peoples



**Tough words:** Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian at a news conference in Beijing. ■ REUTERS

in the region, will not be welcomed or [will not] succeed," he said in response to a question about Friday's virtual summit attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, U.S. President Joe Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison.

"Exchanges and cooperation between countries should help expand mutual understanding and trust, instead of targeting or harming the interests of third parties," Mr. Zhao said. "Certain

countries should shake off their Cold-War mentality and ideological prejudice, refrain from forming closed and exclusive small circles, and do more things that are conducive to solidarity and cooperation among regional countries and regional peace and stability."

**Credible deterrence**  
To a question on comments from U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin that his trip to Japan, South Korea and India this week was aimed at building credible

countries should shake off their Cold-War mentality and ideological prejudice, refrain from forming closed and exclusive small circles, and do more things that are conducive to solidarity and cooperation among regional countries and regional peace and stability."

Chinese media reported that ahead of the U.S. Secretary of Defence's visit to the region, the People's Liberation Army held "combat-

deterrence against China, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson said China "has always firmly upheld the UN-centred international system, and the international order we champion is the one based on international law, not the one defined by individual countries to maintain their hegemony."

"In the era of globalisation, forming enclosed small cliques with ideology as the yardstick is the sure way to destroy the international order and after all, is unpopular and will end in total failure," he said. "The U.S. should treat China and China-U.S. relations in right mentality and in an objective and rational manner, stop interfering in China's internal affairs, and work with China to focus on cooperation, manage differences, and place China-U.S. relations back on the track of healthy and stable development."

Chinese media reported that ahead of the U.S. Secretary of Defence's visit to the region, the People's Liberation Army held "combat-

# Pak. envoy raises concern over 'burkha ban' in Sri Lanka

Such a divisive step will injure feelings of Muslims: Khattak

MEERA SRINIVASAN  
COLOMBO

The Pakistani High Commissioner in Colombo has raised concern over Sri Lanka's recent announcement on outlawing the burkha, noting that such a ban would "injure" the feelings of ordinary Muslims in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

The PLA Northern, Eastern and Southern theatre commands recently organised combat-oriented exercises in the Yellow Sea, East China Sea and South China Sea, respectively," the Communist Party-run *Global Times* reported, adding that "in the Yellow Sea, Type 056 and Type 056A corvettes formed a flotilla and practised training courses, including main gun shooting, secondary gun shooting and air defence by launching flares."

"In the East China Sea, Type 052C destroyer Jinan and Type 054A frigate Changzhou ran more than 10 training missions including free combat among warships, submarines and warplanes, and joint fire strikes. In the South China Sea, different types of tug and support ships held maritime search and rescue and emergency towing exercises," the report said.



**Troubling message:** A Sri Lankan woman in burkha walking along a busy street in Colombo on March 13. ■ AP

munity. Mr. Khattak's reference to "other image related challenges faced by the country at international fora" assumes significance just a week ahead of the vote on Sri Lanka at the Human Rights Council, where Pakistan is currently a member.

The UN resolution on Sri Lanka's rights record is expected to draw upon the January 2021 report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which observed that the country's Tamil and Muslim minorities "are being increasingly marginalised and excluded from the national vision and Government policy, while divisive and discriminatory rhetoric from the highest State officials risks generating further polarization and violence".

Sri Lanka has reached out to different members states, including India, seeking support at the Council. About a third of the 47-member Council's current membership, including Pakistan, is part of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which earlier criticised Colombo's mandatory cremations policy for COVID-19 victims that affected the island's Muslim minority.

## Reversal on cremations

Following persistent calls from the island nation's Muslim community, and from international bodies, including the OIC and the UN, Sri Lanka reversed the policy on February 26. Burials of victims of the virus would be permitted, the government said, days after Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Sri Lanka last month, when he reportedly raised the matter with the Sri Lankan leadership. High Commissioner Khattak had welcomed the move in a Twitter message back then.

## Adani Ports confirms role in Colombo terminal project

Company says it's expanding footprint with the investment

MEERA SRINIVASAN  
COLOMBO

Beijing said it was "very concerned" for the safety of its citizens in Myanmar on Monday, after Chinese factories were attacked amid a bloody crackdown on pro-democracy protests in Yangon. Chinese state media said 32 factories in Yangon were attacked on Sunday, causing \$37 million in damage and leaving two staff injured. Martial law has been declared in the townships where the factories were located. Many in Myanmar's pro-democracy movement believe China has sided with the Army since the coup. Describing the incident as "nasty", Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said China "is very concerned about the impact on the safety of Chinese institutions and personnel". AFP

of GoI, GoSL, SLPA & John Keells for the opportunity to build WCT, Colombo. This partnership is a symbol of the deep strategic relations between countries with great intertwined history. It will launch decades of container growth."

**'Compromise' formula**  
The Adani Group's investment in the WCT project comes after the Sri Lankan government, in early February, ejected India and Japan out of a 2019 trilateral agreement to jointly develop the East Container Terminal (ECT) at the Colombo Port, as trade unions opposed "foreign involvement" in the country's national assets. In what Colombo termed a "compromise", the government offered the WCT instead, with higher stakes for

the Adani Group, along with its local partner and Sri Lanka's largest conglomerate John Keells Holdings, to execute the project with the Sri Lanka Ports Authority.

In a press release issued on Monday, Adani Ports said it received a letter of intent from the Government of Sri Lanka, while Sri Lanka's Cabinet spokesman said last week that the government "assumed" Adani Group was the investor, as the company was India's "nominee" in the ECT deal. India has distanced itself from the WCT project and indicated that Colombo was "directly" in touch with the Adani Group, sparking questions on the process followed by Colombo to choose the private investor in the absence of the Indian government's involvement.

## Biden declines to seek ouster of Cuomo

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden on Sunday passed up an opportunity to join other Democrats calling for the resignation of New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, who is under investigation after multiple allegations of sexual harassment.

Asked by a reporter if Mr. Cuomo should resign, Mr. Biden responded, "I think the investigation is underway and we should see what it brings us."

Mr. Biden, who made the comments upon returning to the White House from a weekend at his home in Delaware, had not previously spoken publicly about the allegations against Mr. Cuomo. However, his comments reflect the wait-and-see position the White House has taken regarding Mr. Cuomo's future.

