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### NEARBY



#### Rakesh Tikait's convoy attacked in Rajasthan

JAIPUR/GHAZIABAD Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait's convoy was allegedly attacked in Rajasthan's Alwar district on Friday. He was on his way to address a farmers' rally in Bansur. A group of people allegedly pelted stones at the cavalcade, damaging the rear windscreen of his car. Mr. Tikait, who escaped unharmed, blamed 'BJP goons' for the attack.

NORTH & EAST ► PAGE 4



## India records 89,019 fresh cases, highest in 6 months

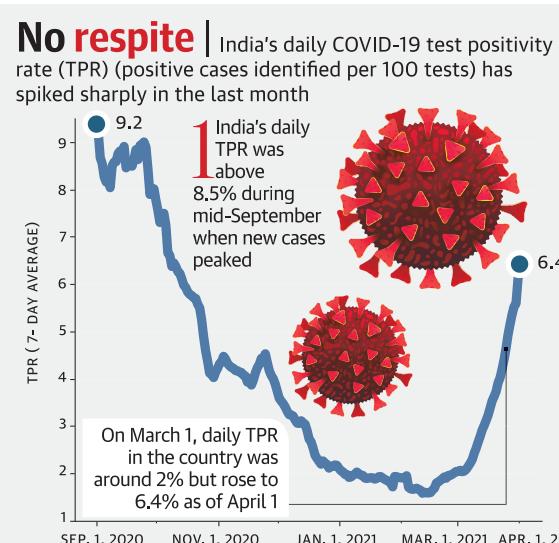
713 more deaths as surge continues for 23rd day

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

India recorded the highest single-day rise in coronavirus cases in six months with 89,019 new infections in a span of 24 hours, taking the COVID-19 tally of cases to 1,23,91,129, according to the State Health Departments and Ministries on Friday.

The single-day rise in cases is the highest recorded since September 8, 2020, while the death toll increased to 1,64,141 with 713 new fatalities, the highest since December 3, data updated at 11.45 p.m. showed.

As many as 89,855 new infections were recorded in a span of 24 hours on September 8, while 541 daily deaths were registered on Decem-



ber 3. The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,15,67,060. The case fatality rate stood at 1.33%, the data stated.

India's COVID-19 tally had

crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, 80 lakh on Oc-

## Highest single day vaccine coverage

More than 36.7 lakh COVID-19 vaccine doses were administered in the last 24 hours, the highest single day coverage till now, the Union Health Ministry said on Friday. Of the 36,71,242 vaccine doses, 33,65,597 beneficiaries were vaccinated for the first dose and 3,05,645 beneficiaries received the second dose of the vaccine. ▶ PAGE 10

tober 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one crore-mark on December 19.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8  
MORE REPORTS ► PAGE 10

## 4 poll personnel suspended in Assam for 'lift' in BJP vehicle

Re-polling ordered at a booth in Ratabari constituency

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI/GUWAHATI

The Election Commission has suspended four polling personnel, including a presiding officer and an armed escort officer, besides ordering a re-poll at a booth in southern Assam's Ratabari Assembly constituency, after electronic voting machines (EVMs) were found in a vehicle linked to a BJP candidate contesting the adjoining Patharkandi seat.

Both constituencies are in Karimganj district.

Officials said the polling personnel were unaware they had – after their car broke down near Nilambazar, 20 km short of district headquarters Karimganj – taken a lift in a vehicle registered in the name of Madhumita Paul, the wife of Patharkandi BJP candidate Krishnendu Paul. The team

We have suspended presiding officer Sahab Uddin Talukdar and three others and asked them to explain why they violated transport protocol. The team said they were unaware of who the vehicle belonged to until it was mobbed. ANBAMUTHU M.P., KARIMGANJ'S DEPUTY COMMISSIONER

Every time there is an election, videos of private vehicles caught transporting EVMs show up. Unsurprisingly, they have the following things in common: the vehicles usually belong to BJP candidates or their associates.... the videos are taken as one off incidents and dismissed as aberrations.

PRIYANKA GANDHI VADRA, CONGRESS LEADER

was returning from 149-Indira MV School under the Ratabari constituency, about 70 km away.

### EVM seals intact

The seals of the EVMs were found intact, but the EC decided to conduct a re-poll at the polling station concerned. The panel also sought a report from the special general observer,

who found armed escort officer Luhit Gohain guilty of leaving the stranded polling party behind and not ensuring its safe arrival at the destination.

Mr. Paul did not take calls. But his party members said the Opposition had blown a "minor" incident out of proportion.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

## Two attackers of BJP leader killed in Pulwama

10 civilians injured in clashes after the encounter

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR

Three militants, including the two persons who attacked the house of a BJP leader on Thursday, were killed in an operation of the security forces in south Kashmir's Pulwama on Friday. Around 10 civilians, including a woman, were injured in clashes near the encounter site.



A jawan walking past the encounter site. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

"Just after the attack on the BJP leader in Srinagar's Nowgam, the police acted on a lead regarding the pre-

sence of terrorists in the residential house of Nawaz Ahmad Dar in Dhoobi Mohalla of Kakapora. They were given an opportunity to surrender. However, they started firing indiscriminately. Later, all the three trapped terrorists were killed," Inspector General of Police (IGP) Vijay Kumar said.

The police said it tactfully rescued five civilians taken hostage by the trapped terrorists. "During the encounter, a stray bullet hit a woman in her leg. Her condition is stable," the pol-

ice said.

The police identified the slain militants as Junaid Ahmad Nengroo from Pricho in Pulwama, Suhail Nisar Lone and Yawar Ahmad Wanji, both residents of Khrew in Pampore.

"Preliminary investigation revealed that the terror attack on a BJP leader's house was jointly carried out by Srinagar and Pulwama-based terrorists of the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Al-Badr," Mr. Kumar said.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

## I-T searches on premises of Stalin's kin

Amid charges of cash for polls, offices of former Minister, aides raided across T.N.

### SANGEETHA KANDAVEL R.SIVARAMAN CHENNAI/TIRUCHI

The Income Tax (I-T) Department on Friday knocked on the doors of V. Sabareesan, the son-in-law of DMK president M.K. Stalin, a few of his associates and former Transport Minister Senthil Balaji. Searches were conducted at over five places in Chennai, including Mr. Sabareesan's residence in Neelankarai on East Coast Road.

Late in the evening, the De-



I-T officials searching V. Sabareesan's house in Chennai. ■ KARUNAKARAN M.

partment said the searches on three different groups and a few individuals by its Chennai Directorate were continuing.

These groups and individuals are involved in businesses ranging from running distilleries and breweries, real estate, local financing, solar power EPC to handling cash of politically exposed persons for the ongoing election. Part of these groups and individuals are alleged to have been actively assisting in political cash distribution. Searches have been conducted to verify and unearth such activities too," the agency said.

The premises searched

were in Chennai, Coimbatore, Karur and Thanjavur. A total of 28 premises were covered under Section 132 of the I-T Act. CBDT officials said several incriminating materials on tax evasion had been found.

Sources said the premises of two of Mr. Sabareesan's close aides, Bala of G Square Realtors Private Limited, and Karthik Mohan, son of DMK's Anna Nagar MLA M.K. Mohan, were also searched.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

## Drugs beat BMWs this poll season in Assam

Narcotics worth ₹34 crore seized

### RAHUL KARMAKAR GUWAHATI

Elections in Assam have often been associated with the doings out of 'BMW's', a coded contraction for blanket, money and wine.

Going by the seizures by various enforcement agencies, the 'BMW's' appear to have lost out to narcotic drugs during the ongoing poll.

Between February 26, when the model code of conduct came into force, and March 31, the enforcement and regulatory agencies seized cash, illegally transported liquor and other items worth a record ₹10.83 crore.

Officials said there was nothing unusual about seizing cash, liquor and other valuables during the campaign phase. What stumped them was the seizure of narcotic substances worth more than ₹34.29 crore.

Freebies of the intoxicating kind, such as Indian and foreign brand cigarettes and tobacco products, also touched a record value of ₹14.91 crore. The drugs seized included 6,892.82 kg of cannabis, 10.27 kg of

crystalline methamphetamine, 4.22 kg of heroin, 1 kg of morphine and 252.85 gm of brown sugar. The surveillance teams also recovered 3,02,188 methamphetamine capsules and pills of other narcotic substances.

"The seizure of drugs was highest in eastern Assam," State Nodal Officer Rahul Das said.

Most of the tea plantations are in eastern Assam.

For Excise and Revenue Intelligence officials, this could be a disturbing trend, as other parts of Assam have been notorious for drug trafficking. These include the Barak Valley, used by dealers on the Myanmar-Mizoram-Bangladesh axis to illegally transport heroin, methamphetamine and high-codeine cough syrups.

Western Assam's Dhubri district is also a conduit.

"The seizure of cannabis in eastern Assam is not unusual since it is grown in parts of southern Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. It is the other substances confiscated in the area that we are more worried about," an Excise official said.

Illustration: SREEJITH RAVIKUMAR

## 4th wave in Delhi; no lockdown plans'

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday said the Delhi government was not planning any lockdown in the wake of the 'fourth wave' of

COVID-19 in the Capital.

The city recorded 3,594 fresh COVID-19 cases on Friday, the highest daily count since December 4 last year, taking the tally to 6.68 lakh.

Terming the latest surge

"less serious" than the previous ones, Mr. Kejriwal said any decision on lockdown will be taken "after due consultation with the public".

DETAILS ON ► PAGE 3

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# In bloom, a vegetable garden at Singhu

Many protesters camping at the border have started sowing seeds and planting vegetable saplings

SHINJINI GHOSH  
NEW DELHI

With protesting farmers continuing to install semi-permanent structures at the Singhu border, mostly for accommodation purposes, several protesters have started sowing a varied range of vegetables, some along the perimeters of the structures.

A park, which was recently made by the protesters, is also set to turn into a kitchen garden for the farmers. Volunteers said that more such gardens will be made depending on space.

Charanjit Singh, a farmer from Punjab's Ludhiana district, said: "The park was opened a few days ago. Now several women and children visit the park in the mornings. We have also decided to plant saplings and sow so that we can grow vegetables ourselves for consumption later."

Mr. Singh, who is also a volunteer looking after the



(From left) Saplings planted by farmers at the Singhu border; a farmer building a temporary shelter at the protest site on Friday.

\*SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

park, added: "As of now we have coriander and bottle gourd among other vegetables. We are also growing mint and have started using it. These days most people are busy constructing their houses over here. Once it is done, we will see if there is enough space available where we can make other similar gardens."

"We also have to decide on where the water from the

existing langars will get drained to ensure that the roads are not flooded," he said.

#### Beyond beautifying

Several others said that apart from beautification purposes, they have also started sowing in limited quantities. Jogiinder Singh, a farmer from Punjab's Roopnagar, district said: "People often come here to sell sa-

plings. So we have kept a few along the boundary. Apart from beautification purposes, we have also sowed a few vegetables so that over the next few months we can consume it right from here."

Stating that the preparations and modifications are towards a longer haul, Mr. Singh said: "We still do not know how long the movement will continue. For the last few months we have

been self-sufficient throughout and we intend to continue doing the same. We have survived harsh conditions over all these months and we are not moving from here."

Thousands of farmers have been camping at Delhi's borders demanding a minimum support price and repeal of the three farm laws brought in by the Centre last year.

**Man kills live-in partner in Mangolpuri**

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

A 25-year-old woman was allegedly killed by her live-in partner in outer Delhi's Mangolpuri. Her minor children were found near her body when it was discovered, the police said on Friday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer) Parvinder Singh said that the woman has been identified as Jyoti alias Soni, a resident of Shahbad Dairy.

The police said that around 10.50 a.m., they were informed about a woman's body, which was lying on the fourth floor of a house in J-Block, Mangolpuri. When the police reached the spot, they found the body and there were visible injury marks on the head and the right side of the face. "During inquiry, it was found that she had come to the area to live on rent a few days ago. She and her husband had separated a few years ago. She was living in the area with her partner Shiva Sharma, who works as a carpenter," Mr. Singh said.

The police said that she had a fight with her partner on Thursday night during which he hit her on the head and face. She was injured and bled profusely. The accused locked the main door and fled.

## Five members of Lawrence Bishnoi-Kala Jathedi gang held

Loaded firearms and over 70 live cartridges recovered: police

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Delhi Police has arrested five criminals of Lawrence Bishnoi-Kala Jathedi gang from the national capital, officials said on Friday.



Accused were wanted in several cases, including murders, extortion and under Arms Act. \*SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The accused have been identified as Kapil Nehra (23), Yashpal alias Sarpanch (28), Rajeev alias Raju Basai (25), Rahul Mehalawat (23), all residents of Haryana, and Gagandeep alias Guni (35), who is from Punjab, they said.

"The police received a specific input regarding the movement of the accused in the national capital. Later, a police team laid a trap near Chandgi Ram Akhara red light at Ring Road on the intervening night of Thursday and Friday and apprehended them," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Manishi Chandra said.

#### Case under Arms Act

Loaded firearms and over 70 live cartridges were recovered from the possession of the accused, police said, adding that a case under Arms Act has been registered and all the accused have been arrested.

The accused were wanted in several cases, including broad daylight triple and

double murders, attempts to murder, extortion, encounter with police and Arms Act in Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab and Uttarakhand, police said.

They had committed a series of crimes in the recent past, acting as a bridge between Lawrence Bishnoi-Kala Jathedi and another wanted gangster of Gurugram Sube Gurjar, who is carrying a reward of ₹7 lakh on his arrest, police said.

#### Network expansion

After escaping from the custody of Haryana Police in February 2020, gangster Sandeep alias Kala Jathedi has been working to expand his network in Delhi and adjoining States, police said.

After the arrests of all major criminals of Delhi in the last one year, gangsters from Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan are trying to enter the national capital. Lawrence Bishnoi and Sube Gurjar are amongst the most dangerous once operating in areas surrounding Delhi, the DCP said.

Bishnoi has been trying to make inroads into Delhi for last eight to ten months. While Bishnoi himself is in jail, his close associate Sandeep is working to expand the syndicate's footprints in Delhi. Sandeep is closely assisted by one Kala Rana of Lawrence Bishnoi gang, suspected to be hiding in a south-east Asian country, the police said.

## Man found dead in vacant flat in Narela

There were injury marks on his neck, hands and his face was burnt to hide identity

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The body of a 36-year-old man was found inside a vacant flat in north Delhi's Narela, the police said on Friday. The face of the deceased was burnt, they said.

Kumar's relatives had informed the police after finding the body. A missing report had earlier been lodged at Kanjhwali police station, the police said.

"Statement of the deceased's nephew, Vicky (21), was recorded. He stated that his

reached DSIIIC flats in Bhoragh. There were injury marks on Kumar's neck and hands and his face was burnt to hide his identity, the officer said.

Kumar's relatives had informed the police after finding the body. A missing report had earlier been lodged at Kanjhwali police station, the police said.

When Kumar did not return home, his family members asked Mr. Panna whether he had met him, but he refused, the police said.

Mr. Panna had sustained an injury on the leg and

uncle had left the house on Wednesday to meet his brother-in-law, Panna Ram, who resides in Narela," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer North) Rajeev Ranjan Singh said.

A case has been registered at Narela Industrial Area police station. Mr. Panna is absconding, the DCP said. Preliminary investigation revealed that there was some dispute between Kumar and Mr. Panna over money.

when his relatives persisted, he told them to search for Kumar at the DSIIIC flats, the police said. On Friday, the relatives found the body, the officer said.

A case has been registered at Narela Industrial Area police station. Mr. Panna is absconding, the DCP said. Preliminary investigation revealed that there was some dispute between Kumar and Mr. Panna over money.

to the woman.

The court noted that there are contradictions between the initial version and the present version of the woman.

"The prosecutrix is a make-up artist and is a resident of Delhi. It cannot be said that she is naive. This is not a case of forceful sexual assault...." the High Court said, adding that whether the woman's physical relationship was based on her free consent or not will be decided only in trial.

The court noted that the evidence has been collected and the mobile phone of the man, who is a doctor working

to the woman.