REUTERS  
VATICAN CITY

The Vatican said on Monday that priests and other Roman Catholic Church ministers cannot bless same-sex unions and that such blessings are "not licit" if carried out.

The ruling was a response to practices in some countries, such as the U.S. and Germany, where parishes and ministers have begun blessing same-sex unions in lieu of marriage, and calls for bishops to defacto insti-



Pope Francis

Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), issued the ruling: "Negative".

Pope Francis approved the response, the CDF said, adding that it was "not intended to be a form of unjust discrimination, but rather a reminder of the truth of the liturgical rite".

It said such blessings were not permissible even though they were "motivated by a sincere desire to welcome and accompany homosexual persons" and help them grow in the faith.

## Biden seeks to boost Asia alliances

With China in focus, Washington turns to allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific

STANLY JOHNY

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan will meet their Chinese counterparts Wang Yi and Yang Jiechi in Alaska later this week, in the first face-to-face interaction between the Biden administration and China.

The meeting is happening after a volley of diplomatic efforts by the Biden administration to strengthen America's relations with its allies and partners in Asia. Since taking office on January 20, President Joe Biden has moved quickly on China, leaving no ambiguity on where his foreign policy priorities are. At least three takeaways from his early foreign policy moves offer a clear view of his approach towards China.

### 'Biggest test'

First, there is a consensus within the Biden administration that China, not Russia, is America's primary rival. The Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, released by the administration, calls China "the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system". According to Secretary of State Blinken, the U.S.'s relationship with China "will be the biggest geopolitical test of the 21st century". Second, as the Alaska meet suggests, the Biden ad-



**Force multiplier:** U.S. President Joe Biden, left, with leaders of Japan, India and Australia at the virtual Quad summit. ■ AFP

a U.S. "pivot to Asia", but he was constrained by several other factors, mainly America's involvement in West Asia. Mr. Trump took the U.S.-China rivalry to a new height, but he did it bilaterally – he took on China head-on by launching a trade and tech war and mounting sanctions.

There are geopolitical areas as well where both sides can continue cooperation. The U.S. has already proposed a multilateral UN-led conference involving the representatives of China, Russia, India, Iran, Pakistan and the U.S. to find a lasting solution to the Afghan conflict. Similarly, the Biden administration has made its intention clear to revive the Iran nuclear deal which President Donald Trump abandoned.

China, along with other permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany and the EU, is a signatory to the deal.

The U.S. would need China's diplomatic support in its effort to bring the nuclear accord back on track.

### NEWS ANALYSIS

Unsurprisingly, the first country Secretary Blinken visited was Japan. Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga would be the first foreign leader Mr. Biden would be hosting in the White House. During the Trump years, America's ties with Japan and South Korea had soured over the President's demand for higher payouts from those countries for keeping U.S. troops there. The Biden administration wasted no time in reaching deals with

South Korea and Japan on sharing the cost for hosting U.S. troops – which these countries see as a security guarantee. Then leaders of the so-called Quad countries – the U.S., India, Japan and Australia – held virtual talks in their first summit. That a Quad summit was held within the first 50 days of the Biden administration points to the high priority Mr. Biden gives to the grouping in its Indo-Pacific strategy.

**The common factor**  
While all sides have said the Quad is not against any particular country, it is hard to miss what the common factor is. The U.S. has been a strong proponent of a stronger Quad. But it's too early to say whether Mr. Biden would be able to rally the Quad and other American allies in the region such as South Korea against China in an emerging bipolar contest.

Among the Quad countries, India is the only country that shares a land border with China, which saw clashes last year. For Japan, South Korea and Australia, China is their top trade partner and uninterrupted trade with China is important for their continued prosperity. But all these countries share security concerns with a fast-rising China. So are several other countries in the region such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and even the communist Vietnam. The U.S. is trying to tap these concerns while seeking a mock-up American aircraft carrier in the Strait of Hormuz.

## Iran unveils underground missile facility

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
TEHRAN

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard on Monday inaugurated a new underground facility designated for missile storage, the country's state TV reported.

The report quotes Guard commander General Hossein Salami as saying that cruise and ballistic missiles will empower the force's Navy even more. The TV report showed footage of scores of missiles in an enclosed space resembling an underground corridor. It did not say where the facility is located nor how many missiles are stored there.

Since 2011, Iran has boasted of underground facilities across the country as well as along the southern coast near the strategic Strait of Hormuz. Iran claims to have missiles that can travel 2,000 km, placing much of the West Asia, including Israel, within range.

The U.S. and its Western allies see Iran's missile programme as a threat, along with the country's nuclear programme – particularly after Iran breached its commitments to the 2015 nuclear deal, following the U.S. administration's withdrawal from the deal in 2018. Last July, the Guard launched underground ballistic missiles as part of an exercise involving a mock-up American aircraft carrier in the Strait of Hormuz.

## KALABURAGI MAHANAGAR PALIKE KALABURAGI

E-mail : itstaff\_ulb\_gulbarga@yahoo.com

No : KMP/HS/SWM/01/2020-21

Date : 15-03-2021

### EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

#### "ELIGIBLE AND QUALIFIED APPLICANTS FOR BIO-REMEDIATION/MINING OF LEGACY WASTE, LOCATED AT KALABURAGI USING APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY"

Kalaburagi Mahanagar Palike Kalaburagi/Kalaburagi Municipal Corporation (KMP/KMC) invites Expression of Interest (EOI) through E-portal website of Government of Karnataka: <https://eproc.karnataka.gov.in> in a Single Cover (both Technical and Financial Bid) system with Proposed Concepts from reputed Agencies with proven Track Record for fixation of rates for various items as specified below.