The court noted that there are contradictions between the initial version and the present version of the woman.

"The prosecutrix is a make-up artist and is a resident of Delhi. It cannot be said that she is naive. This is not a case of forceful sexual assault...." the High Court said, adding that whether the woman's physical relationship was based on her free consent or not will be decided only in trial.

The court noted that the evidence has been collected and the mobile phone of the man, who is a doctor working

## Haryana property damage recovery Bill comes under fire from activists

Mass movements held at State-level convention in Rohtak

ASHOK KUMAR  
GURUGRAM

The legislation on recovery of damages to property, recently enacted by the Haryana Assembly, came under fire from activists associated with several mass movements at a State-level convention held in Rohtak on Friday.

"The Haryana Recovery of Damages to Property During Disturbance of Public Order Bill, 2021" was passed by the State Assembly on March 18, giving powers to the police and executive towards recovery of damages to property from protesters of an agitation.

The Speakers at the convention, organised by Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), attacked the Bill calling it a "draconian" measure to stifle the right to protest.

All-India Kisan Sabha Haryana vice-president Inderjit Singh



The State-level convention was organised by Samyukt Kisan Morcha in Rohtak on Friday. \*SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Singh put forth a resolution critical of the Act and called upon all sections of the people to raise their voice for repealing the pernicious Act whose implications were very serious for the future of democracy.

The decisions taken in the convention included sending emails to the Chief Minister demanding a point-to-point rebuttal of the law questioning the intentions of the government behind the move as there were ample laws for damages to property under the Indian Penal Code.

and Batukeshwar Dutt in 1929 against similar legislations brought by Britishers and protest before the Raj Bhawan.

All-India Lawyers Union president Gurjeet Singh and advocates Rajender Singh and Pradeep Raparia placed a point-to-point rebuttal of the law questioning the intentions of the government behind the move as there were ample laws for damages to property under the Indian Penal Code.

## Man held for creating girl's fake profile

Accused posted morphed pictures of the girl; he has targeted six women: police

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

A 25-year-old event manager was arrested for allegedly creating a fake profile of a Class VIII student on Instagram and threatening her with obscene messages, the police said on Friday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) Atul Kumar Thakur said that the accused has been identified as Bharat Khatar, who allegedly posted a 14-year-old girl's morphed nude pictures on the social media. He wanted to take revenge on her as she had warned him against harassing his friend.

The police said that a complaint was received from the victim's mother who stated that a fake Instagram profile of her daughter was created



Accused Bharat

and the accused has been sending obscene messages from the same and stalking her daughter.

Based on the complaint, a case under Sections 354D (stalking), 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman), 354A (sexual harassment and punishment for sexual harassment and punishment) and other relevant sections of the POCSO Act was

registered at Kotla Mubarakpur police station.

During probe, letters were sent to Facebook to seek details about the Instagram account and with the help of technical intelligence, the accused was identified.

After due verification, the accused was apprehended from his residence in Faridabad on Thursday, Mr. Thakur said.

It was revealed that the accused first targeted the victim's friend and contacted her through social media. He started harassing her and they had an argument on WhatsApp after which she shared the incident with her daughter.

Based on the complaint, a case under Sections 354D (stalking), 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman), 354A (sexual harassment and punishment for sexual harassment and punishment) and other relevant sections of the POCSO Act was

## Solution to pollution



Firefighters dousing burning leaves and garbage near Gole Dak Khana in New Delhi on Friday. \*SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

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•LAJPAT NAGAR, 49, Main Ring Road, Adj. Haldi Ram, Near Moolchand Crossing

## HC grants bail to doctor accused of rape on pretext of marriage

'Victim's initial and present versions are contradictory'

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has granted bail to a doctor, accused of raping a woman after promising her marriage, noting that it was "not a case of forceful sexual assault...." the High Court said, adding that whether the woman's physical relationship was based on her free consent or not will be decided only in trial.

The court noted that the evidence has been collected and the mobile phone of the man, who is a doctor working

to the woman.

The court noted that there are contradictions between the initial version and the present version of the woman.

"The prosecutrix is a make-up artist and is a resident of Delhi. It cannot be said that she is naive. This is not a case of forceful sexual assault...." the High Court said, adding that whether the woman's physical relationship was based on her free consent or not will be decided only in trial.

The court noted that the evidence has been collected and the mobile phone of the man, who is a doctor working

at Safdarjung Hospital here, was with the police.

"In view of the above, this court finds it just and expedient to grant bail to the petitioner [doctor] in the event of arrest [in the case] registered at Hauz Khas police station for offences punishable under Sections 376 [punishment for rape] and 328 [causing hurt by means of poison with intent to commit an offence] IPC...." the High Court said.

The woman alleged that he later called her to meet him to "know each other more". Once, she said, he called her at his friend's house where she was given a soft drink after which she lost consciousness. After regaining consciousness, she said, she realised she has been raped.

According to the woman, her father had suffered a heart attack in January 2019 and she took her to Safdarjung Hospital where the ac-

tuated to make it viral, the woman alleged, adding that she was later called to some hotels and raped again.

Seeking bail, the doctor's counsel submitted that the FIR was registered January 28 this year based on the allegation that the petitioner took the woman to his friend's flat on June 9, 2019, and raped her. However, this story has been completely given a go by and now the allegation is that the man promised marriage and established physical relationship with her, he argued, adding that no useful purpose would be served by arresting the doctor.

**Timings****DELHI**

SATURDAY, APR. 03
RISE 06:09 SET 18:40
RISE 00:00 SET 10:27
SUNDAY, APR. 04
RISE 06:08 SET 18:41
RISE 01:02 SET 11:25
MONDAY, APR. 05
RISE 06:07 SET 18:42
RISE 01:59 SET 12:26

**Delhi Weather**

max min

Delhi City 34 16

Safdarjung 34 16

Palam 35 17

Delhi Palam Today

35°C Surface winds speed

would decrease. Light to

moderate surface winds would

continue during the warm

sun day.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow

36°C Temperature would rise.

A very warm day would prevail

with partly cloudy sky and light

winds.

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THE HINDU

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# Not planning to impose lockdown, says Kejriwal amid surge in cases

CM says 'fourth wave is less serious', exhorts Centre to allow mass vaccination

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT****NEW DELHI**

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday said the Delhi government is not planning to impose any lockdown in the Capital. He said the "fourth wave" of COVID-19 was "less serious" than others before it.

If needed, Mr. Kejriwal said, the government would consider a lockdown only "after due consultation with the public" even as he sought to urge the Central government to open up the vaccination process for everyone instead of keeping it restricted to specific age groups due to the rising number of cases.

"India is witnessing a rise in cases. Delhi, too, is witnessing a surge. As I have always said Delhi has encountered the worst COVID situation, this is the fourth wave for the city. For the



Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

country, this might be the second wave but Delhi is encountering the fourth peak," he told at a digital briefing after an emergency meeting at his residence to assess the situation.

**'Govt. keeping an eye'**

"At this peak, we have seen that the cases have been rapidly increasing regularly and this is a matter of grave concern but one must not worry. The government is keeping an eye on the situation and all mandatory steps that need to be taken, are being looked into," he added.

On March 16, he said, the city witnessed 425 cases, which has now surged beyond 3,500. According to data, he said, the fourth wave is "less serious than the previous ones" as mortality rates are relatively low and so was the number of people being admitted to hospitals and ICUs.

In October, he said, 3,000 to 4,000 new cases came up daily with around 1,700 patients in ICU. On Friday, the number was around 800 - registering a drop of 50%. The mortality rate then was 40 deaths per day but on Friday it was around 10-12. "We have looked into the provision for additional requirements for hospitals in case people fall sick and need to get admitted to the hospital. The provision

of ambulance, hospital, ventilator, oxygen, and ICU were all discussed. For this, a plan has been laid down as to in what stages the number of ICU beds in the private and government hospitals would be increased," he added. The government has three broad concerns, including preventing the spread of infection, hospital management and the ongoing vaccination drive.

Mr. Kejriwal said he was happy that the Centre allowed the vaccination to people above the age of 45. "If the Centre permits us to do mass vaccination, then hundreds and thousands of facilities can be created in community centres, schools and a mass vaccination drive could be initiated. If this is done, it would be a great aid to control the spread of the virus," he said.

# Daily new COVID-19 cases cross 3,500 mark in Capital

Over 80,000 tests conducted in 24 hours, says govt.

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT****NEW DELHI**

The city on Friday recorded 3,594 new COVID-19 cases and 14 deaths, stated a health bulletin released by the government.

The bulletin added that 87,505 tests had been conducted in 24 hours with a positivity rate of 4.11%. Out of the total tests, 54,898 were RTPCR and 32,607 were rapid antigen.

At present, there are 11,994 active cases in the city out of which 6,106 were under home isolation.



A health worker administering vaccine to a man in the Capital on Friday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

**Virus spread**

Total number of COVID-19 cases	Delhi
<b>6,68,814</b>	<b>11,050</b>
New cases in the past 24 hours	
<b>3,594</b>	<b>14</b>
New deaths	

SOURCE: DELHI GOVERNMENT HEALTH BULLETIN

There are 2,338 containment zones in the city. Since the pandemic began over a year ago, the total number of positive cases has reached 6,68,814 cases with 11,050 deaths.

The last time the number of new cases was over the 3,500 mark was on December 4 when 4,067 cases

## HC refuses to stay order for FIR against councillor

He allegedly caused loss to exchequer

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA****NEW DELHI**

The Delhi High Court has declined to stay the Lokayukta order for registering an FIR against a councillor of the North Delhi Municipal Corporation for alleged pecuniary loss caused to exchequer over disbursal of old-age stipends under a 2018 scheme.

Justice Prathiba M. Singh also did not put on hold any investigation or trial in connection with the FIR which was ordered to be lodged by the Lokayukta in January last year.

**Recovery of loss**  
"The interim prayer for stay of the FIR and the trial and investigation is rejected considering the nature of the allegations. However, if any steps are taken for recovery of the pecuniary [loss], at that stage, the petitioner [councillor] is permitted to approach the court," the Judge said in the order of March 24.

## Kejriwal will represent Delhi at World Cities Cultural Forum

'This year's theme will play crucial role in reimagining culture'

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT****NEW DELHI**

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will represent the Capital and India at the World Cities Cultural Forum, the Delhi government said here on Friday.

Mr. Kejriwal, the government said, had recently accepted an invitation by the Mayor of London to represent Delhi at the forum, which comprises 40 world cities including London, Tokyo and New York.

All the cities 'recognise the impact and importance of culture and creativity and seek to inculcate these values in public policy and city planning', the government said.

In his response to the invitation received from the

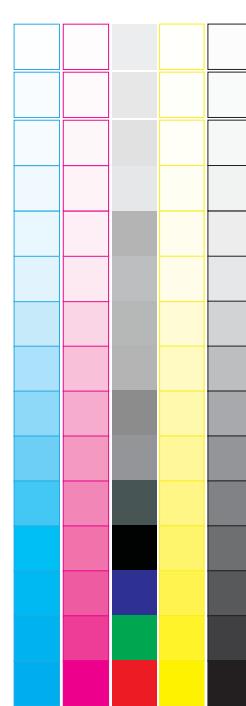
annual Summit, attended by Deputy Mayors for Culture and Heads of Culture from the member cities, is at the heart of the forum's activity, the government said, adding that Delhi will also be part of the World Cities Culture Report, the most comprehensive global dataset on culture in cities.

This year's theme – The Future of Culture – will play a crucial role in reimagining the culture of Delhi, especially in the wake of several devastating challenges and COVID crisis faced by the people in the last one year, the government said.

In his response to the invitation received from the

Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, Mr. Kejriwal said: "Future of Culture" is certainly a topic of relevance at this challenging juncture. As people around the world struggled in isolation – it has been art and music that helped us stay connected and cope with the crisis at hand. Creativity and sharing provided hope and strength to respond to the COVID-19 with resilience.

The unfortunate circumstances of the pandemic have posed new challenges and possibilities to reimagine the modes of cultural practice. As we move towards recovery, the arts and culture will play a vital role in rebuilding lives and society."



## Temperature in Capital likely to rise to 38°C by Monday, forecasts IMD

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA****NEW DELHI**

The Capital recorded a maximum temperature of 34.4 degrees Celsius on Friday, two notches above the normal, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

The city's minimum temperature settled at 16.2 degrees Celsius. The weatherman said mercury is likely to rise to 38 degrees Celsius

by Monday.

The Capital had recorded a mean maximum temperature of 33.1 degrees Celsius last month, making it the "hottest" March in the last 11 years, according to the IMD.

**Worst since 2010**  
It was the highest mean maximum temperature in March since 2010, when it was 34.1 degrees Celsius.

Normally, the mean maximum temperature for the month of March in Delhi is 29.6 degrees Celsius, according to the IMD.

**Heat wave condition**  
On Monday, Delhi reeled under a "severe" heat wave, as the maximum temperature shot up to 40.1 degrees Celsius, making it the hottest day in March in 76 years, the IMD had said.

## Cong. criticises AAP for letting students down

'Instead of bridging digital divide gap, govt. is launching virtual school project'

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT****NEW DELHI**

The Delhi Congress on Friday criticised the government for allegedly failing to provide students with the necessary infrastructure to attend online classes during the pandemic.

"Instead of providing the necessary facilities for online class to the students and teachers, the Kejriwal government is showing the dream of a virtual school so

If there is no timely action on this inequality, then poor students will get backward not only in terms of education but also employment

CH. ANIL KUMAR

Delhi Congress chief

that one school can be used to promote it, while it is a common opinion that students during the pandemic

period did not get the benefit of education," Delhi Congress chief Ch. Anil Kumar said.

**Digital inequality**

He added that for the second year in a row, students will be forced to study through online classes, and due to the digital inequality, many will be deprived of education and will lag. "If there is no timely and thoughtful action on

## LoP says AAP govt. in nexus with liquor mafia

Bidhuri demands Sisodia's resignation

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT****NEW DELHI**

Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri on Friday demanded the immediate resignation of Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia for conceding that a big "liquor mafia" had illegally operated in the Capital for the past six years of AAP government rule and had caused nearly ₹12,000 crore worth of losses to the exchequer.

"Now, they have suddenly woken up to this illegal practice and loss of revenue. Why were they sleeping over it? This is a clear case of collaboration in corruption and therefore Mr. Sisodia should immediately step down owning responsibility for this scam," he also said.

How many people from the liquor mafia were prosecuted and sent to jail and how many cases under the Excise Act were registered in relation to their activities? Mr. Bidhuri asked. Similarly, he asked, what action had been taken against errant shops and how many criminal cases had the Delhi government got registered against those allegedly indulging in irregularities related to liquor.

"The LoP alleged that the inaction of the Delhi government against the alleged mafia is an indication that it was hand in glove with the mafia. Therefore, the Delhi government will now attempt to break the hold of the liquor mafia," she said.

She added that till now there were many areas in Delhi that did not have legal outlets for the sale of alcohol due to which there was an uneven distribution of shops. As a result, liquor was sold illegally and therefore the Delhi government had brought in the policy to ensure that alcohol was not sold illegally.

"The AAP government has brought in a new excise policy to end the activities of liquor mafia in the city. The Aam Aadmi Party had previously endeavoured to end the private school mafia, tanker mafia, hospital mafia – in the same manner, the

this inequality, then poor students will get backward in the future not only in terms of education but also employment," Mr. Kumar said.

Mr. Kumar said that the budget presented for the year 2021-22 also did not make any allocation to overcome the problem. No incentive, like laptops, tablets or data for mobile phones and Internet, was announced for them either.