**1) Particulars :** Any new techniques to be proposed by eligible applicant for bioremediation of 165000 cum old SWM waste, Unit : —

**2) Particulars :** Quote Processing fee for processing and disposal of SWM Legacy waste/ton, Unit : In Rs.

**Calendar of Events:** 1) Last date for submission of EOI application: 26-03-2021

04.35 PM, 2) Date of opening of EOI : 27-03-2021 04.35 PM.

Asst Executive Engineer (Env), Mahanagar Palike Kalaburagi can be contacted (Mobile No. 7829847863) for 'Site visit' with prior intimation. Renowned Agencies with proven Track record in implementing similar projects can download the 'Expression of Interest' (EOI) Document from E-portal website of Government of Karnataka <https://eproc.karnataka.gov.in>

The filled in 'Expression of Interest' Document should be uploaded on E-portal website of Government of Karnataka : <https://eproc.karnataka.gov.in>

DIP/Kalaburagi/1086/MC&A/2020-21

Kalaburagi Mahanagar Palike, Kalaburagi

**भारत सरकार / GOVERNMENT OF INDIA**  
**अंतरिक्ष विभाग / DEPARTMENT OF SPACE**

**विक्रम सारामाई अंतरिक्ष केंद्र / VIKRAM SARABHAJAN SPACE CENTRE**  
**निर्माण एवं अनुसंधान यूपी / CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE GROUP**

(फोन नं. : 0471-2564568 / 2564537)

**निविदा की अवधि बढ़ाना / EXTENSION OF TENDER**

कार्य का शीर्षक/Title of work:

1) उत्तरी अंतरिक्ष के लिए टर्लस, वीरासरी, तुंबा में विशिष्ट भवनों का निर्माण (1) पाइरो सुप्रि क्सुम्बव्यन सुविधा, (2) प्रैटो संचालन शौप (एस्प्रीटरासी सुविधाएं) (प्रिंटर, प्रीप्रिंट, पाइरेक्ट तथा विद्युत कार्य) / Construction of various Buildings for (1) Pyro Devices Assembly Facility, (2) LBS Production Facility, (3) ASOE Storage Facility and (4) Proto Fabrication Shop (SPARC Facilities) at TERLS, VSSC, Thumba (Civil, PH, Mech. & Electrical works)

2) दूरसंचार, वीरासरी, तुंबा में तकनीकी सुविधा लंबक तथा परिदर्शन सुविधा संवर्धन (स्पार्क सुविधाएं) के लिए डिस्ट्रिक्ट और अंतरिक्ष केंद्र (प्रिंटर, प्रीप्रिंट, यांत्रिक तथा विद्युत कार्य) / Construction of Buildings for Technical Facility Block and Inspection Facility Augmentation (SPARC Facilities) at TERLS, VSS

## MARKET WATCH

|           | PRICE  | CHANGE |
|-----------|--------|--------|
| Sensex    | 50,395 | -0.78  |
| US Dollar | 72.46  | 0.45   |
| Gold      | 44,364 | 0.69   |
| Brent oil | 68.64  | -1.02  |

## NIFTY 50

|                   | PRICE    | CHANGE  |
|-------------------|----------|---------|
| Adani Ports       | 719.05   | -9.10   |
| Asian Paints      | 2355.00  | -46.35  |
| Axist Bank        | 744.40   | -6.20   |
| Bajaj Auto        | 3664.65  | -81.75  |
| Bajaj Finserv     | 9689.05  | -245.05 |
| Bajaj Finance     | 5439.05  | -118.80 |
| Bharti Airtel     | 522.85   | -1.35   |
| BPCL              | 460.55   | 3.00    |
| Britannia Ind     | 3450.40  | 16.15   |
| Cipla             | 805.50   | -0.45   |
| Coal India        | 146.90   | -3.60   |
| Divis Lab         | 3411.00  | -101.05 |
| Dr Reddys Lab     | 4342.25  | -84.25  |
| Eicher Motors     | 2669.45  | 31.95   |
| GAIL (India)      | 143.55   | -3.30   |
| Grasim Ind        | 1384.10  | 4.60    |
| HCL Tech.         | 992.35   | 13.10   |
| HDFC              | 2535.50  | -32.50  |
| HDFC Bank         | 1528.65  | -23.30  |
| HDFC Life         | 704.15   | -6.65   |
| Hero MotoCorp     | 3264.15  | -86.40  |
| Hindalco          | 333.80   | 3.60    |
| Hind Unilever     | 2210.85  | 6.10    |
| ICICI Bank        | 603.50   | -9.35   |
| IndusInd Bank     | 1038.65  | 16.00   |
| Infosys           | 1373.60  | -1.25   |
| Indian Oil Corp   | 101.05   | -0.25   |
| ITC               | 205.45   | 0.25    |
| JSW Steel         | 429.65   | 10.90   |
| Kotak Bank        | 1918.65  | -16.50  |
| L&T               | 1483.75  | -30.25  |
| M&M               | 844.40   | -11.40  |
| Maruti Suzuki     | 7089.30  | -6.90   |
| Nestle India Ltd. | 16833.05 | 110.60  |
| NTPC              | 110.50   | 1.40    |
| ONGC              | 114.35   | -0.70   |
| PowerGrid Corp    | 224.15   | 4.10    |
| Reliance Ind      | 2108.90  | -28.70  |
| SBI Life          | 920.00   | 5.80    |
| State Bank        | 383.90   | 2.80    |
| Shree Cement      | 27644.55 | -56.95  |
| Sun Pharma        | 605.50   | -8.10   |
| Tata Motors       | 318.55   | 1.00    |
| Tata Steel        | 736.40   | 16.45   |
| TCS               | 3066.15  | 8.20    |
| Tech Mahindra     | 1026.65  | 23.40   |
| Titan             | 1492.20  | 9.70    |
| UltraTech Cement  | 6561.45  | -76.70  |
| UPL               | 621.35   | 1.05    |
| Wipro             | 426.35   | 1.15    |

## IN BRIEF



## Bank of Baroda reduces lending rate to 6.75%

MUMBAI

Bank of Baroda (BoB) has cut its lending rate from 6.85% to 6.75%. "This reduction makes our loans more affordable for customers," said Harshadkumar T. Solanki, GM, mortgages and other retail assets.

## WPI inflation quickens to 27-month high

## PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

The wholesale price-based inflation rose for the second consecutive month to a 27-month high of 4.17% in February, as food, fuel and power prices spiked.

The WPI inflation was 2.03% in January and 2.26% in February last year. After witnessing months of softening of prices, food articles in February saw 1.36% inflation.