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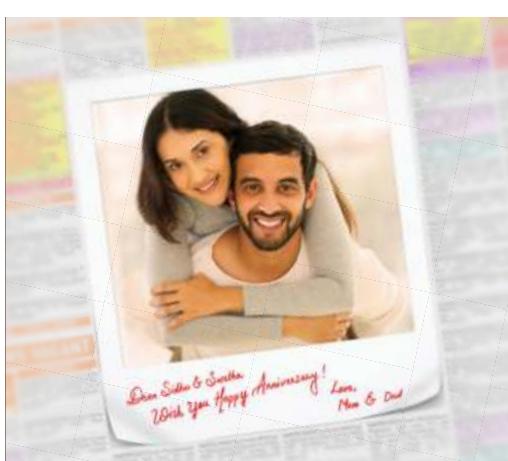
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## PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

See Section 82 Cr. P. C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person namely **Nazim S/o Lt. Sh. Md. Nazer** R/o H.No. 140, Gali No.04, D Block, Near KhaJoori Khas, Shri Ram Colony, Delhi, has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence under case **FR No. 30/13 U/s 498A/406/34 IPC** has been registered at **P.S. Bhajanpura** Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest there upon issued that the said, **Nazim S/o Lt. Sh. Md. Nazer** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said, **Nazim S/o Lt. Sh. Md. Nazer** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).

Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused, **Nazim S/o Lt. Sh. Md. Nazer** of **FR No. 30/13 U/s. 498A/406/34 IPC** required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before 08.06.2021.

By Order,

Ms. Vijay Shree Rathore, MM

DP/673/NE/2021 Kakardooma Courts, Shahdara Delhi

## Rakesh Tikait's convoy attacked

Incident took place in Rajasthan's Alwar when he was going to address a rally

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

JAIPUR/GHAZIABAD

Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait's convoy was allegedly attacked in Rajasthan's Alwar district on Friday, when he was going to address a farmers' rally in Bansur town. A group of people pelted stones at the cavalcade, damaging the rear windscreen of his car.

Mr. Tikait was safe and did not get any injury. The farmer leader, who has been leading the agitation against the Centre's agriculture sector laws for over four months, held the "goons of Bharatiya Janata Party" responsible for the attack.

"The goons of BJP indulged in a lethal attack [on our convoy] at Tatarpur intersection on Bansur road. This is the murder of democracy," Mr. Tikait remarked while posting a video clip of his car with the smashed window glass on twitter.



Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait



Farmers blocking traffic at the Ghaziabad border in protest against the alleged attack on Rakesh Tikait on Friday. ■ PTI

Mr. Tikait addressed two rallies in Alwar district on Friday. He was travelling from Harsauli to Bansur when the attack, allegedly with stones and iron rods, took place.

Police have detained four persons, including a student leader, in connection with the incident. The BKU leader's supporters and a large number of farmers from the region blocked the Bansur road after the attack. A huge police

force was deployed in the area late in the evening.

## BKU flays attack

Meanwhile, the BKU and the Samyukt Kisan Morcha have criticised the alleged attack on Mr. Tikait. BKU media in-charge Dharmendra Malik said the assailants came in an SUV and were close to the local BJP MLA.

He said the BKU members blocked the road in protest and an FIR was registered

against unidentified assailants. "The SUV that the attackers left is said to have belonged to Kuldeep Yadav, student union president of Matsya University. Kuldeep could be seen in photos with Rajasthan BJP chief Satish Punia and is said to be close to him," Mr. Malik said.

In response to the attack, the BKU workers blocked the Delhi-Meerut Expressway at Ghaziabad border for two hours.

## FIR filed against BJP leader in Ansari ambulance row

Alka Rai charged with cheating, forgery

## OMAR RASHID

LUCKNOW

The police in Uttar Pradesh's Barabanki district registered an FIR against a woman BJP leader on Friday on charges of cheating and forgery after it surfaced that an ambulance with a number plate from the district was used to ferry jailed MLA Mukhtar Ansari from Ropar jail to a court in Mohali by the Punjab Police. The Supreme Court had last week directed the Punjab government to hand over the custody of the controversial MLA.

The case was lodged under Sections 419, 420, 467, 468 and 471 of the IPC against Alka Rai, who is the regional general secretary of the BJP's women unit in Gorakhpur.

The controversy erupted after the U.P. government alleged that the Punjab go-

vernment had allowed Mr. Ansari to be escorted to court in a luxury, bullet-proof ambulance that had a number plate of Barabanki district.

A probe by the U.P. Transport Department found that the address and documents provided for the registration of the ambulance in 2013 were "prima facie fraud" and forged, said Yamuna Prasad, Superintendent of Police, Barabanki. The address stated during registration was not found to be in Rafi Nagar area of Barabanki, he said.

The case was lodged under Sections 419, 420, 467, 468 and 471 of the IPC against Alka Rai, who is the regional general secretary of the Shyam Sanjeevni Hospital in Mau district, from where Mr. Ansari is an MLA. The ambulance was allegedly registered to an address linked to her hospital.

## Three arrested for assault on couple in U.P.

## PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

BAREILLY

Three persons have been arrested after a video of them allegedly beating up an unmarried couple sitting in a shop in a village here surfaced on social media, police said on Friday.

Assistant Superintendent of Police Raj Kumar Agarwal said that the incident took place in Rithaura village on Wednesday.

After the video surfaced on social media, the woman's brother registered a complaint, following which three men, identified as Manoj, Pankaj and Ajay, all residents of Rithaura area, were arrested.

An FIR was registered in Hafizganj police station under the IPC Sections 323 (voluntarily causing hurt) and 504 (intentional insult).

## AAP plans stir against high power tariffs

Punjab people are suffering due to Cong. govt's policies: Harpal Singh Cheema

## VIKAS VASUDEVAKA

CHANDIGARH

Ahead of the Assembly elections in Punjab, due early next year, the principal Opposition party – the Aam Aadmi Party – has decided to raise the electricity rate issue. The party plans to launch a State-wide agitation from April 7.

In the first phase of the month-long agitation, AAP would be staging protests in over 16,000 villages and wards across the State.



Harpal Singh Cheema. ■ FILE PHOTO

however, is paying no heed to the problems being faced by the people. Now, we will launch a mass agitation to pressurise the government to resolve these issues," he said.

Hitting out at the Congress, Mr. Cheema said the State government has failed to keep its promises made during the 2017 Assembly polls and the people have lost all faith in the government.

"The Congress had promised to reduce power tariffs before the 2017 elections, but after assuming power, the government had raised power prices multiple times. The Congress had promised that power agreements made by the previous SAD-BJP government with the private companies would be reviewed and can-

du on Friday.

Mr. Cheema said on account of the anti-people policies adopted by the Congress during its four years of rule, the people are suffering immensely.

"We had been raising the high power tariffs and other public-centric issues in the Assembly, told The Hindu.

Meerut's Rural Superintendent of Police Keshav Kumar said four youths were involved in abducting and raping the girl, and the police, on the basis of a note left by the girl, have arrested two of the accused.

**Suicide prevention helpline:** Sanjivini Society for Mental Health, Telephone: 011-4076 9002, Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-7.30 p.m.

## OBITUARY &amp; REMEMBRANCE

## DEATH

MRS SUBHALAKSHMI Ram Mohan, W/o Capt C Ram Mohan, of Defence Colony, Madras, expired on 1 April 2021. Deeply mourned by Family and Friends. Contact 984094349/ 9500015058

**OBITUARY**

Dr.A.THIRUSELVAM, M.D., D.A.,(72)

Retired Professor, Department of Anaesthesia Madras Medical College - Rajiv Gandhi Government Hospital

Died on 30-03-2021 in Melbourne, Australia. Age: 72 years 30 AM (IST)

Deeply mourned by Friends and Relatives Contact: Ms.NishaSharma Thiruselvam (Daughter) at +61 425 870 555

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**WEATHER WATCH**

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 10 AM)

**Forecast for Saturday:** Thunderstorm with lightning likely at isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, coastal Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. Heat wave conditions likely in some/isolated pockets over Rajasthan, Saurashtra & Kutch, Vidarbha, Telangana, Rayalseema, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	... -	26.5	26.5	Kozhikode	... -	33.6...26.1	
Ahmedabad	39.9	20.3	17.0	Kurnool	... -	40.6...26.7	
Aizawl	28.1	13.1	10.6	Lucknow	... -	36.6...16.8	
Allahabad	39.2	16.8	14.8	Madurai	0.5	42.3...24.5	
Bengaluru	36.8	21.4	18.8	Mangaluru	... -	35.5...24.5	
Bhopal	39.1	17.4	14.8	Mumbai	... -	32.4...23.8	
Bhubaneswar	38.2	25.5	25.5	Mysuru	... -	35.0...20.0	
Chandigarh	32.4	13.3	13.3	Patna	... -	34.4...16.2	
Chennai	41.8	28.5	28.5	Pondicherry	10.2	28.8...22.1	
Coimbatore	36.7	24.2	24.2	Port Blair	... -	37.8...25.6	
Dehradun	31.5	12.5	12.5	Rajkot	... -	37.7...17.8	
Gangtok	19.3	10.5	10.5	Raipur	... -	41.7...21.0	
Goa	34.3	25.3	25.3	Ranchi	... -	37.9...19.8	
Guwahati	32.2	20.1	20.1	Shillong	0.8	25.1...13.5	
Hubballi	36.0	19.0	19.0	Shimla	... -	19.2...8.1	
Hyderabad	39.3	23.1	23.1	Srinagar	... -	19.6...4.8	
Imphal	1.5	28.8	13.7	Thiruvananthapuram	... -	34.0...24.7	
Jaipur	36.0	18.6	18.6	Tiruchi	... -	42.3...26.6	
Kochi	32.4	24.4	24.4	Vijayawada	... -	42.8...27.2	
Kohima	22.6	—	—	Visakhapatnam	... -	33.0...28.8	
Kolkata	35.6	26.6	26.6				

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

**Pollutants in the air you are breathing**

CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>x</sub>	CO	PM <sub>2.5</sub>	PM <sub>10</sub>	CODE
Ahmedabad	83	.85	24	.188	.172	...
Bengaluru	.4	118	39	.70	.106	...
Chennai	.8	.25	52	.64	.73	...
Delhi	22	40	34	.252	.192	...
Hyderabad	.6	91	.25	.113	.150	...
Kolkata	.8	19	50	.155	.159	...
Lucknow	.6	39	.60	.199	.164	...
Mumbai	.2	18	.5	.323	.148	...
Pune	.6	39	.36	.135	.108	...
Visakhapatnam	—	—	—	—	—	—

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

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

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

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

**PM<sub>2.5</sub> & PM<sub>10</sub>:** Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m. Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh recorded an overall AQI score of 322 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Bagalkot, Karnataka recorded a healthy AQI score of 50

CM hits out at political parties opposing lockdown

STAFF REPORTER  
MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Friday said that strict restrictions would be implemented in the State in the coming days. He did not want to impose a lockdown, but would be left with no option if COVID-19 cases continued to rise in the present manner.

"I have been getting calls enquiring whether a lockdown would be imposed in the State. I am only warning today; I am not announcing anything. I will be watching for the next two to three days and discussing with various stakeholders. I will announce strict restrictions in the coming few days. We have to stop this wave and ensure there is no third wave. It is not a one-way process; both sides have to work hard. I expect cooperation like last year," said Mr. Thackeray, in his address to the State.

Mr. Thackeray's speech indicated that the State is set to come under a lockdown from the coming week as he presented the examples of foreign countries, including France, Brazil and the United Kingdom, where strict measures like lockdown were taken to control the spread of novel coronavirus.

"I don't want a lockdown. But can all those who are advising me to not call for a lockdown suggest me a way to control the number of patients? Lockdown will hamper the economy, employment. But saving lives is the utmost priority for me. Employment is not going anywhere," he said.

He said that the State



I don't want a lockdown. But can all those who are advising me to not call for a lockdown suggest me a way to control the number of patients?

UDDHAV THACKERAY  
Chief Minister

would increase the number of people getting vaccinations. "A total of 65 lakh people have been vaccinated and on Thursday, three lakh citizens received the jab. We look forward to increase this number to 6-7 lakh and I am sure the Centre will grant our request," he said.

Mr. Thackeray slammed the political parties who are opposing the lockdown and

threatening to hit the streets. "Of course, I welcome them to hit the streets. But they should come out to save lives, to help health professionals with testing, and to create social awareness," he said.

Taking a dig at Maharashtra Navnirman Sena chief Raj Thackeray, without naming him, for his refusal to wear a mask, the CM asked what sort of bravery was this and what was being achieved through it?

Mr. Thackeray said people were getting infected irrespective of being vaccinated. "Vaccine is merely an umbrella in a storm. We have to follow each and every health norm even after getting COVID-19 jab. There is no effective mode to stop the spread of the virus," he said.

About the additions to the State's health infrastructure, the CM said from a few thousand beds, the number had reached 3.75 lakh beds in one month. "But if this trend continues, we may face shortage of beds in 15-20 days," he said.

The State is conducting 1.82 lakh tests, of which 70% are RT-PCR, every day, and plans to increase the number to 2.50 lakh.

## Maharashtra sees 47,827 new cases, 202 fatalities

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI

Maharashtra on Friday recorded 47,827 new COVID-19 cases, the highest daily count since the novel coronavirus pandemic began.

The new figure took the State tally of positive cases to 29,04,076, a Health Department statement said. As many as 202 novel coronavirus patients died in the State on Friday, taking the death toll to 55,379, it said.

## Author refuses to work under Ambedkar publication committee member-secretary

J.V. Pawar questions his eligibility, contribution to movement

ALOK DESHPANDE  
MUMBAI

The reorganisation of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Source Material Publication Committee by the Maharashtra government has sparked a controversy after veteran Ambedkarite and author J.V. Pawar refused to work under a relatively unknown member-secretary of the committee, questioning the credentials of Dr. Krishna Kamble appointed as the member-secretary.

"I have been active in the Ambedkarite movement for over 50 years. It was me who ensured the legal battle over this literature ended in 70s and material was made available for publication. I have authored numerous books, articles on Dr. Ambedkar, and even at the age of 78, I am active in the movement. I have never heard the name of Dr. Krishna Kamble nor am I aware of his contribution to the movement. Why should I work under him?" Mr. Pawar asked.

The State Higher and Technical Education Department on March 30 issued a list of new members, including Mr. Pawar, in an attempt to reorganise the dormant committee which is tasked with editing, translating, and re-publishing the works of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Apart from ministers, MLA and officials, it has 16 private members, including activists, authors and researchers of the Ambedkarite movement.

On April 1, Mr. Pawar

wrote to Higher and Technical Education Minister Uday Samant, who is the president of the committee, questioning the credentials of Dr. Krishna Kamble appointed as the member-secretary.

"I have been active in the Ambedkarite movement for over 50 years. It was me who ensured the legal battle over this literature ended in 70s and material was made available for publication. I have authored numerous books, articles on Dr. Ambedkar, and even at the age of 78, I am active in the movement. I have never heard the name of Dr. Krishna Kamble nor am I aware of his contribution to the movement. Why should I work under him?" Mr. Pawar asked.

According to sources in the government, the committee is an attempt to go beyond politics and try to work towards the larger aim of bringing out literature of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Interestingly, one of the members of the committee, senior journalist Nikhil Wagle, has already declared that he is not part of it. "As a journalist, it has been my policy to not work with any government committee. Here I was not even consulted before selecting me. I also believe that researchers on Dr. Ambedkar and his work should be part of this committee instead of me," he told *The Hindu*.

## Two months after Kharghar gang rape, police arrest main accused in Chembur

RAINA ASSAINAR  
NAVI MUMBAI

Nearly two months after a 19-year-old woman was gang-raped by two people inside a stationary bus in Kharghar, the police arrested the main accused in Chembur on Wednesday.

The arrested accused, identified as Abhishek Kharat (31), was the driver of the bus in which he committed the crime along with his accomplice, Tejas Dewlekar (19), a college-going student.

Mr. Dewlekar was arrested on February 4 after an FIR was registered at Kharghar police station. She reached home with the

help of some citizens and informed her family about the incident.

The next day, based on a complaint, the Kharghar police registered a case of gang-rape against the two and immediately arrested Mr. Dewlekar. However, Mr. Kharat, had absconded. On Wednesday, he was traced to Lal Dongar in Chembur where he was hiding at his sister's house and was arrested by assistant police inspector Shridhar Pawar.