ICRA principal economist Aditi Nayak said the doubling in WPI inflation reflected the rise in commodity prices brought on by the global risk-on sentiment, hardening of crude oil and fuel prices, and a fading of the favourable base effect for food items.

## Private sector can help unlock CPSEs' real value'

Efficient use of tech is the key, says FM

## PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said efficient management and use of the latest technology by the private sector will help unlock the real value of CPSEs undergoing strategic sale and bring much higher dividends for the economy.

Ms. Sitharaman said that the NITI Aayog had been mandated to identify and recommend CPSEs – which are not in the 'priority sector' – for strategic disinvestment.

These CPSEs are reckoned as 'low priority' for the government notwithstanding that they may be profit-making companies.

"The unlocking of real va-

5.03% in February on higher fuel prices, which could challenge the central bank's accommodative stance. Core inflation was estimated in a range of 5.61%-5.9% by four economists.

lue through better / efficient management and use of latest technology by the private sector may bring much higher dividends for the economy as a whole in terms of growth, productivity and employment," Ms. Sitharaman said in reply to a question in the Lok Sabha.

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# India will look to build on the success from Ishan's approach

Rahul's place under scrutiny, Rohit set to return; England pacers will do well to learn from Shardul who kept the batsmen on a leash on a slow wicket



**In his element:** Shardul Thakur's clever variations thwarted England from reaching a competitive total in the second T20I on Sunday. ■ SPORTZPICS/BCCI

## ENGLAND IN INDIA

ASHWIN ACHAL  
AHMEDABAD

In September last year, Mumbai Indians (MI) was staring down the barrel in an IPL fixture against Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB). Chasing a mammoth 202, MI needed a miracle at 39 for three. Out of nowhere, Ishan Kishan played saviour, with a breathtaking 58-ball 99, studded with two fours and nine sixes.

Ishan's assault helped MI pull level with RCB, before the latter prevailed in a Super Over. RCB captain Virat Kohli may have survived the scare, but the southpaw's knock certainly left an impression on him.

Ishan exuded a fearless, guilt-free, unhinged style of

hitting, the very same qualities that the Indian team management – led by Kohli – is searching for. On his India debut, in the second T20 here on Sunday, Ishan was advised by Kohli and MI captain Rohit Sharma to stick to the game plan that brought him success in the IPL. The 22-year-old followed orders, and it worked wonders.

One can expect the same approach from Ishan in the third game here on Tuesday, for that is the only way he knows. Debutant jitters, if any, disappeared when Ishan smoked speedster Tom Curran over long-on for a six in the sixth over. Two crunching fours followed, and Ishan was up and running.

The Jharkhand cricketer was severe on leg-spinner Adil Rashid as well, plonking his right foot forward and

## India fined

■ The Indian players were fined 20% of their match fee for a slow over-rate in the second T20I

generating great power with a low, almighty swing of the bat. A reverse-sweep brought an end to his stay, but his 32-ball 56 set India on the path to victory. If Ishan is a young man with a bright future ahead, time is running out for 35-year-old Shikhar Dhawan. Dhawan featured in the first match, and was then dropped to make way for Ishan. It would be wise to give Ishan a long run – a courtesy that was not extended to Dhawan.

Questions will also be asked of K.L. Rahul, who has scored only one run in two

matches. With Rohit Sharma set to return from rest, Rahul could face the axe. Ishan could also be slotted in the middle-order – where he has batted in the IPL – to accommodate the first-choice Rahal-Rohit opening combination.

While there is a long way to go for the ICC T20 World Cup, scheduled to commence in India in October, there is a distinct possibility of Rohit and Ishan taking first strike at the mega event.

The England pacers, meanwhile, made life easy for the batsmen on Sunday.

The Curran brothers, Jofra Archer, Chris Jordan and Ben Stokes showed no control over the slower deliveries, serving it up on a platter with rank long hops.

The visitors will do well to learn from the Indian fast

bowlers, who landed their cutters perfectly on a good length outside off. The England batsmen – with their upright stance – cluelessly swung at deliveries which stayed low, making contact with nothing but air.

**The teams (from):** India: Virat Kohli (Capt.), Rohit Sharma, K.L. Rahul, Shikhar Dhawan, Shreyas Iyer, Suryakumar Yadav, Hardik Pandya, Rishabh Pant, Ishan Kishan, Yuzvendra Chahal, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Rahul Tewatia, Rahul Chahar, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Deepak Chahar, Navdeep Saini, and Shardul Thakur.

**England:** Eoin Morgan (Capt.), Moeen Ali, Jofra Archer, Jonny Bairstow, Sam Billings, Jos Buttler, Sam Curran, Tom Curran, Chris Jordan, Liam Livingstone, Dawid Malan, Adil Rashid, Jason Roy, Ben Stokes, Reece Topley, and Mark Wood.

Match starts at 7 p.m.

## Remaining T20Is behind closed doors

The remaining three India-England T20Is at the Narendra Modi Stadium will be played behind closed doors, the Gujarat Cricket Association (GCA) announced on Monday.

"Due to rise in the number of COVID-19 cases, we, at GCA, have decided in consultation with the BCCI, that the matches will be played behind closed doors and spectators will not be allowed at the ground," read a statement from Dhanraj Nathan, GCA vice-president.

The three T20Is will be held on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. — Ashwin Achal

## How Punam turned it around

During the lockdown, I worked on my technique'

### SA IN INDIA

KAMESH SRINIVASAN  
LUCKNOW

The Indian batting has been improving remarkably with every outing, despite being asked to bat in more demanding, bowler-friendly conditions, in the ongoing one-dayers against South Africa.

The Proteas have shown that no target is beyond their batting might, by winning the last two matches when chasing stiff targets of 249 and 267.

**Glowing example**  
For India, Punam Raut provides a glowing example with her progressive scores of 10, 62, 77 and 104. She remained unbeaten during her knocks of 62 and 104. When the 31-year-old got out, it was in the attempt to accelerate,



Punam. ■ BCCI

a hook and a lofted off-drive accounting for her dismissals.

The former opener, who may perhaps regain that status if the captain and coach feel the need to entrust her with the responsibility, is ready to serve the team in any position. "If the captain wants me to open, I will,"

said Punam, after her vibrant century on Sunday.