After she became unconscious, the two sexually assaulted her in the bus. The duo then took her to a secluded spot in Taloja in the dark and abandoned her. She reached home with the

## Car falls into waterbody; 4 of family dead

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
PUNE

A woman and her three daughters died and her husband was injured after their car fell into a roadside waterbody in Panshet dam catchment area near Pune on Friday afternoon, police said.

After locals alerted authorities about the incident, the bodies were brought out, said fire brigade officials of PMRDA.

The deceased have been identified as Alpana Bhikule (45) and her daughters Prajkti (21), Pranita (17) and Vaidali (8), while the injured person is Vitthal Bhikule, a rural police station official said.

"The family was returning to their home in Pune from their native village in Velhe tehsil. It is suspected the man lost control of the vehicle and it fell into the waterbody," he added.

## Remembering Christ



Solemn occasion: Members of the Christian community receive the Holy Communion on the premises of Mount Carmel Church at Bandra on Good Friday. Due to COVID-19, many churches in Mumbai kept the Mass service online. ■ EMMANUEL YOGINI

## Postmaster General's tribute to Netaji wins laurels

Directorial debut on freedom fighter's legacy adjudged Best Biographical Film at National Film Awards

LALATENDU MISHRA  
MUMBAI

*Elephants Do Remember*, a documentary on Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, recently adjudged the Best Biographical Film at the 67th National Film Awards 2019, marks the directorial debut of Swati Pandey, Postmaster General, India Post, Mumbai Region.

The film, which will bring to the fore unknown facts about the great freedom fighter, revolves around the life of Rama Khandwala, 94, a resident of Opera House, Mumbai, who served in the Indian National Army and worked closely with Netaji. With a run time of 37 minutes, the film is co-directed by Viplove Bhatia and Manu Bist, and produced by Films Division. The filmmakers will receive the

award from the President on May 3 in Delhi.

Ms. Khandwala is the oldest tourist guide in India, helping Japanese tourists during their visits to Mumbai, and recipient of the Presidential Award. The film records the thrilling experiences of Ms. Khandwala, who hails from Burma



## Prudence prevails

That inflation is a concern for policymakers is reassuring for consumers and savers

The Finance Ministry has put to rest all speculation about the inflation targeting framework that will guide the interest rate decisions of the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee over the five-year period starting on April 1. In a terse notification, the Department of Economic Affairs announced that the inflation target for the quinquennium ending on March 31, 2026, will be 4%, with an upper tolerance level of 6% and a lower tolerance level of 2%. Economic Affairs Secretary Tarun Bajaj said that the framework's parameters would remain unchanged from what had prevailed in the five years that ended on March 31. The government's announcement is a welcome step in reiterating that inflation targeting remains the centrepiece of the monetary policy framework and signals that the fiscal and monetary authorities are in lockstep in ensuring the primacy of price stability as the bedrock for all macro-economic development. This is particularly apposite at a time when inflation pressures are mounting in an economy that is still struggling to regain its footing from the devastating contraction in the just-ended fiscal year, when the COVID-19 pandemic and the drastic measures to curb its spread resulted in widespread precarity. The latest Consumer Price Index data show retail inflation accelerated by almost 100 basis points to a three-month high of 5.03% in February, with food and fuel costs continuing to remain volatile. Also, with the prices of multiple raw materials on an upward trajectory, an IHS Markit India Business Outlook survey last month showed companies were planning to raise selling prices over the coming 12 months to cope with rising costs.

The RBI's officials have in recent months maintained an unwavering focus on emphasising the need to retain the flexible inflation targeting framework. In a December working paper titled 'Measuring Trend Inflation in India', the Deputy Governor overseeing monetary policy, Michael Debabrata Patra, and a colleague underscored the importance of ensuring the appropriateness of the inflation target. Observing that there had been a steady decline in trend inflation to a 4.1%-4.3% band since 2014, they said a target far lower than the trend ran the risk of imparting a 'deflationary bias' that would dampen economic momentum, while a goal much above the trend could engender expansionary monetary conditions that would likely lead to inflation shocks. And in February, the RBI's researchers authoring its Report on Currency and Finance – themed 'Reviewing the Monetary Policy Framework' – made clear that the framework had served the economy well, attested by a decline in inflation volatility and more credible anchoring of inflation expectations. That the government's economic officials have heeded these calls will certainly reassure investors and savers that inflation remains a central concern for all policymakers.

## Better late

Rajinikanth fully deserves the Phalke, but the timing of the announcement is suspect

Rajinikanth, the reigning demigod of Tamil film-dom, richly deserves the Dadasaheb Phalke award, Indian cinema's highest recognition, bestowed by the jury this year. The film world has few parallels to his success story. His transition from Shivaji Rao Gaekwad, a Marathi-born struggling bus conductor in Bengaluru, to a worshipped superstar in the Dravidian heartland, was made possible only by his undimmed passion and sustained hard work. From early on, he introduced novelty to his screen characters. He has kept innovating on his unique styles of tossing a cigarette or a mint, twirling his sunglasses and walking with a swagger. While style remains his hallmark, it would be an injustice to dismiss him as just a mass hero. He had excelled as an actor with sensitive portrayals in films such as *Mullum Malarum* and *Aarilirindhu Arubadhu Varai* before getting trapped in superstardom with *Billa* and donning larger than life roles. He is among the rare heroes who handle comedy scenes with ease, his dual roles in *Thillu Mullu* being an example. His charisma has attracted three generations of fans, with a following even in Japan where he is lovingly called 'Odori Maharaja' (The Dancing Maharaja). He is also the only Indian actor to have featured in black and white, colour, 3D and motion capture films.

But despite Rajinikanth's demonstrable body of work, given his active inclination for a foray into "spiritual politics" until last year, inevitable questions are being raised if the award is a calculated choice to influence poll-bound Tamil Nadu. While Rajinikanth lent support during elections to the DMK-TMC (1996, 1998) and AIADMK-BJP (2004), in recent years he has made no secret of his admiration for BJP leaders. Not only did he hail Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah as 'Lord Krishna and Arjuna' – after the scrapping of special status granted to Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 – he targeted Dravidian icon Periyar E.V. Ramasamy while recalling the alleged attacks on Hindu deities during a 1971 anti-superstition rally. He backed the Citizenship Amendment Act. To be fair, since his 'no show' in politics, the actor has remained politically withdrawn, though previously he indirectly targeted the DMK and the AIADMK. He has not responded to appeals from 'neutral' observers to lend his support for "honest, dynasty-free politics". Whether the award's timing would influence the voting choice of his legion of fans is difficult to say as he remains an untested electoral force. However, had the jury put off the announcement of the award by just a week till polling was over, everyone would have unconditionally welcomed the choice. The giver has done the recipient a disservice through the timing of the announcement.

# A missing science pillar in the COVID response

India's fight against the resurgence of the coronavirus is a challenge requiring strengthened data and better science



PRABHAT JHA

The optimism that India might have beaten the COVID-19 pandemic has given way to pessimism from a sharp increase in new cases and deaths from the disease. Maharashtra seems to be particularly affected, but nearly all States are reporting increases. The epidemiology of COVID-19 is poorly understood, but some early understanding of the transmission of the virus can enable a more effective science-driven response.

### Spread of variants

First, the surge is probably driven by variants from the original, as variants worldwide comprise much of the current wave. A resumption of global travel meant that spread of variants into India was inevitable, with the only question being when. Evolutionary theory would expect SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, to mutate to become more transmissible. After all, the only task of a virus is to reproduce. However, the expected concomitant decrease in lethality has not yet been documented. Anecdotal reports that the current surge is occurring more in younger adults and accompanied by unusual symptoms also support the idea that variants are responsible. Direct evidence is needed from genetic sequencing of the virus.

Second, it was, and remains, wishful thinking that India had achieved "herd immunity". The patterns of infection in India clearly suggest multi-generational transmission, with younger adults the engine of transmission into the elderly. Various serosurveys have consistently found that half or more of tested urban populations have antibodies to the virus. However, this high level of infection is not the same as a markedly reduced level of transmission, which is what is required for herd immunity.

Notions of herd immunity do not fully capture the fact that for largely unknown reasons, viral transmission is cyclical. Delhi had two major peaks, in 2020, of death rates and case rates, one in June and another in November, and now is entering a third major wave. Within Mumbai, the current wave appears to be affecting more affluent areas and private hospitals, in contrast to last year where the highest infection levels were in the slums and poorer areas. Our forthcoming mortality-based analyses (<https://bit.ly/3sYOKYZ>) suggest several sub-waves exist within major viral peaks, reflecting subtle changes in community transmission. The ebbs and flow of vaccine transmission are far more variable than we assume.

As well, much of infection in India might well be mild, with less durable immune protection than induced by vaccination. Asymptomatic infection is more commonly reported in Indian serosurveys, exceeding 90% in some, in contrast to high-income countries, where about one-third of infections report as asymptomatic. Recent findings from Wuhan, China show most seropositive infections were asymptomatic and among these, the important protective antibodies were low during follow-up periods. Milder infection might well also correlate with lower severity



of clinical illness, helping to explain the Indian paradox of widespread transmission but with low mortality rates.

### Data must guide decisions

India needs to increase the quantity, quality and public availability of actual data to guide decision-making. Theories or mathematical models are hugely uncertain, particularly early on in the epidemic. Better understanding of the unique patterns of Indian viral transmission has a few pillars, which can be achieved quickly. First, collection of anonymised demographic and risk details (age, sex, travel, contact with other COVID-19 patients, existing chronic conditions, current smoking) on all positive cases on a central website in each State remains a priority.

Second, greatly expanded sequencing of the viral genome is needed from many parts of India, which can be achieved by re-programming sequencing capacity in Indian academic and commercial laboratories. Third, far better reporting of COVID-19 deaths is needed. Daily or weekly reporting of the total death counts by age and sex by each municipality would help track if there is a spike in presumed COVID-19 deaths. The Registrar General of India's

verbal autopsy studies are invaluable, but must be reactivated to review deaths occurring in 2020, given that the last available results are from 2013.

Third, the Indian Council of Medical Research's national sero-survey had design limitations such that it probably underestimated the true national prevalence. A far larger and better set of serial surveys is required. Finally, we need to understand better why some populations are not affected. For example, COVID-19 infection and death levels in Thailand and Vietnam are remarkably low, and cannot be assigned to their stronger testing and tracing programmes. Widespread existing immunity, perhaps from direct exposure to bat coronaviruses might be one explanation. Rapidly assembled comparative studies across parts of India and Asia are a priority.

### Counter growing inequity

The science pillar of a response is complementary to action. The central and State governments have already pushed for a rapid expansion of COVID-19 vaccination. India can learn from Chile, which has successfully provided at least one dose to over half of its population. Affluent and connected urban elites of India are vaccinating quickly, but the poorer and less educated Indians are being left behind. Vaccination campaigns need to reach the poor adults over age 45, without having to prove anything other than approximate age.

Follow-up studies among the vaccinated can establish the durability of protection, and, ideally, reduction in transmission.

Similarly, India must capture and report data on who is vaccinated, including by education or wealth levels. The poor cannot be

left in the dark.

### Adult vaccination plan

COVID-19 could well turn into a seasonal challenge and thus, the central government should actively consider launching a national adult vaccination programme that matches India's commitment and success in expanding universal childhood vaccination. The Disease Control Priorities Project estimates an adult national programme would cost about ₹250 per Indian per year to cover routine annual flu vaccination, five-yearly pneumococcal vaccines, HPV vaccines for adolescent girls and tetanus for expectant mothers. Per year, vaccines for one billion adults might save about 200,000 lives from the targeted diseases. Annual flu vaccination reduces the risk of influenza pandemics and perhaps even COVID-19 infection. Indeed, we might already be in the era where major zoonotic diseases are not once-a-century events, but once a decade. Thus, adult and child vaccination programmes are essential to prepare for future pandemics.

More draconian steps, such as another full national lockdown should be considered carefully, as they incur a huge toll on the poor and stunt education of Indian children. It also remains unclear if the population would comply. The resurgence of COVID-19 presents a major challenge for governments, yet the best hope is to rapidly expand epidemiological evidence, share it with the public and build confidence that the vaccination programme will benefit all Indians.

*Prabhat Jha is a professor of epidemiology and global health at the University of Toronto, Canada*

## In Geneva face-off, outrage versus hope

The Human Rights Council is where Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms meet and confront each other



RADHIKA COOMARASWAMY

"Hey Geneva" laments Ajith Kumarasiri (musician, songwriter, and composer in Sri Lanka) in powerful Sinhala rhythm and blues. "We no longer kill." "We don't shoot anymore." "Give us our island back." Geneva as an idea is firmly embedded in the Sri Lankan consciousness. For many Sri Lankans, especially the Sinhalese, it is an attack on national honour, a place where their vulnerability as a small island is exploited. For many Tamils and now Muslims, it is a place of hope. For human rights activists the world over, it is their forum.

### The setting

The Human Rights Council in Geneva is a place where Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms meet, confront each other and fight countless shadow battles. In some of the side events of the Council, before the novel coronavirus pandemic, people have fainted, come to fistfights and been removed by UN security. It is the place where both communities have large demonstrations next to the legless chair that reminds the Palais de Nations of the consequence of war. There are heated, blood-chilling speeches aimed at the supporters. For bystanders, much of this drama is quite unsettling.

The government playbook with regard to the Geneva process at the UN Human Rights Council is to present it as an enormous power

play full of double standards. It is seen as western countries ganging up on Sri Lanka for its closeness to China. Imperialism and neocolonialism remain in the frame. There is no government recognition that there may be any grievance or a victim. This just compounds the insensitivity.

The government's aim this year was to have no resolution at all, while the major Tamil groups wanted the Human Rights Council to begin a pathway to the International Criminal Court. In the end, the resolution decided to create capacity at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to collect, preserve and consolidate evidence not only on war crimes but also on other gross violations of human rights and serious violations of humanitarian law. There is no date or time period.

### Geopolitics 'plus'

Though geopolitics is the framework for decision making at the Human Rights Council, the actual process is more nuanced and may be described as geopolitics "plus". Unless one acknowledges this "plus" factor, one will never understand the actual workings of the Human Rights Council. The activism, agitation and the momentum around a resolution created by this "plus" factor spills over and creates the atmosphere in which the resolution is adopted.

The "plus" factors around the Sri Lankan resolution were easy to identify. First came the legal experts of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as the Special Rapporteurs and procedures who took very strong positions. The pivotal input by the Office was the Report of the High Commissioner on "Promot-



ing Accountability and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka". Michelle Bachelet as a High Commissioner, a torture victim, President, and a Minister of Defence, put her full weight behind the report. More than anything else, her report and words made the resolution inevitable.

In addition to the work of OHCHR, the Tamil groups nationally and globally were extremely active. But, it was Muslim civil society and the Muslim diaspora that made the difference for this resolution. Their passion, energy and sense of injustice filled the spaces. Despite heavy lobbying from Pakistan, (the Coordinator on Human rights and humanitarian issues in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, at Geneva), and from Bangladesh, after Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's visit in March, despite pressure from China and after the Rajapaksas made personal calls to OIC members, the large majority of Muslim countries still decided to abstain.

### Elements to a global cause

Though the diasporas are always active, it is an international civil society made up of a whole array of disparate groups that dominate the agitational space of the Human Rights Council. These groups are often at odds with each other but act in solidarity when it comes to global causes. Sri Lanka has again become a global cause. Once you

get on the agenda of international civil society, it is difficult to get off. As Christine Schöwel-Patel, the academic in international law and political economy, has recently written, there is a kind of "branding" in a communications sense that takes place and has severe consequences for country and community.

The events unfolding in Geneva are particularly disturbing because of their shortsightedness. In 2014, Sri Lanka faced a hostile Council and was an outlier in the international system very much like today. Most people have conveniently forgotten this history. The Resolution of the Human Rights Council in 2015 (<https://bit.ly/3mDP8x>) that Sri Lanka cosponsored after the government changed was to pull Sri Lanka out of the rut that it had fallen into. If that resolution were not passed, Sri Lanka would have had the evidence collection and preserving mechanism in some form by 2016.

The 2015 resolution accepted international best practices, an office for missing persons, an office for reparations, a truth commission and a judicial process for those guilty of serious crimes. At that time, the focus was on the need for a system that gave confidence to the victims. Victim groups were clear that a purely domestic process had failed them before. As a result, it was agreed to have a framework with an element of foreign participation.

International resolution 30/1 became a great success though victim groups thought it was a failure due to a lack of implementation. International hostility disappeared; Sri Lanka was dropped from international punitive agendas, became open to GSP plus (or the European Union's Generalised

Scheme of Preferences Plus) and other trade and financial benefits and was welcomed back into UN peacekeeping. Despite its international success, 30/1 was reviled nationally as a resolution that "sold out the soldiers" – blurring the lines between the few who have committed war crimes and the large majority who have not.

Fundamentally, there was also a lack of understanding of what "co-sponsorship" meant and the enlightened self-interest that it entailed. Co-sponsorship has always meant accepting international standards while keeping control of the national process – the legislation to be enacted and the personnel to be appointed. By arbitrarily withdrawing from the resolution, Sri Lanka created the space for the Human Rights Council to create a new mechanism to collect and preserve evidence. This process is now independent of the Colombo government and will eventually have a life of its own.

### The two sides

With this dedicated capacity at the OHCHR, the human rights issues regarding Sri Lanka will not go away. For many Sri Lankans, especially the Sinhalese, this is an outrage of double standards. There is real fury at what they see as global inequity. For many members of the minorities, opposition leaders, journalists, lawyers, victim groups and civil society activists who claim they are being harassed, prosecuted and intimidated on a daily basis by a surveillance state, there is relief to know that someone will be watching.

*Radhika Coomaraswamy is former Under Secretary General and Special Representative of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict*

## 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.

### Reversing rate cuts

The flip-flop announcement over interest rate cut is a matter that the Election Commission of India must look into. Why was such a cut announced and repealed overnight after calling it an oversight, and at a time when a few States have their Assembly elections? First cause a jolt and then induce relief – is this some new technique to attract the middle class by playing with their sentiments?

J. EDEN ALEXANDER,  
Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu

Many of us have still to recover from the shock, even

if it has been rolled back now. Why is the central government so hell-bent on crushing small savers? One is certain that had it not been for the elections in the backdrop, the government would not have backtracked. It is small savers who give the government its financial cushion.

KATURU DURGA PRASAD RAO,  
Hyderabad

■ Even otherwise, the central government has been subjecting senior citizens and retirees to trauma by reducing bank deposit rates. Similarly, fuel prices have been rising sharply and even when there were

opportunities to pass on relief, these were not explored. Whatever happened to "Achhe din aane wale hain"?

B.G. BALIGA,  
Thrissur, Kerala

■ To stabilise the economy, a good amount of domestic savings is one of the important and inevitable components for any country. It is a factor which helped China in building its economy. Instead of encouraging such savings in government schemes, driving people into the arms of private players does not speak well of the government. However, many

have got a clue now. After the spell of elections, there are sure to be more shocks.

A.G. RAJMOHAN,  
Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh

■ On the campaign trail Why are our political leaders humiliating each other in order to serve us? It is absolutely amazing, that on a daily basis over the past few days, they are embarrassing each other by alleging just about anything. Is this the leadership that we have to contend with and guide the destiny of our nation? Or, are image makers and speech writers creating this havoc?

HEMACHANDRA BASAPPA,  
Bengaluru

### Award for actor

It is impossible to believe that the Dadasaheb Phalke award was not awarded to superstar Rajinikanth in the hope of reaping some political harvest in Tamil Nadu. This is not to say that the superstar is unworthy of the award, but the sheer effrontery of the BJP in

ANTHONY HENRIQUES,  
Mumbai

disregarding established norms has to be criticised. In its desperation to gain a toehold in Tamil Nadu, the politicisation of the awards demeans the award and the awardees.

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:  
In a Sports page story titled "IPL 2021: Hazlewood pulls out 'for personal reasons'" (April 2,

# ASSEMBLY POLLS

DEHLI THE HINDU | SATURDAY, APRIL 3, 2021

## NEWS ANALYSIS

# Polls piquantly poised in southern Tamil Nadu

Caste equations, reservation for the Vanniar community and the impact of T.T.V. Dhinakaran's party will determine the outcome in the region

### T. RAMAKRISHNAN MADRASI

A combination of factors seems to give the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)-led coalition an edge over the front-bench by the ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu.

Apart from anti-incumbency and the discontent over the rise in prices of petrol, diesel and cooking gas, the ruling front is also troubled by other disadvantages.

### Quota questions

The presence of the breakaway Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK) led by T.T.V. Dhinakaran, nephew of former AIADMK's interim general secretary V.K. Sasikala, and the strong pushback from sections of Mukkulathors, a dominant community in the region, to the State government's decision providing 10.5% reservation to Vanniyars within the overall quota of 20% for Most Backward Classes and denotified communities have thrown up serious challenges for the ruling party.

A functionary of the AIADMK in charge of the southern zone feels that the party should not have distanced itself from Ms. Sasikala, who belongs to a sub-sect

of Kallars, one of the three constituent-castes of the Mukkulathors (the other two being Maravars and Agamudaiyars).

### Key role

Though she hails from the central region of the State, she was said to have played a key role, according to the community, in getting a golden armour presented by Jayalalithaa in 2014 for the bust of U. Muthuramalinga Thevar, an icon of the community.

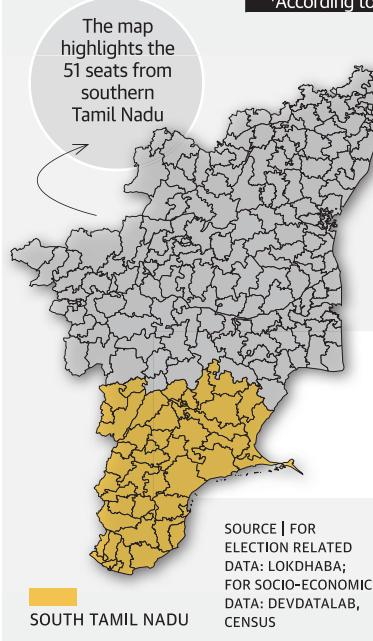
He said Ms. Sasikala's hold over sections of the community should have spurred the party to revive its ties after her release from prison earlier this year.

Across the divide, a young DMK leader in Virudhunagar district said though his party has not played up the reservation issue, it is aware of the two factors will enable Mr. Dhinakaran to cut into the AIADMK vote share.

Yet another challenge looming for the ruling front, given its ties with the BJP and its hardline Hindutva politics, is the considerable presence of religious minorities in the southern districts such as Ramanathapuram, Thoothukudi, Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari.

A veteran AIADMK leader from Ramanathapuram

### A lowdown on south T.N.



In the 51 seats in the southern regions\* of Tamil Nadu, the AIADMK won about 57% with a vote share of 40% in 2016. A look at the demographics and socio-economic data from the region. **By The Hindu Data Team**

\*According to the regional classification by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS)

■ 2016 PERFORMANCE IN SOUTH T.N.		
Party	Seat share %	Vote %
AIADMK	57	40.95
DMK	29	28.64
INC	12	8.9
IJML	2	0.78
BJP	-	5.18
DMDK	-	2.34
NOTA	-	1.16

### ■ RURAL/URBAN POPULATION SHARE

Type	Rural %	Urban %
South	52.4	47.6
All seats	51.6	48.4

### ■ SC/ST POPULATION SHARE

Type	ST (%)	SC (%)
South	0.2	17.0
All seats	1.1	20

■ PER CAPITA ANNUAL CONSUMPTION		
Type	Urban	Rural
South	₹29,597	₹22,591
All seats	₹29,962	₹22,413

### ■ SHARE OF LITERATES

Type	%
South	73.8
All seats	80.1



pointed out that "they [DMK] are banking on the overwhelming support from the minorities – Muslims and Christians. This is a huge plus factor for them."

### Infrastructural projects

Economic backwardness and strong caste affiliations in the southern districts have led to heightened communal sensitivities.

Lack of progress in high-profile infrastructure is also likely to affect the fortunes of the ruling AIADMK. A case in point is the widespread impact of DMK youth wing secretary Udhayandhi Stalin recently holding up a brick to symbolise the slow progress of the proposed AIIMS in Madurai.

Subhasan, a trader who hails from Watrap and fre-

quently visits Madurai, said that regardless of political affiliation, the general feeling among people is that an expeditious execution of the hospital project would make a huge difference to the region.

While the project itself has made very little headway, real estate in and around the proposed site is on the rise. Politically speaking, the

south has favoured the AIADMK more in the last 40-odd years. Like her mentor and the party founder M.G. Ramachandran, former Chief Minister Jayalalithaa represented the south thrice in the Assembly. In 2016, which was the last Assembly election for her, the region returned 32 candidates of the AIADMK. Several party heavy-

+ weights are contesting from the region. Deputy Chief Minister and party coordinator O. Panner Selvam is contesting from Bodinayakanur, Forests Minister C. Sreenivasan in Dindigul, Revenue Minister R.B. Udhayakumar from Thirumangalam, former Electricity Minister R. Viswanathan from Natham, and former PWD Minister N. Thalai Sundaram in Kanniyakumari.

Despite the ruling party giving ticket to a substantial number of persons from the Mukkulathor community in the region, the talk in political and public discourse about the chasm between certain sections of the Mukkulathors and the AIADMK will yield support from other communities to the party. Besides, there is a "sense of complacency" in the DMK, sources said.

### Rough estimate

"We in the party strongly believe that winning 60% of the seats – 35 out of 58 – is a doable, even though we are aware that it is not that easy," a young AIADMK leader said.

Mr. Dhinakaran, who is a sitting legislator of R.K. Nagar, a constituency in northern Chennai, has surprised many by choosing Kovilpatti, which comes under the Thoothukudi Lok Sabha constituency, as he had earlier said he would contest from one of the constituencies in Theni district.

Ms. Sasikala's visits to many important temples in the region during the past 10 days and AMMK functionaries greeting her in a few places have added to the morale of the workers of the party.

## A dance for democracy

The State is known for voting out the government in every election since 1982

### BIJU GOVIND KOZHIKODE

Even as several pre-poll surveys indicate a continuity of the CPI(M)-led LDF rule in Kerala, a silent undercurrent of anti-incumbency appears to be prevailing among the voters. Rarely has the electorate rewarded incumbent State governments, especially in Kerala, with consecutive terms in recent times. Either they vote for the Congress-led UDF or the Left alliance. This see-saw voting pattern has been seen in the State since the 1982 election. The predicted continuity of the LDF government headed by veteran CPI(M) leader V.S. Achuthanandan in the 2011 election also failed to materialise.

### No clear wave

This time, the absence of a clear wave for or against either of the fronts has given the impression that the Left is set

to retain power. One of the factors for this assumption is the LDF's victory in the local body polls in December 2020. The victory came despite the government facing serious allegations of nepotism and backdoor appointments and investigations by the Central agencies into multiple scams, including smuggling of gold through the diplomatic channel. But it remains to be seen whether

the same narrative will work in the Assembly poll.

"Yes, there is silent anti-incumbency. But the Left's aggressive publicity blitzkrieg focusing on social security schemes and pensions overshadowed it. The electoral picture is still hazy," said Hamid Chennamangaloor, political analyst and social critic.

Mr. Chennamangaloor said that the Opposition has been

unable to mount a serious challenge in the run-up to the poll.

"It has been ineffective in projecting a strong leader to steer the campaign even though Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Ramesh Chennithala, levelled serious charges of corruption against the government. The CPI(M), with its well-equipped machinery, showcased Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan as a superhero who can handle any situation," he said.

So far, the ruling party has controlled the optics of the poll campaign. Many also believe that a continuation of the Left government will help the dispensation concentrate more on infrastructure projects with longer gestation periods.

The Congress, which delayed finalisation of the list of candidates, has been hamstrung by organisational weakness.

## Change or continuity? Kerala plays it close



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## POLL POURRI

### Robot woos voters in Wayanad



### BJP candidate injured in Bengal



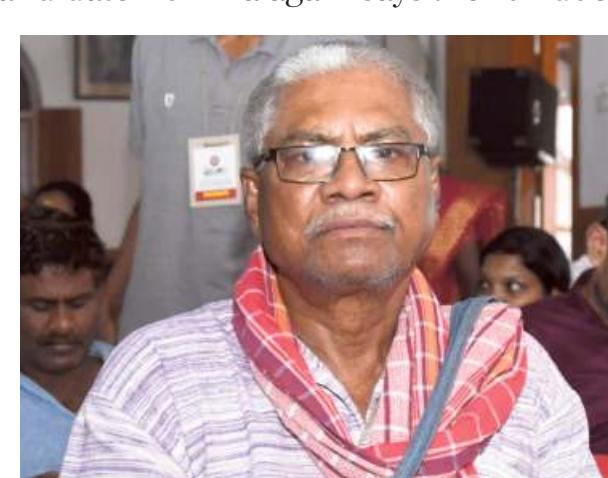
### Priyanka cancels campaign tours



### INTERVIEW | MANORANJAN BYAPARI

## 'As a writer, I had to stand up to the BJP's divisive politics'

The Dalit Bengali writer and Trinamool candidate from Balagarh says the BJP doesn't have any idea about West Bengal



You have written about the poor and Dalits and the discrimination they face. But did caste play a big role in earlier elections? Why has it become a talking point this time?

The BJP has set foot in West Bengal and is dividing the people further on religious and caste lines. We have lived in harmony for many years despite the harsh life we have had to endure. It is criminal to polarise people who are struggling with so

many other issues, from high prices of essential food items, the impact of the coronavirus, job fears and so forth. We have to protest against this naked show of power and divisiveness. We have to tell the people that if the BJP is allowed to come to power, they will not permit Dalits to enter temples, they will discriminate against us, the poor will become poorer, and no one will be able to read books any more.

Is this one of the reasons

why you decided to contest? Did Mamata Banerjee convince you to join the fray?

Yes. I am a Dalit writer. I understand the poor people's world and I want to tell them to beware of BJP propaganda. The party doesn't stand for true emancipation of the poor and people must be made to understand that. The BJP is standing on our turf and espousing bravado. This must stop. I write about

Caste was not a factor in Bengal but the BJP has introduced identity politics in the State

## FROM PAGE ONE

## India records 89,019 fresh cases, highest in 6 months

According to the ICMR, 24,559,12,587 samples have been tested up to April 1, and 11,13,966 samples were tested on Thursday.

The health ministry stressed that more than 70% of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.  
(With inputs from PTI)

## Four poll personnel suspended in Assam

"We have suspended presiding officer Sahab Uddin Talukdar and three others and asked them to explain why they violated the transport protocol. The team said they were unaware of who the vehicle belonged to until it was mobbed at Kanaishil, short of the district headquarters," Karimganj's Deputy Commissioner and District Election Officer (DEO) Anbamuthan M.P. told *The Hindu*.

According to a statement, the mob had damaged the vehicle by the time Mr. Anbamuthan and the District Superintendent of Police reached the spot. The police had to resort to "blank firing" to disperse the stone-pelting mob after the SP sustained minor injuries.

The EC has sought a ground report on the incident that happened about 10 p.m. on Thursday, four hours after the second phase of polling across 39 of Assam's 126 Assembly seats had concluded.

District officials said the polling team had left booth No. 149 for Karimganj, about 70 km away, in a convoy of armed security personnel led by police sector officer Luhit Gohain. Their vehicle broke down at 9 p.m., but it had by then got separated from the convoy due to traffic congestion and rainfall.

"The party alighted from the vehicle and called sector officer Ajoy Sutradhar on his mobile phone and informed him. While the sector officer was arranging an alternative vehicle, the polling party decided to arrange a vehicle of its own so as to reach the Material Receipt Centre faster" as they were carrying the EVMs.

## I-T searches on premises of Stalin's kin

Sources in the Income Tax Department said the searches were based on inputs received. The officers of IT Department also conducted a search in a premises belonging to G Square, which has aggregated land for some big corporates and for setting up IT parks in the last few years.