She may be viewed as a slow starter, but Punam said that she was doing so for the team. "Some batters attack and some have to stay. When two wickets are down, you have to stay and play long, to get a good total for the team," she said.

### Flooded by emotions

It was her third ODI century, coming after a long time. Flooded by emotions, Punam knelt and kissed the pitch in celebration.

"During the lockdown, I worked on my technique and played a lot of matches, with the boys," said Punam.

With tremendous scope for improvement in many aspects of the game, Punam firmly believes that the Indian team will settle into a strong, winning combination in the near future.

## Bravo century guides West Indies to victory

Home team sweeps series 3-0

### LANKA IN WI

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
NORTH SOUND  
(ANTIGUA & BARBUDA)

Darren Bravo's fourth ODI century guided the West Indies to a five-wicket victory over Sri Lanka and a clean sweep of the three-match series in Antigua on Sunday.

Set another challenging target of 275, the home side's response was anchored by Bravo's innings of 102 off 132 balls (5x4, 4x6).

Captain Kieron Pollard (53 not out) ensured there was to be no late stumble despite Bravo's dismissal to seamer Suranga Lakmal just before the end.

**The scores:** Sri Lanka 274 for

six in 50 overs (A. Bandara 55 n.o., W. Hasaranga 80 n.o., Ho-

sein 3/33) lost to West Indies



Darren Bravo. ■ AFP

276 for five in 48.3 overs (S. Hope 64, D. Bravo 102, K. Pollard 53 n.o.).

**Toss:** WI. MoM: Bravo; Player-of-the-Series: Hope.

WI won by five wickets to clinch series 3-0.

## Kapil joins PGTI board

Promises to attract corporate support

### GOLF

RAKESH RAO  
NEW DELHI

"Please take five percent of the attention you give to cricket and spare it for golf."

This was the passionate appeal of legendary cricketer Kapil Dev to the media persons after being inducted as a board member of the Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI) here on Monday.

Kapil, an avid golfer since his retirement from international cricket in 1994, promised to do his best to attract corporate support for Indian golf and golfers.

"Annually, there are more than 500 corporate events in golf across India. If the professional tour can get increased corporate patronage, our home-grown golfers will be able to make a living out of playing domestic events, without looking to play on overseas Tours.



Kapil. ■ FILE PHOTO

There should be enough money for the golf professionals in India so that others get attracted to play here. I know it will take time but with corporate support and media, it is possible," said Kapil.

The announcement came as part of the launch of the ₹30 lakh-Prometheus School Presents Delhi-NCR Open golf championship in Gurugram from Tuesday. Also present on the occasion was golfer Jeev Milkha Singh who is set to participate on the Senior Tour, across the world, next year.

Rashid Khan, eyeing an Olympic berth, along with Udayan Mane, S. Chikkaranappa, Rahil Gangjee, Ajitesh Sandhu, Viraj Madappa, Khalin Joshi and Karandip Kochhar form the creamy layer of the field.

## A new spell begins



**Partner for life:** India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah tied the knot with sports presenter and anchor Sanjana Ganesan on Monday. ■ TWITTER

## Annu Rani rewrites own National mark

Inches closer to Olympic qualification with a throw of 63.24m

### FEDERATION CUP

UTHRA GANESAN  
PATIALA

National javelin throw champion Annu Rani moved closer to the elusive Olympic qualification with a 63.24m throw here on Monday, bettering her own two-year-old mark for a new National record on day one of the 24th Federation Cup.

Annu has been consistently throwing over 61m both in and out of competition. Monday's mark is 0.81m better than her previous best (62.43m) in 2019 and almost a metre more than the previous meet record (62.34m), also held by her. The gap bet-

ween her and the rest can be gauged from the fact that no one else could even cross the 55m mark. The Olympic qualification mark is 64m.

### Getting better

"I won't say I am completely satisfied with my performance, but I am not disappointed either. I am getting better with every outing, especially since we started only recently after a year-long break. I am sure I will reach the mark soon," Annu said after the event.

Admitting that she needed to work on her technique, Annu said: "I tend to stop just before the release of the javelin, nullifying a lot of what I gain in my run-up.

In the 10,000m run, Sanjivani Jadhav returned to the podium in her first competition after serving a two-year suspension, finishing second behind Savita Pal.

**The results:** Women: 10,000m:

1. Savita Pal (UP, 33:59.35), 2. Sanjivani Jadhav (Mah, 34:02.26), 3. Savita Pal (UP, 34:04.45); Shot put: 1. Kiran Balyan (UP, 16.45m), 2. Manpreet Kaur (Pun, 15.65m), 3. Sonal Goyal (Del, 15.09m).

Javelin: 1. Annu Rani (UP, 63.24m), 2. Sanjana Choudhary (Raj, 54.55m), 3. Sharmila Kumari (Har, 50.78m); Pole vault:

1. Rosy Paulraj (TN, 3.90m), 2. Pavithra Venkatesh (TN, 3.80m), 3. Mariya Jaison (Ker, 3.70m).

Admitting that she needed to work on her technique, Annu said: "I tend to stop just before the release of the javelin, nullifying a lot of what I gain in my run-up.



Annu Rani

break owing to injury, won 10 ATP points for making it to the main draw and also collected \$13,300.

After competing in the ATP Tour event in Singapore on a protected ranking, Bhambri clinched the doubles title with Saketh Myneni in the \$15,000 ITF tournament in Lucknow before flying out to Dubai. He beat Prajesh Gunneswaran and Ramkumar Ramanathan to qualify for the main draw.

### TENNIS

SPORTS BUREAU  
NEW DELHI

Qualifier Yuki Bhambri stretched the 59th-ranked Slovenian Aljaz Bedene before losing 6-3, 1-6, 4-6 in the first round of the \$2,048,855 ATP tennis tournament in Dubai on Monday.