Until 8 p.m., tax sleuths remained tight-lipped when asked about seizures.

According to sources, the searches began at all the places simultaneously around 6.30 a.m. including at the two-storey palatial house located near the coast in Casurina Drive, Kappleeshwar Nagar, Neelangrai. Around 12 officers from the IT Department, accompanied by armed guards from the central paramilitary forces, entered the bungalow when Mr. Sabareesan and his wife Sentharamai were present.

As soon as word spread about the searches, DMK workers gathered in front of the house and expressed solidarity with their leader's family. They also blamed the BJP-led central government for the action.

At Anna Nagar, DMK cadres protested in front of Mr. Karthik's house. The cadres assembled before the house to accompany his father, Mr. Mohan, for door-to-door canvassing in the early hours. Suddenly, the

officers of IT department entered the house, accompanied by armed central paramilitary force personnel. While the officers were conducting the search, the cadres blocked the road and staged a dharna, besides shouting slogans against the Central and State governments for launching searches at DMK leaders' houses.

The IT officials also searched the residences of former Transport Minister and DMK MLA Senthil Balaji and his brother Ashok Kumar in Karu and at a couple of other places. Mr. Balaji is the DMK candidate for the Karu Assembly constituency. The operation continued till the evening.

In Thanjavur, the officials searched three places belonging to the Thanjavur North DMK union secretary, Murasoli. The searches were conducted at the house of Mr. Murasoli at Arulananda Nagar in Malligapuram, Thanjavur, and at his native place in Thennankudi village.

After searching the three premises for about six hours, the IT sleuths issued a notice to Mr. Murasoli directing him to appear for further inquiry at the IT Office, Thanjavur, sources said.

(With inputs from R. Rajaram in Tiruchi and V. Venkatasubramanian in Thanjavur)

## Two attackers of BJP leader killed in Pulwama

"It was Lone and Nengroo, who used an Alto-800 vehicle to commute from Nowgam to Pulwama. The car belonged to the owner of the house, where the encounter took place," Mr. Kumar added. The police said an SLR rifle, which was snatched from a policeman in Srinagar on Thursday, had been recovered.

The police said the owner of the house will be booked under the Unlawful Activities and Prevention Act (ULPA). "We managed to crack the Srinagar attack within 24 hours. Two out of the four militants involved in the attack have been killed," IGP Kumar said.

The police said the last rites of the slain militants will be carried out in Baramulla and the nearest family members shall be allowed to participate. Around 10 civilians were injured in clashes

that broke out near the encounter site. Locals alleged the police used pellet shotguns and firearms to disperse the youth.

"During the withdrawal of the security forces from the encounter site, some miscreants resorted to stone pelting and were dispersed by using non-lethal weapons, in which few miscreants received minor injuries," the police said.

Meanwhile, the J&K Police said it's working on measures to improve the security cover of the protected persons in Kashmir, especially of the leaders associated with the BJP. "Policemen guarding politicians will get fresh training. New standard operating procedures and advisories are being worked out to foil the bids of the militants to target protected persons," IGP Kumar said.

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## LDF is destabilising holy places in Kerala: Modi

Prime Minister says his party won't let anyone tamper with Indian culture

STAFF REPORTER  
PATHANAMTHITTA

Accusing the Left Democratic Front (LDF) of making attempts to destabilise places of worship through their agents, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) activists will stand in the way of any attempts to tamper with Indian culture.

Addressing a rally organised by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at Rajiv Gandhi Indoor Stadium at Pramadam, near Konni, on Friday, Mr. Modi invoked the Sabarimala episode as a case in point. "At first, they tried to portray the culture of Kerala as regressive and tried to destabilise places of worship by sending their agents," he said.

"The devotees of Lord Ayappa, who should have been welcomed warmly, were greeted with lathis. The innocent devotees are not criminals," he said.

### PM invokes Ayyappa

Earlier, the Prime Minister started his speech by chanting "Swamiye Saranam Ayappa". He then paid tributes to various temples in Pathanamthitta, including the Thiruvalla Sreevalabha temple, Aranmula Parthasarathy temple and Malayalapuzha Devi temple, besides Sabarimala. The services and sacrifices made by Jesus Christ too were remembered in view of the observance of Good Friday.

He lashed out at the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the LDF of engaging in "competitive corruption".



**Mission Kerala:** Narendra Modi greeting supporters during an election rally in Thiruvananthapuram on Friday. ■ PTI

Front of India (PFI).

The BJP, on the other hand, brought in professionals and educated people to politics as evident in the case of technocrat E. Sreedharan. He termed Mr. Sreedharan's entry into politics as a game changer in Kerala's path of progress.

He elaborated on the development projects allotted to Kerala in the Union Budget and noted the potential that the State holds in the area of tourism development. Mr. Modi criticised the State government for its under-achievement in the Jal Jeevan Mission programme and attributed the shortfall to an attempt to deny credit to the Prime Minister.

BJP State president K. Suresh, Union Minister of State for External Affairs V. Muraleedharan, and Bharat Dharm Jana Sena State president Thushar Velappally were present.

### Second rally

Addressing another rally in Thiruvananthapuram, Mr. Modi described the two fronts as twins of misgovernance, corruption and political violence, among others.



KERALA

"The UDF and the LDF are twins. They are twins of misgovernance, corruption, political violence, communalism, casteism, cronyism, nepotism and more," Mr. Modi said.

Citing the alliance between the Congress and Left parties in West Bengal, he said, "the political picture in West Bengal is clear to everyone. Election after election, Congress and Left are getting closer. The logical step after such closeness is a full merger of Congress and the Left. They can call the new party CCP-Comrade Congress Party."

"Because they are twins, the UDF lacks the ability and willingness to defeat the LDF. No wonder there is a surge in support in favour of the NDA," Mr. Modi said.

(With inputs from PTI)

## SC warns against mechanically granting bail in heinous offences

'The nature of the crime should be a basic consideration'

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has cautioned courts against mechanically granting bail in heinous offences, saying the seriousness of the charge is a basic consideration before releasing an accused on bail.

A recent judgment by a Bench led by Justice Indira Banerjee set aside a Kerala High Court order bailing out a man accused of stabbing to death a 30-year-old dentist in front of her father in September 2020. The accused had gone absconding for several days before his arrest.

Though the trial court denied him bail, the High Court set him at liberty.

"The nature of the offence

is one of the basic considerations for the grant of bail – more heinous is the crime, the greater is the chance of rejection of the bail, though, however, dependent on the factual matrix of the matter," Justice Banerjee, who authored the judgment, observed. The court agreed that grant of bail was a judge's discretion.

"However, calls for exercise of such a discretion in a judicious manner and not as a matter of course. Order for bail bereft of any cogent reason cannot be sustained," the judgment said.

The apex court said the accused had reached the clinic of the victim with a knife. "He had attacked the deceased and inflicted very

serious stab injury and caused damages to her internal vital organs... the High Court overlooked the materials on record, which *prima facie* indicate that the respondent (accused) had committed cold-blooded murder of a young lady doctor, as a fall-out of a soured relationship... After committing the crime, the petitioner had absconded and he could be apprehended only on October 6, 2020 on receiving secret information by the investigation agency..." the court noted.

Justice Banerjee said, "while granting bail the court has to keep in mind not only the nature of the accusations, but the severity of the punishment".

## Chennithala denigrating voters: CM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Friday slammed Leader of the Opposition Ramesh Chennithala for stating that nearly 4.34 lakh voters in the State had obtained multiple voter identity cards through deception.

In Kannur, Mr. Vijayan said systemic anomalies, and not criminal deceit, had resulted in the mix-up.

Mr. Vijayan pointed out that Mr. Chennithala's close relatives had inadvertently figured on different electoral lists. It did not mean they were bogus voters.

He pointed out that the Election Commission of India had sufficient checks and balances to prevent double voting.

## Cong. questions Kerala's power pact with Adani

Pinarayi rejects corruption charge

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Congress on Friday came up with a fresh corruption charge against the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government over its purchase of power from the Adani group. However, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan rejected the allegation.

Leader of the Opposition Ramesh Chennithala alleged that the lucrative purchase contract was awarded to the Gujarat-based Adani group to avert prosecution by Central agencies investigating the UAE consulate-linked gold smuggling case.

The Adani group shared a 'special relationship' with the BJP's national leadership, he alleged.

Mr. Chennithala alleged

## Karnataka shuts gyms, cuts cinema seats

Kerala asked to prepare for second wave effects; cases rise in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
BENGALURU

Karnataka ordered a ban on gyms and swimming pools, rallies and protests, allowing cinemas with only 50% seating.

After suspending regular classes for VI to IX grade students in Bengaluru, it extended the rule to all districts. But the government decided against lockdown or night curfew.

### COVID-19

Karnataka reported 4,991 cases, 3,509 from Bengaluru Urban. There were six deaths.

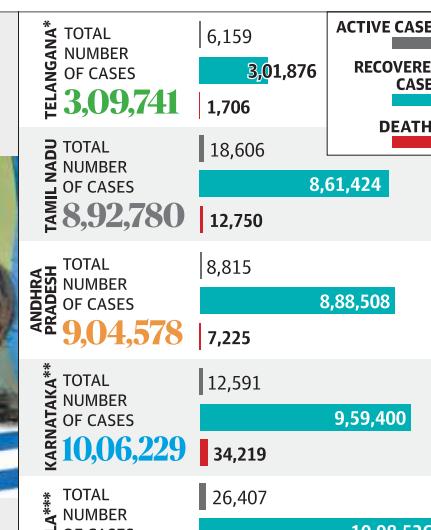
Kerala reported 2,508 new cases of COVID-19 on Friday with a test positivity rate (TPR) of 4.84%. Public health experts said the State should have a mitigation plan to counter a more sev-

### Screening time

Amid fresh spike in COVID-19 cases, testing has been scaled up in various States. The graph shows the spread of the pandemic in the southern States



**On guard:** A health worker collecting the swab sample of a person at a hospital in Bengaluru on Friday. ■ K. MURALI KUMAR



ere and fast-paced second wave. "We do not have adequate knowledge about the virus and should be very careful about extrapolating its

behaviour during the last wave. Unlike in the first, we find the virus is creating more immune mischief now so that our margins for treat-

ment are much narrower and the time to respond, much less," said Subramanian Swaminathan, an infectious diseases specialist at

Global Hospital, Chennai, and governing council member, Clinical Infectious Diseases Society.

The State added 14 more virus deaths.

Andhra Pradesh witnessed five more deaths and added 1,288 infections on Friday. The TPR of 31,116 samples was 4.14%.

Telangana reported 965 cases on Thursday and five fatalities. The Hyderabad region recorded 254 cases.

After five months, fresh COVID-19 cases in Tamil Nadu exceeded 3,000 on Friday. A total of 3,290 persons tested positive for COVID-19, taking the State's overall tally to 8,92,780. The last time the State had recorded 3,000-plus cases (3,057 cases) was on October 23, 2020.

(With inputs from Vijayawada, Thiruvananthapuram, Hyderabad and Chennai bureaus)

### IN BRIEF



**TDP to boycott MPTC, ZPTC polls in A.P.**

VIJAYAWADA  
The Telugu Desam Party has decided not to contest the ZPTC and the MPTC elections. This is for the first time that the TDP is boycotting the elections in the last 39 years. Disclosing this at a press conference on Friday, party president N. Chandrababu Naidu said the TDP has taken the tough decision owing to lack of trust in the State Election Commission.

**Woman trampled to death in Wayanad**

KALPETTA  
A 47-year-old woman was trampled to death by a wild elephant at Neykuppam under the Chethalayam forest range of the South Wayanad forest division on Friday. The jumbo attacked Gangadevi while she was collecting firewood from the nearby forest along with a group of women in the area.

### Unemployed youth succumbs to poison

HYDERABAD  
A 26-year-old unemployed graduate, Boda Sunil Naik, who attempted to end his life by consuming pesticide at Hanamkonda in Telangana last week, died while undergoing treatment on Friday. In a selfie video, Naik blamed the State government for not issuing government job notifications. To overcome suicidal thoughts, call Rosh

## Himanta can't campaign for 48 hours

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Election Commission of India (EC) on Friday barred BJP leader Himanta Biswa Sarma from holding public meetings, processions, rallies, road shows and interactions with the media in connection with the ongoing elections for 48 hours.

The EC issued the order with respect to a complaint lodged by the Congress on March 30, alleging that Mr. Sarma had threatened Hagrama Mohilary, chairman of the Bodoland People's Front and the Congress alliance partner, of sending him to jail by misusing the National Investigation Agency.

"The Commission hereby strongly condemns the impugned statements made by Himanta Biswa Sarma, BJP leader and star campaigner," said the EC.

## BJP behind new outfits, says Himanta

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI

Assam's Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has said the BJP had encouraged the creation of two regional parties – the Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) and jailed activist Akhil Gogoi's Rajo Dal (RD) – ahead of the State polls in order to split the anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act votes between them and the Congress and its allies.

In response to the BJP leader's remark, AJP general secretary Jagdish Bhuyan said: "The Minister is intelligent enough to remember that he had a few months ago said we were sired by the Congress and the AIUDF."

## No ban on vaccine export: MEA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Asserting that India has not imposed any export ban on COVID-19 vaccines, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Friday said the country has taken the lead in sending vaccines abroad with over 640 lakh doses supplied to more than 80 countries till now.

At an online media briefing, MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi also said that the Ministry's 'Vaccine Maitree' initiative to supply vaccines abroad had been "very successful and very well liked" by our partners across the world.

## India stands for revival of democracy in Myanmar'

It says violence will not solve the prevailing situation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

India on Friday said it stood for revival of democracy in Myanmar, and added that violence would not solve the prevailing situation in the country.

"We condemn any use of violence. We believe that the rule of law should prevail. We stand for the restoration of democracy in Myanmar. We have urged the release of political prisoners and supported any attempts at resolving the current situation, including the efforts of ASEAN," said Arindam Bagchi, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson said.

India was among the first countries to express concern after the February 1 military takeover which deposed the democratically elected leadership of Myanmar. However, India's subse-

## Cong. raises doubts over Assam polling

Call for probe after car of BJP candidate's wife was used to transport EVM in Karimganj district

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday questioned the electoral process in Assam after a polled electronic voting machine (EVM) was being transported in the vehicle of a BJP candidate's wife, with party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi asking for a "serious re-evaluation" of the use of EVMs by all national parties.

Violence broke out in Karimganj district on Thursday night after a crowd discovered that the vehicle of the wife of Krishnendu Paul, the BJP candidate from Patharkandi, was being used to transport the EVM to the strong room.

While the police is said to have fired in the air to bring the situation under control, the Election Commission of India (ECI) ordered a re-poll in the booth where the particular EVM was used and



The EVM found in a vehicle belonging to BJP MLA Krishnendu Paul in Karimganj on Thursday night. • ANI

suspended four polling officials.

A Congress delegation, led by former Law Minister Ashwani Kumar, raised with the ECI the Karimganj incidents as well as the defection of an Opposition candidate to the BJP just days before polling.

"Every time there is an election, videos of private vehicles caught transporting EVMs show up. Unsurprisingly, they have the following

things in common: 1. The vehicles usually belong to BJP candidates or their associates; 2. The videos are taken as one-off incidents and dismissed as aberrations; 3. The BJP uses its media machinery to accuse those who exposed the videos as sore losers," Ms. Vadra alleged.

The Congress leader's comments could restart the debate on the use of EVMs. In August 2018, at an all-

party meeting convened by EC, Opposition parties demanded a return to paper ballots. "The fact is that too many such incidents are being reported and nothing is being done about them. The EC needs to start acting decisively on these complaints and a serious re-evaluation of the use of EVMs needs to be carried out by all national parties," Ms. Vadra said.

### 'Minor incident'

However, Karimganj Deputy Commissioner Anbanthum M.P. said it was a minor incident involving a polling party from a polling station in the adjoining Ratabari constituency.