Bhambri, playing in his third tournament after returning from a two-year

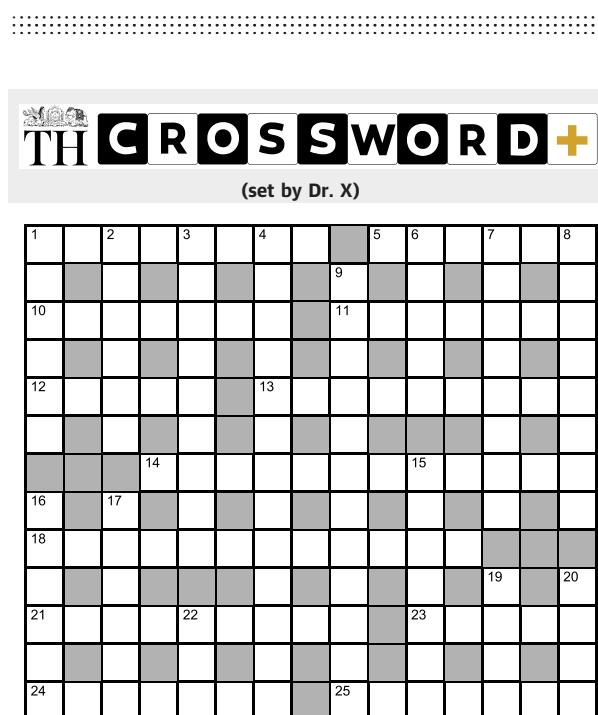
### FAITH

## Effects of anger

The story of Satyavrata related in the Devi Bhagavata Purana by Vyasa to Janamejaya gives a detailed account of the sacrifice undertaken by one Devadutta with the specific desire to beget a son. It also throws light on some interesting issues that can arise during the performance of such a sacrifice, pointed out Sri K. Srinivasan in a discourse.

Devadutta is fully aware that since this yaga is of the 'karma karma' type, no concessions in the conduct of the sacrifice are allowed. So, he engages all the learned scholars and proficient ritviks who are competent to take care of the various aspects of the sacrifice. But it so happens that the rishi chanting the 'sama' mantras, though a skilled expert, owing to his age, becomes breathless and thereby there is a break in the continuity of utterance. Devadutta observes this flaw and immediately is angry with the rishi since this will affect the result of the sacrifice. The rishi also becomes angry. He points out that shortness of breath is common as one grows old and cannot be treated as a fault. He curses Devadutta that he will get a dumb fool for a son.

Devadutta is devastated and falls at the rishi's feet seeking his pardon. Is it not commonly held that being issueless is better than having a foolish son? The rishi calms down when Devadutta is penitent. Unlike ordinary people who tend to nurture anger for long and do not forgive, great people are generally calm even as water that is naturally cool. They give up their anger when the sin that had been the cause for anger is repented for, just as water becomes hot when heated and returns to normal coolness when the heat is removed. The compassionate rishi assures Devadutta that the boy will be born a fool, but will eventually become a jnani by the Grace of Goddess.



**ACROSS**

- Associate escorted around by assistant in Australian city (8)
- Some terrorist essentially caught by FBI at building (1,3,2)
- Primarily poor rating for movie trailer (7)
- Most rush after member in transparent dress fabric (7)
- A largely savoury meat jelly (5)
- Starting affair with Greek character for bit of diversion (9)

**DOWN**

- Rise in circulation of a paper (6)
- Excuse is old and mostly hollow (6)
- English-French battle out, racing animatedly (9)
- Where an oral surgeon might be looking unhappy (4,2,3,5)
- Make famous Italian girl enter retro bar (3,2)
- Tense performers going over new, touching lines (8)
- Fellow on track falls over during sprint resulting in this? (8)
- Criminal firm, old, controlled by pig – it might put the squeeze on you? (3,11)
- Anteater moving around base of anthill every second (9)
- Pontiff artfully preserves a little rare copy of article (8)
- Removes tramps around park getting high (5,3)
- Enemy grabs kid in raid (6)
- Everyone enthralled by favourite straw mattress (6)
- Consume couple of drugs outside bar (5)

Display keystrokes of genius.  
Type your answers into our online grids!

## TV PICKS

**India v England:** 3rd T20I, Star Sports 1 (SD & HD), 7 p.m.  
**UEFA Champions League:** Sony Ten 1, 2 & 3 (SD & HD), 1.30 a.m. (Wednesday).

## IN BRIEF



Great for self-esteem, says Medvedev

MARSEILLE Russia's Daniil Medvedev said it was "great for the self-esteem" to win a 10th career title on the eve of replacing Rafael Nadal as the World No. 2. The top seed cruised to victory in Marseille on Sunday, beating Pierre-Hugues Herbert 6-4, 6-7(4), 6-4. "I am really happy. I knew that I would become No. 2 no matter what on Monday," said Medvedev. "It is always better when you step up the rankings when you do something great." AFP

## Joshua bows out

CAIRO Joshua Chinappa of India bowed out in the third round of the CIB PSA Black Ball squash open here on Monday, after losing 6-11, 5-11, 6-11 to fourth seed Hania El Hammamy of Egypt in 32 minutes.



Justin Thomas wins Players Championship

MIAMI Third-ranked Justin Thomas held off Lee Westwood down the stretch, firing a four-under par 68 Sunday to capture his first Players Championship for his 14th career US PGA Tour title. The 27-year-old American overtook England's Westwood on the back nine with a mid-round run of three birdies and an eagle and was solid down the stretch to secure his first victory of the season. He also matched the best 36-hole comeback to win in Players history. AFP

## Juventus rides on Ronaldo's 'perfect hat-trick'

Scores off a header, a right-footed penalty and a left-footer; Napoli stuns Milan; United stretches unbeaten run to 13 games

## EURO LEAGUES

REUTERS

TURIN

Cristiano Ronaldo scored a 'perfect hat-trick' inside 32 minutes as Juventus bounced back from its midweek Champions League exit by beating Cagliari 3-1 away in Serie A on Sunday.

The 36-year-old striker found the net with a header, a right-footed penalty and a left-foot shot and celebrated by pointing to his ear in an apparent response to recent criticism.

The Italian champion, which enjoyed a comfortable win despite Giovanni Simeone's second-half strike for the host, is now third with 55 points, 10 behind leader Inter Milan with a game in hand.

AC Milan suffered a major blow to its title hopes as Mat-



Doing the treble: Ronaldo racked up yet another three-goal performance as Juventus cruised past Cagliari. ■ REUTERS

teo Politano's second-half strike earned Napoli a 1-0 win to leave the host nine

points behind leader Inter Milan.