"The vehicle from the polling station to the district headquarters broke down about 20 km away at Nilambari. The polling party was waiting for transport when a private vehicle was passing

her. The driver stopped and offered a lift. While we were organising another vehicle to bring them, the presiding officer took the offer to reach Karimganj. The vehicle was mobbed by some people near the headquarters and it was only then that the officer realised his folly," he told *The Hindu* on Friday, adding that the vehicle was registered in the name of the Patharkandi MLA's wife.

Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi tweeted, "EC's car has broken down, the BJP's intentions are bad and the condition of democracy has worsened."

While Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said the "EVM fraud" was there for all to see and asked whether the ECI needed the BJP's help to carry EVMs, MP Manish Tewari demanded a probe by a Joint Parliamentary Committee.



Prakash Javadekar and Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi speaking in New Delhi. • PTI

her misconduct. A Chief Minister, who herself is in a constitutional post and sat on dharna while the polling was on, is against democracy and against the Election Commission's norms for polling.

The BJP delegation included Union Ministers Prakash Javadekar, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, BJP general secretary Bhupender Yadav and party's national spokesman Anil Baluni.

"For the first time in the country's history, a Chief Minister sat on dharna in a polling booth when polling was on. Before she [Mamata Banerjee] sat on dharna, 74% of the votes were polled in Nandigram and the polling was by and large peaceful," Mr. Javadekar said after meeting EC officials.

"We have given all proofs including photographs of

representatives of both the Trinamool Congress and the BJP met the Chief Electoral Officer in Kolkata and raised allegations against each other.

The BJP delegation, led by party leader Sishir Bajaria, questioned why the Chief Minister had stayed inside a polling booth for more than two hours and accused her of violating the model code of conduct. The Trinamool delegation, which was led by party leader Yashwant Sinha, said the delegation told the Election Commission that the Central forces had

acted in a partisan manner in many booths in the first two phases. "There have been incidents of violence and attacks on our party supporters by the BJP," Mr. Sinha said.

Addressing a meeting at Natabari in Cooch Behar, the Chief Minister accused Home Minister Amit Shah of using Central agencies to target Opposition parties.

Ms. Banerjee said that leaders from Tamil Nadu, where Assembly election is to be held, had contacted her over income tax raids on relatives of DMK leader M.K. Stalin, claiming that these were done at the behest of the Home Minister. She accused Mr. Shah of trying to scare his political opponents.

## Will develop north Bengal, says Shah

'Mamata has done injustice to region'



Hectic round: Union Home Minister Amit Shah at a road show in South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, on Friday. • PTI

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday accused West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of doing injustice to the people of north Bengal. Mr. Shah, who promised ₹2,000 crore for the region's development, said an All India Institute of Medical Sciences would be set up in the area.

"Mamata didi has done nothing for the development of the region. After coming to power, the BJP will constitute a North Bengal Development Board and spend ₹2,000 crore annually on the region's development," Mr. Shah said at a rally at Sitalluchi in Cooch Behar district. He held two public meetings in north Bengal and participated in two road shows in south Bengal. In north Bengal, the Home Minister claimed that infiltration was the biggest problem in the region and promised to stop it.

Targeting the Trinamool government, Mr. Shah said the Mamata Banerjee governance model was based on 3Ts of 'Tolabaji' (extortion), 'Tanashahi' (dictatorship) and 'Tushtikaran' (appeasement). He promised the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act at the first Cabinet meeting if the BJP came to power.

## HC to decide on Param Bir's plea on April 5

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

On April 5, the Bombay High Court will pronounce its order on the public interest litigation (PIL) petition filed by former Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh seeking a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) into his allegations against Home Minister Anil Deshmukh.

On March 20, Mr. Singh wrote a letter to Chief Minister Uddhab Thackeray alleging that Mr. Deshmukh had directed suspended police officer Sachin Vaze to collect ₹100 crore from bars and restaurants a month.

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**NOTICE**

Pursuant to Advertisement No.46/OMC dt.26.02.2020, Computer Based Test (CBT) held during the month of December, 2020 and Computer Proficiency Test (CPT) held on 25.03.2021, the Document Verification of the provisionally shortlisted candidates shall be conducted on 08.04.2021 & 09.04.2021 in the Community Centre, OMC Colony (Near Gopabandhu Square), Unit-8, Bhubaneswar for the post of Jr. Executive Assistant. For this purpose, a notice containing details of Application Sequence No., Roll No. & name of the provisionally shortlisted candidates for Document Verification along with the date of document verification has been displayed in OMC website (<https://omcltd.in>). Accordingly, the candidates are advised to remain present on their respective designated dates for document verification.

SMS & e-mail to the provisionally shortlisted candidates for Document Verification shall be sent shortly to their registered Mobile Number & e-mail respectively.

Sd/-  
GENERAL MANAGER (P&A)

NB : Candidates are advised to check the OMC website (<https://omcltd.in>) regularly for further updates.



**Madhya Pradesh Power Generating Co. Limited**  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER (R&M); Shed No 10;  
MPPGCL; Jabalpur (M.P.); INDIA/CIN NoU40109MP2001SGC014882  
Email: [cprnr@rediffmail.com](mailto:cprnr@rediffmail.com); Ph.: +91-761-2939844

### NOTICE FOR PRE-TENDER MEETING

Madhya Pradesh Power Generating Company Ltd. (MPPGCL) intends to invite Expression of Interest for shortlisting the bidders to conduct feasibility study and carry out comprehensive Renovation & Modernization (R&M) of 4x210 MW Units at Sanjay Gandhi Thermal Power Station, Birsinghpur (M.P.) through Swiss Challenge Mode. The firm shall also be required to prepare tender document to invite offers through Swiss Challenge Mode. Prospective bidders are requested to participate in pre-tendering meeting through Video Conferencing as well as off line, scheduled to be held on 23rd & 24th April 2021 at 11:30 Hrs. in the O/o of Chief Engineer (R&M), Shed No. 10, Rampur, Jabalpur (M.P.) for finalizing the terms of Pre Qualifying Requirement of tender for inviting EOI for R&M

SD  
Chief Engineer(R&M), MPPGCL, JABALPUR

## BJP complains against Mamata, Udhyanidhi

Party delegation meets EC officials

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Senior leaders of the BJP on Friday complained to the Election Commission (EC) against West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for what they termed poll violations. They also complained against Udhyanidhi Stalin, son of DMK leader M.K. Stalin, for "indecent remarks" against late BJP leaders Arun Jaitley and Sushma Swaraj.

The BJP delegation in-

cluded Union Ministers Prakash Javadekar, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, BJP general secretary Bhupender Yadav and party's national spokesman Anil Baluni.

"For the first time in the country's history, a Chief Minister sat on dharna in a polling booth when polling was on. Before she [Mamata Banerjee] sat on dharna, 74% of the votes were polled in Nandigram and the polling was by and large peaceful," Mr. Javadekar said after meeting EC officials.

"We have given all proofs including photographs of

representatives of both the Trinamool Congress and the BJP met the Chief Electoral Officer in Kolkata and raised allegations against each other.

The BJP delegation, led by

party leader Sishir Bajaria,

questioned why the Chief Minister had stayed inside a

polling booth for more than

two hours and accused her

of violating the model code

of conduct. The Trinamool

delegation, which was led by

party leader Yashwant Sinha,

said the delegation told

the Election Commission

that the Central forces had

acted in a partisan manner

in many booths in the first

two phases. "There have

been incidents of violence

and attacks on our party

supporters by the BJP," Mr.

Sinha said.

Addressing a meeting at

## Highest vaccine coverage in a day

36.7 lakh people get jabs on Friday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

More than 36.7 lakh COVID-19 vaccine doses were administered in 24 hours, the highest single-day coverage till now, the Union Health Ministry said on Friday.

Of the 36,71,242 vaccine doses, 33,65,597 beneficiaries were vaccinated across 51,215 sessions for the first dose and 3,05,645 beneficiaries received the second dose of vaccine, the Health Ministry said in a statement.

The Ministry said this is the highest single day vaccine coverage till now.

Cumulatively, more than 6.87 crore (6,87,89,138) vaccine doses have been administered through 11,37,456 sessions, as per the provisional report till 7 a.m. on Friday.

These include 83,06,269 healthcare workers (HCW; first dose) and 52,84,564 HCWs (second dose); 93,53,021 frontline workers (FLW; first dose) and 40,97,634 FLWs (second dose); 97,83,615 (first dose)

and 39,401 (second dose) beneficiaries aged more than 45 years with specific co-morbidities; and 3,17,05,893 (first dose) and 2,18,741 (second dose) beneficiaries aged more than 60 years, it said.

Eight States account for 59.58% of the cumulative doses given so far. These eight States are Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Kerala.

### Steep rise

The Ministry further said that Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh reported a steep rise in daily new cases. Five States, namely, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Kerala and Punjab, cumulatively account for 79.91% of the total active cases in the country.

"Maharashtra alone accounts for nearly 60% per cent (59.84%) of the total active caseload of the country," it noted.

## 11 States, Union Territories show surge

Tier 2 and 3 cities, along with peri-urban areas, account for a jump in the number of COVID-19 cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The current COVID-19 case growth rate of 6.8% in March 2021 has surpassed the previous record of 5.5% (June 2020), noted a release issued by the Central government following a meeting chaired by Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba on Friday.

The government has identified 11 States and Union Territories as areas of grave concern — Maharashtra, Punjab, Karnataka, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Chandigarh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Delhi and Haryana. They have been reporting a surge in daily cases and daily mortality in the past two weeks. The meeting was to review and discuss the COVID-19 management and response strategy.

"Another worrisome aspect pointed out at the meeting was that Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities along with peri-urban areas have recorded a surge in COVID-19 cases. The spread of infection to the rural areas with weak health infrastructure would overwhelm the local administration," it noted.



**Tight surveillance:** Tourists waiting to get their rapid antigen test done at the Gateway of India in Mumbai on Friday. ■ VIVEK BENDRE

The Chief Secretaries, Directors-General of Police and Health Secretaries of all States and Union Territories and other senior officials participated in the meeting.

The Central government said that while the country was reporting 97,000 daily new COVID-19 cases at the peak of the pandemic in September 2020, the country

had now reached the critical figure of 81,000 daily new cases.

### Containment measures

"The Cabinet Secretary has reiterated the need for stringent enforcement of containment and surveillance measures, in conjunction with ramping up vaccination and strict enforcement of COVID-

appropriate behaviour," noted the release.

The States and the Union Territories have been asked to increase testing continuously to ensure that positivity comes down to 5% or less than 5%, focus on ensuring RT-PCR tests (comprising 70% of total tests), and reduce waiting time of test results while using the rapid

antigen test (RAT) as a screening test in densely populated areas and where fresh clusters were emerging.

The Centre has added that all symptomatic RAT negatives have to be mandatorily subjected to RT-PCR tests while ensuring effective and prompt isolation of those infected in institutional facilities (COVID-19 care centres).

The release noted that the States and the Union Territories had been told to ensure that patients isolated at home are monitored daily and that 25 to 30 close contacts be traced for each infected person.

"Tracing of close contacts and their isolation has to be done in 72 hours. Subsequent testing and follow-up of all close contacts have to be carried out," the release said.

The States have been asked to examine the case fatality rate hospital-wise, devise appropriate strategy, and mitigate concerns regarding late admission in hospitals and non-adherence to National Clinical Management Protocol.

## Clinical trial for third dose of Covaxin

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

The expert panel of India's drug regulator, Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI), has permitted Bharat Biotech to give a third dose of Covaxin to a few volunteers in its clinical trials of the COVID-19 vaccine, sources said.

Bharat Biotech presented amendments to the subject expert committee of the DCGI in the approved phase 2 clinical trial protocol for administration of booster dose six months after second dose. "The firm presented amendments in the approved Phase 2 clinical trial protocol for administration of booster dose only in 6 mcg cohort and also should follow up the subjects at least for six months after the third dose," the SEC said.

The firm was asked to present the details of assessments to be carried out in the subjects.

## Two arrested in Jhansi for harassing nuns

OMAR RASHID  
LUCKNOW

Two persons were arrested in Jhansi of Uttar Pradesh in connection with the harassment of two nuns and their two postulants, who were forced to de-board from a train after ABVP members accused them of illegal conversion. However, the police and the administration did not make it clear if the arrests were directly linked to the incident on March 19 as the action appeared to be a preventive measure against future protests planned by the arrested persons.

Jhansi DM Andra Vamsi on Friday said the arrested persons belonged to a fringe group called Rashtrabakti Sangh formed by one of the accused. Mr. Vamsi said they had no present connection with any mainstream outfit.

## Rahul questions U.S. silence on events in India

There is a wholesale capture of the institutional framework'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Friday questioned the silence of the United States establishment over what is happening in India.

Mr. Gandhi made these remarks in an interactive virtual conversation with former U.S. diplomat Nicholas Burns of the Harvard Kennedy School.



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in a virtual conversation with Nicholas Burns from Harvard Kennedy School. ■ ANI

"wholesale capture of institutions" in India.

"I don't hear anything from the U.S. establishment about what's happening in India. If you are saying partnership of democracies, I mean what is your view on what is going on here," Mr. Gandhi said.

"I fundamentally believe that America is a profound idea. The idea of freedom the way it is encapsulated in your Constitution is a very

powerful idea but you have got to defend that idea," he added.

Mentioning the incident of an electronic voting machine being transported in the car of a BJP candidate in the Assam elections, Mr. Gandhi claimed that nothing about it was being talked about in the national media.

"There is a wholesale capture of the institutional framework of this country," he said.

In the hour-long interaction that had questions from students, the Congress leader spoke on a range of issues such as the economy, foreign policy as well as domestic politics, including farmers' protests and the ongoing elections.

Talking about the role of being an Opposition leader, he said there had been a

## Pune goes into week-long shutdown

Restaurants, bars and religious centres to close

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
PUNE

Eateries, bars and restaurants in Pune district of Maharashtra will remain shut for seven days starting April 3 in view of the spike in coronavirus cases of late, a senior official said on Friday.

A curfew will be in place across the district from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., and malls, cinema halls and places of religious worship will also be shut during this seven day period, he said.

The administration introduced these "stricter restrictions" in the district, which has reported more than 8,000 COVID-19 cases in the past two consecutive days.

The decision to impose the curbs was taken during a review meeting chaired by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar here on Friday.

"Eateries, bars and res-



**Shutters down:** Malls, too, will not be allowed to function in Pune for a week. ■ FILE PHOTO

taurants will remain closed, but home delivery of the food will continue," Pune Divisional Commissioner Sau-

rad Rao said.

"Malls, cinema halls will remain shut for seven days from Saturday. All religious places will also be closed for a week," he said.

Except weddings and rituals pertaining to last rites, all other public gatherings have been banned in the district.

Only 50 people will be al-

lowed to attend a wedding and only 20 people can remain present for last rites, he added.

**Essential services**

He said that essential services had been exempted from the curfew.

"All these decisions were taken in view of the surge in COVID-19 cases in the last few days. The situation is becoming critical. In the last one week, the positivity rate of the district has crossed 32%," Mr. Rao said.

## Lockdown in Durg district in Chattisgarh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
DURG

The administration in Durg district of Chattisgarh on Friday announced a complete lockdown from April 6 to 14 in the light of spike in COVID-19 cases.

## Plea seeks action against black magic

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

A petition has been filed in the Supreme Court to issue a direction to the Centre and States to control black magic, superstition and religious conversion by intimidating, threatening, deceptively luring through gifts and monetary benefits.

"Religious conversion by 'carrot-and-stick' or 'by hook-or-crook' not only offends Articles 14 [right to equality], 21 [right to life] and 25 [right to religious freedom], but also against the principles of secularism, which is an integral part of basic structure of Constitution," the petition filed by advocate A.K. Upadhyay said.

The court is likely to hear the case on April 9.

Mr. Upadhyay registered his "dismay" that the Centre and the States failed to control the menace of black magic, superstition and deceitful religious conversion, though it was their duty under Article 51A of the Constitution.

"There is not even one district in the country which is free of black magic, superstition and religious conversion ... Incidents are reported every week throughout the country where conversion is done by intimidating, threatening, deceptively luring through gifts and monetary benefits," the petition alleged.