In the Premier League,

second-half own goal by West Ham United's Craig Dawson gave it a 1-0 home win.

The result left United second on 57 points from 29 games, 14 behind Manchester City which has played a game more, while West Ham stays fifth on 48 points from 28 matches, three behind fourth-placed Chelsea with a game in hand.

United were twice denied by the woodwork and by a pair of fine saves from visiting goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski but it ground out its victory as Dawson turned an inswinging Bruno Fernandes corner into his own net in the 53rd minute.

## Sevilla posts win

Sevilla beat Real Betis 1-0 in the LaLiga to grab a first victory in five games in all competitions and cement its bid to finish in the top four.

Youssef En-Nesyri settled the city derby in the 27th minute.

## The scores:

**Seria A:** Cagliari 1 (Simeone 61) lost to Juventus 3 (Ronaldo 10, 25-pen, 32).

Bologna 3 (Barrow 27, Svartberg 41, Soriano 70) bt Sampdoria 1 (Quagliarella 37); AC Milan 0 lost to Napoli 1 (Politano 49).

## Premier League:

Arsenal 2 (Odegaard 44, Lacazette 64-pen) bt Tottenham 1 (Lamela 33); Manchester United 1 (Dawson 53-og) bt West Ham 0.

**LaLiga:** Celta Vigo 0 drew with Athletic Bilbao 0; Granada 1 (Sanchez 52) bt Real Sociedad 0.

Eibar 1 (Enrich 55) lost to Villarreal 3 (Gomez 1, Bacca 34, Pedraza 87); Sevilla 1 (En-Nesyri 27) bt Real Betis 0.

**Bundesliga:** RB Leipzig 1 (Forsberg 46) drew with Eintracht Frankfurt 1 (Kamada 61); VfB Stuttgart 2 (Adams 15-og, Kalajdzic 64) bt Hoffenheim 0.

## The scores:

Himachal Pradesh 208/9 in 50 overs (Shivani Singh 116) bt Delhi 198/8 in 50 overs (Vandana Chaturvedi 37, Neha Chhillar 57, Renuka Singh 43/9).

## Points:

**HP 4(4), Delhi 0(0).**

Meghalaya 49 in 33.4 overs (Rameshwar Gayakwad 4/11) lost to Karnataka 53 for one in six overs. **Karnataka 4(8), Meghalaya 0(0).**

Vidarbha 207 in 49.2 overs (Bharti Fulmali 94, Krutika Pophali 46, N. Niranjana 3/38, L. Neetha 3/43) bt Tamil Nadu 154 in 45.2 overs (Eloks Arun 30, N. Niranjana 41, Vaishnavi Khandkar 4/36).

## Vidarbha 4 (8), TN 0 (4).

Bharti and Vaishnavi star for Vidarbha

## SPORTS REPORTER

CHENNAI

Bharti Fulmali's 94 (116b, 11x4, 1x6) and leg-spinner Vaishnavi Khandkar's four-wicket haul helped Vidarbha register a 53-run win over Tamil Nadu in the BCCI senior women's one-dayer (Elite Group E) here on Monday.

## Shivani hits century

In another match, Himachal opener Shivani Singh slammed a brilliant 116 (157b, 11x4) as her side scored a 10-run win over Delhi.

## The scores:

Himachal Pradesh 208/9 in 50 overs (Shivani Singh 116) bt Delhi 198/8 in 50 overs (Vandana Chaturvedi 37, Neha Chhillar 57, Renuka Singh 43/9).

## Points:

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## Vidarbha 4 (8), TN 0 (4).

Manika loses to Xiaoxin

## TABLE TENNIS

RAKESH RAO

NEW DELHI

Manika Batra's defeat to Monaco's Yang Xiaoxin ended India's search for an Olympic berth from the World singles qualification tournament in Doha on Monday.

Yang, ranked 44th, defeated Manika 11-9, 11-4, 8-11, 11-4, 11-9 to move within one victory from booking a place in the Tokyo Games.

Earlier, Sutirtha Mukherjee and G. Sathiyani lost in the quarterfinals of their respective pools. Russia's Polina Mikhaileva, ranked 46th, stopped Sutirtha 10-12, 11-7, 11-8, 11-12, 10-11, 11-5. To book Olympic berths, the Indians now await the Asian Olympic qualification tournament at the same venue from March 18 to 20.

Arteta will turn the page on Aubameyang

## AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

LONDON

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said he will turn the page on Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang's breach of discipline after the Gunners captain was dropped for Sunday's 2-1 win over Tottenham.

"We have a way of living together, we have to respect each other," said Arteta. "But he is an incredible guy, he is our captain and we move forward. I will never tell anything that happens in the dressing room."

## Sporting beats Churchill; Gokulam held by Real Kashmir

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA

Pedro Manzi fired two late goals to help Mohammedan Sporting outplay Churchill Brothers 4-1 in a championship leg match of the I-League at the Kalyani Stadium on Monday.

Hira Mondal and Vanlalbia Chhangte completed the tally for Sporting.

Luka Majcen scored the consolation goal for Churchill off a penalty.

This was Churchill's second successive defeat.

The result helped the Imphal-based club draw level with Churchill on points.

Both have 25 points from 13 matches, but Churchill remained on top due to a better goal difference.

In another match, played

at the Salt Lake Stadium, Gokulam Kerala FC dropped vital points as it was held 1-1 by Real Kashmir.

Gokulam has 23 points from 13 games.

**The results (Championship leg):** Gokulam Kerala FC 1 (Dennis Antwi 24-pen) drew with Real Kashmir FC 1 (Basit Ahmed Bhat 13).

TRAU FC 1 (Komron Tursunov 81) bt RoundGlass Punjab FC 0.

Churchill Brothers FC 1 (Luka Majcen 21-pen) lost to Mohammedan Sporting 4 (Hira Mondal 15, Vanlalbia Chhangte 65, Pedro Manzi 86, 90+3).

## Premier Action claims Sultan Phiroze Plate

HYDERABAD: L. D'Silva-trained Premier Action (Afroz Khan up) won the Sultan Phiroze Plate, the feature event of the extra race day held here on Monday (March 15). The winner is owned by Mr. Harisharan Devyan & Mr. Tinder Singh Ahluwalia.

1. BABY BELLE PLATE (DIV. I) (1,400m), (Terms) Maiden, 3-yo only (Cat. II): PEDROL PLANET (Kiran Naidu) 1, My Master (Nakhat Singh) 2, Palading (Afroz Khan) 3 and Sir (B.R. Kumar) 4. Not run: City of Blessings 1-1/4, Nk and 1-1/2, Im, 29.18s. ₹194 (w), 27, 6 and 8 (p). SHP, 22, THP: 19, FP: 1,078, Q: 27, Tanala: 5,591. Favourite: Hot Seat. Owners: Ms. Meka Ahalya & Mrs. Rajini Meka. Trainer: L. D'Silva.

2. DILAWAR PLATE (1,400m), rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III): ALWAYS SUCCESS (Santosh Raj N R) 1, Team Player (Nakhat Singh) 2, Coastal Cruise (B.R. Kumar) 3 and Thrill Of Power (Akshay Kumar) 4. Not run: Aintree 1-1/2, 2 and Nk, Im, 27.19s. ₹19 (w), 5, 7 and 13 (p). SHP, 16, THP: 27, FP: 40, Q: 27, Tanala: 276. Favourite: Always Success. Owners: Mr. Zavary S. Poornawalla & Mrs. Behroze T. Poornawalla rep. Poornawalla Racing & Breeding Pvt. Ltd., Mr. Vijay Kumar Gupta & Mr. Suseel Kumar Gupta rep. Vijay Racing & Farms Pvt. Ltd. Trainer: Laxman Singh.

3. BABY BELLE PLATE (DIV. II) (1,400m), (Terms) Maiden, 3-yo only (Cat. II): CAMPANIA (Chouhan) 1, Georgia Peach (Akshay Kumar) 2, Gurbasa (Kiran Naidu) 3 and Good Tidings (Ajeeth Kumar) 4. 1-1/4, 6, 5 and 14 (p). SHP: 16, THP: 35, FP: 31, Q: 12, Tanala: 152. Favourite: Georgia Peach. Owners: Mr. Aditya P. Thackersey, Mr. Gaurav Gopal Krishnan Sethi, Mr. Abhimanyu Jagdish Thackersey & Mr. Berjus Minoo Desai. Trainer: L.V.R. Deshmukh.

4. ABBOTS ROYAL PLATE (DIV. II) (1,600m), 5-y-o & upward, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III): LICKFANG (Mukesh Kumar) 1, Nova Scotia (B.R. Kuldeep) 2, Solo Winner (Nakhat Singh) 3 and Alta Vita (B.R. Kumar) 4. 4-3/4, Sh and 2, Im, 39.94s. ₹36 (w), 13, 8 and 10 (p). SHP: 31, THP: 34, FP: 449, Q:

129, Tanala: 4,661. Favourite: Alta Vita. Owners: Mr. Subodh Kumar Ananthan & Mr. G. Raghuandan Chary. Trainer: Mir Faiyaz Ali Khan.

5. JAIDEV PLATE (DIV. I) (1,400m), rated upto 25 (Cat. III): LORENA (Deepak Singh) 1, Alluri's Pride (Gaurav Singh) 2, Kintsugi (B.R. Kumar) 3 and Tapatio (Surya Prakash) 4. 1-1/4, 2-3/4 and Nk, Im, 27.86s. ₹161 (w), 26, 20 and 9 (p). SHP: 70, THP: 20, FP: 4,417, Q: 1,798, Tanala: 14, 11. Favourite: Alluri's Pride. Owners: Mr. G. Krishnamohar Rao, Mr. T. Amader Reddy & Mr. Alluri Ajay Kumar. Trainer: D. Netto.

6. ABBOTS ROYAL PLATE (DIV. I) (1,600m), 5-y-o & upward, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III): DILLON (Kirun Naidu) 1, Sun Dancer (N.B. Kuldeep) 2, Ulysses (Mukesh Kumar) 3 and Promiseofhappiness (A.A. Vikrant) 4. Sh, 2-3/4 and 3/4, Im, 40.27s. ₹34 (w), 10, 15 and 14 (p). SHP: 28, THP: 83, FP: 394, Q: 112, Tanala: 6,345. Favourite: Call Of The Blue. Owners: Ms. Sarojini Gudari & Mr. Sriram Upalur. Trainer: N. Ravinder Singh.

7. SULTAN PHIROZE PLATE (1,600m), rated 80 & above (Cat. I): PREMIER ACTION (Afroz Khan) 1, Havelock Cruise (Ajeeth Kumar) 2, Titus (B.R. Kumar) 3 and Sover Pride (Akshay Kumar) 4. 2, Hd and 1-1/2, Im, 37.78s. ₹19 (w), 6, 27 and 21 (p). SHP: 43, THP: 72, FP: 51, Q: 27, Tanala: 6,829. Favourite: Consiglori. Owners: Mr. Harisharan Devyan & Mr. Tinder Singh Ahluwalia. Trainer: L. D'Silva.

8. JAIDEV PLATE (DIV. II) (1,400m), rated upto 25 (Cat. III): RED RIVER (Santosh Raj N R) 1, Hurricane (B.R. Kumar) 2, Sacred Lamp (Mukesh Kumar) 3 and Berkeley (N.B. Kuldeep) 4. Not run: Flying Queen, 2, 3/4 and Nk, Im, 27.81s. ₹17 (w), 9, 21 and 11 (p). SHP: 60, THP: 25, FP: 278, Q: 253, Tanala: 13, 20, 27. Favourite: Battle Ready. Owners: M.A.M. Ramaswamy Chettiar Of Chettinad Charitable Trust. Trainer: K. Sathesh.

9. ABBOTS ROYAL PLATE (DIV. II) (1,600m), 5-y-o & upward, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III): LICKFANG (Mukesh Kumar) 1, Nova Scotia (B.R. Kuldeep) 2, Solo Winner (Nakhat Singh) 3 and Alta Vita (B.R. Kumar) 4. 4-3/4, Sh and 2, Im, 39.94s. ₹36 (w), 13, 8 and 10 (p). SHP: 31, THP: 34, FP: 449, Q:

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10. ABBOTS ROYAL PLATE (DIV. II) (