## IN BRIEF



### CGHS: no refund for jab taken in private centres

NEW DELHI

The Health Ministry on Friday said beneficiaries of the Central Government Health Scheme, who get their COVID-19 vaccination at private empanelled hospitals, will not be reimbursed. The clarification has been issued after various representations and grievances regarding administration of vaccine to the CGHS beneficiaries was put forward and the matter was examined. The Ministry added. As per government policy, vaccination against COVID-19 is being provided free of cost to beneficiaries at designated government facilities.

### Dalit youth held captive, tortured by four in U.P.

LAKHIMPUR KHERI

A 22-year-old Dalit man was allegedly held captive and tortured by four persons here on the suspicion that he was having an affair with a girl of their family, police said on Friday. The man's family members had claimed that an iron rod was also inserted in his rectum, but Circle Officer Pradeep Kumar Verma, who is investigating the case, denied the charge, saying the medical examination and probe so far indicate this is not true. The accused have been arrested and the victim is under treatment at the district hospital. His condition has been stated to be serious, police said. PTI

## Maternal deaths rose during pandemic: study

Risk of stillbirths also increased

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The failure of the health system to cope with COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an increase in maternal deaths and stillbirths, according to a study published in *The Lancet Global Health* journal.

Overall, there was a 28% increase in the odds of stillbirth, and the risk of mothers dying during pregnancy or childbirth increased by about one-third. There was also a rise in maternal depression. COVID-19 impact on pregnancy outcomes was disproportionately high on poorer countries, according to the study published on March 31.

The report is an analysis of 40 studies across 17 countries including Brazil, Mexico, the U.S., Canada, the U.K., Denmark, Netherlands, Italy, India, China and Nepal. "The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has led to avoidable deaths of both mothers and babies. Policy makers and healthcare leaders must urgently investigate robust strategies for preserving safe and respectful maternity care, even during the ongoing global emergency. Immediate action is required to avoid rolling back decades of investment in reducing mother and infant mortality in low-resource settings," the authors urge.

The study attributes the worsening trend to the fail-



Fewer women received ante-natal checkups during the pandemic, data show. The lure of the inefficiency of the healthcare system and their inability to cope with the pandemic" instead of strict lockdown measures. This resulted in reduced access to care.

**Indian context**  
In the Indian context, an analysis of HMIS data by Population Foundation of India shows that during the months of national lockdown last year between April and June, compared to the same period in 2019, there was a 27% drop in pregnant women receiving four or more ante-natal check-ups, a 28% decline in institutional deliveries and 22% decline in prenatal care.

## Centre says labourers in Punjab drugged

Home Ministry says 58 migrant workers were exploited in the border districts

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry has said in a communication to the Punjab government that labourers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar who work in agricultural fields in the State are drugged, exploited and meted out inhuman treatment. The Ministry asked the State government to take appropriate measures to address the serious problem.

The Ministry said that 58 mentally challenged people from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh were found working as bonded labourers in the border districts of the State by the Border Security Force (BSF) in 2019 and 2020. In a communication to the

During the course of questioning, it emerged that most of them were mentally challenged

HOME MINISTRY LETTER

Chief Secretary of Punjab, the Ministry said the BSF found that the workers were brought to Punjab on the promise of a good salary but they were exploited, given drugs and forced to work in inhuman conditions. The BSF has said that these labourers were rescued from their native place to work in the border areas of Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Ferozepur and Abohar in Punjab.

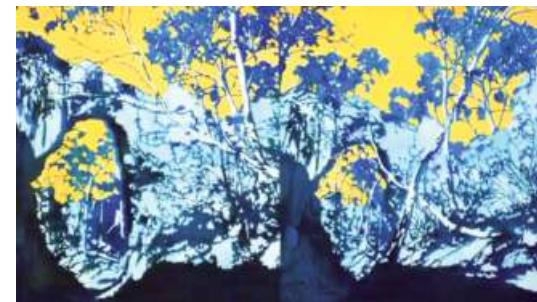
"During the course of questioning, it emerged that most of them were either mentally challenged or were

in a feeble state of mind and have been working as bonded labourers with farmers in border villages of Punjab. The persons apprehended belong to poor family background and hail from remote areas of the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh," the letter dated March 17 said.

**Human trafficking**  
The Ministry said it has been further informed that "human-trafficking syndicates hire such labourers from their native place to work in Punjab on the promise of a good salary, but after reaching there, they are exploited, paid poorly and meted out inhuman treatment. To make them work in the fields for long hours, these labourers are often given drugs, which adversely affect their physical and mental condition. The BSF has been handing over the rescued persons to the State police for necessary action," the letter said.

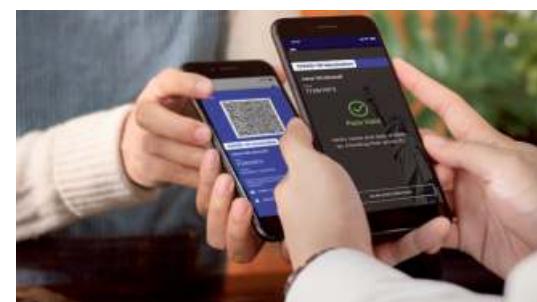
"Keeping in view the multi-dimensional and overwhelming enormity of the problem, which involves human-trafficking, bonded labour and human rights violation, you are requested to look into the matter and take appropriate measures to address this serious problem," the Ministry communicated to the Punjab government.

The Punjab government has also been asked to inform it on priority about the action taken in the matter.



## Instapick

**Delhi Art Week:** As Art Dubai, held as an in-person event, comes to a close today, a new initiative, Delhi Art Week, gets underway. The city has been divided into four 'art zones' with exhibitions, workshops and walkthroughs from about 37 galleries. Details: [delhiartweek.com](http://delhiartweek.com). Till April 10. If pop art is more your speed, Super Nintendo World is finally a reality at Universal Studios Japan in Osaka.



## Talking point

**Excisor Pass:** What's the latest on digital vaccine passports? You know, the health certificate that will see you enjoying a concert with hundreds of people and the tourism industry sighing with relief. New York, with IBM, has rolled out the pass, which shows a person's Covid-19 status (whether vaccinated and results of a recent test). And then follow the questions about privacy and data protection.

## Pick of the week

Concerts, stand-up and other events you just can't miss.



### XXL beer paradise

Bengaluru, home to over 60 microbreweries, can add 'world's largest microbrewery' to the list with the opening of Ironhill India that can accommodate 1,500 people. Eight varieties of beer are on offer, including Sinnerman Stout, at the 1.3 lakh sq ft space in the IT hub of Marathahalli. #9606044623/24. In Delhi's Saket, Altogether Experimental has a popup today, in collaboration with Amrita Kaur. 'Vasant' welcomes spring through a seven-course home style meal using Ayurvedic principles. #99992 88073



### Ruby-loaded eggs

Smash Fabelle Chocolates' Signature Easter Egg to reveal nut clusters enrobed in milk and ruby chocolate. Buy the egg at ₹2,475 or mini eggs (box of 10) for ₹495 at ITC hotels or order online. Kiko-bā a restaurant in Delhi's Vasant Vihar, takes heirloom recipes from homes in Eastern Asia, and gives them a modern twist. Try the shiso butter that takes three days to make, combining ingredients like shiso leaves, Ponzo, aged rice vinegar, and French butter. Or order the Grilled Lobster (Robatta) or the Black Cod Gyoza to savour its flavour.



### Kate's photo project

Even as the UK takes steps to unlock, Kate Middleton's project, Hold Still, which invited photo submissions that captured life in lockdown, has been turned into a book, Hold Still: A Portrait of Our Nation in 2020. The book features 100 images selected by a panel of judges, including the Duchess of Cambridge and National Portrait Gallery Director Nicholas Cullinan. Meanwhile, kids can learn about alphabets, numbers and Pokemon, of course, via Pikachu Press' new series of interactive books for children.



### Vali Vadhe online

Vali Vadhe is part of Staged@RS – Bengaluru-based Ranga Shankara's digital programme. Based on celebrated writer Kuvempu's Sri Ramayana Darshana, the play blends elements of Yakshagana, Kalaripayattu and the Manipuri art form. ₹150 at insider.in. What is the purpose of art? Find out with The Right Way by Thespo. The play has been created by Daniele Bartolini, and is "audience-specific art" (meant for one person at a time). April 3, 4, 4 pm onwards. ₹300 at insider.in.



### Return of the watches

Watchmaking worldwide is set to be in the spotlight as the annual trade show, where leading names reveal their latest products, will soon get underway. Set to be a hybrid show this year, Watches and Wonders Geneva's digital event is a private affair. As many as 38 prestigious brands will gather on watchesandwonders.com. April 7 to 13. This will be followed by an in-person event in Shanghai, which will host 19 brands, including first-time exhibitors Chopard, Montblanc, Tudor, Ulysse Nardin. April 14 to 18.



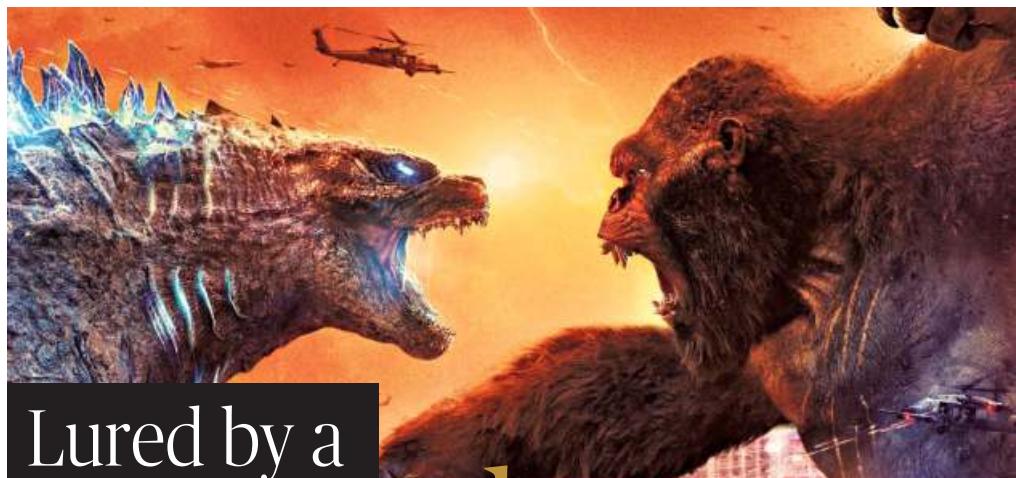
### Sufi and some ghazals

Ruhaniyat, the Sufi and mystic music festival, will be held digitally across seven cities, including Delhi. The shows curated for each city will be a combination of newly shot and archival performances. April 3, 6 pm. in.bookmyshow.com. Komune presents Mulaqat: An Introductory Workshop on Urdu Ghazal. Learn the history of ghazals and more from writer and lyricist Swapnil Tiwari. Some participants may even get the chance to perform at an online event. April 3, 4, ₹499. Insider.in.



### On Korean culture

As a reminder that there is more to Korean culture than K-dramas, The Korean Cultural Centre UK presents A Viewing Room. The artist film programme features new and recent video works by eight contemporary Korean artists. Themes include psychological well-being and the transition from offline to online. The works include Sound Garden by Jeann Cha and After Life by Cha Ji Ryang. April 6 to May 31. kccuk.org.uk. Meanwhile, Minari, nominated for six Oscars, is set to be released in India on April 16.



## Lured by a spectacle

With cinemas shutting across the world, will there be room only for 'event' cinema like Godzilla vs. Kong?

NAMAN RAMACHANDRAN

As you read this, *Godzilla vs. Kong* is already the biggest hit across the planet, including in India, China, the US, wherever cinemas are open, really. People are flocking by the millions to watch the beloved monsters go up against each other in an epic spectacle. By the same token, medium-level films, budget and spectacle-wise, are not exactly falling by the wayside, but aren't doing humongous box office numbers either. The debate that has been raging on for the last year, ever since Covid-19 began ravaging the world, and producers started giving their babies to OTT platforms for direct to digital premières, is about the death of small cinema.

A year that has passed has had a devastating effect on cinemas. The latest FICCI report reveals that in India alone, some 1,500 cinemas were forced to close over the last 12 months, leaving just 8,000 screens for a population of 1.3 billion. Though there are dedicated repertory single cinemas and chains for independent

### NOW SHOWING

films around the world, won't producers be tempted to recover costs in one fell swoop? Or maybe even turn a profit by selling rights to a giant global streamer, with the justification that their product is reaching some 200 countries at the same time and potentially hundreds of millions of eyeballs.

Small, intimate films are going nowhere soon and will continue to be made and consumed, but the question is whether their platforms will be restricted. The

leave you with a personal experience. Along with a prominent Indian independent filmmaker I watched Cate Blanchett's Oscar-winning performance in *Blue Jasmine* in a giant multiplex in Leicester Square. We were stunned by the agony Blanchett conveyed in the film. As we stumbled out into daylight, rendered speechless, the moment was somewhat ruined by a selfie seeker (for a picture with him, not me), but the effect was indelible enough for both of us to remember today, eight years down the line. I somehow doubt a small screen will provide that level of engagement.

From an audience point of view, in a post-Covid, vaccinated world (and that world can't come soon enough), will they be willing to take a risk (vaccinations

### YARN IT!

# The election GAME

Who said it's about the best candidate or the best party?

JANE DE SUZA

Remember, before starting this game, you must pledge to not play fair. Now, let's begin.

Roll the dice. Whatever you get – protest! Loudly. Arrange for a stage and the loudest loud speakers that (tax payer) money can buy. Say that the other party has rigged your dice. Whatever the results, you're being cheated. **10 points**.

Oops, the first round of results show you're in the lead. Instantly do a U-Turn. Go back onto the stage. Give interviews. Tell people how honest the elections are, how you believe in the system, and that anyone who protests is anti-national. **15 points** for this turnaround.

Proceed. You are now entering a new phase. Rallies. One rule. Make sure you organise more than your opponent. Bring out the biggest face of your party, give away masks of the face, splash the face on every

hoarding. Promise free everything – money, rice, places of worship, free air (fabricate statistics about how much pollution there is in the states you do not run yet). **25 points**.

This annoying popular candidate from the other party keeps edging ahead. Resort to your Rescue Card. Horse-trading. Threaten, publish fake stories about this dirty scoundrel. If all else fails, bribe the dirty scoundrel to join your party. Throw him a party to welcome him in. Kill any media story that says you said he was dirty. Wear matching halos. **45 points**.

Your ally, the media channel, has to keep at 24x7 stories about how you are winning (especially if you're not, no one really wants

the truth anyway). Fire the journalists who expose the truth. Are we a nation of people who expose? Hack their accounts, get them arrested. Replace them with lip-sync dolls who will shout and spout whatever you tell them to. Brilliant! You're almost there. **65 points**.

Diversion needed. Quick! Some idiot party member said something sick. Start stories about Covid-19 (that God for such a timely diversion), border problems, film stars, drugs. Blame the foreign hand for trying to roll the dice. Not working? Talk history, even

better, make up history. The voting masses lap it up. **80 points**.

There are still some stubborn hurdles in the game. Activists, students, writers. Get rid of them. Any way you can. Now, the flag at the end is in sight. Make sure it is yours. Give a tear-jerker speech about honesty and democracy. **90 points**. If you can squeeze out a tear too, you make it to **100 points**. Congratulations!

Where Jane De Suza, author of *Flyaway Boy*, pokes her nose into our perfect lives.

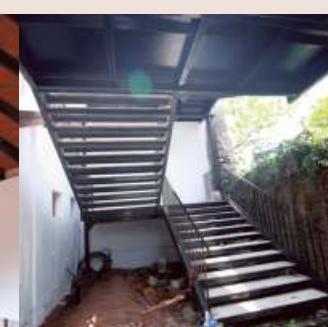


## Transforming Alappuzha's warehouses

How the town's historic coir factories are being restored to accommodate art spaces and museums



PRIYADESHINI S



(Clockwise from left) The Coirfed building, a new steel staircase and other work at the New Model Society Building

■ SURESH ALLEPPEY



Building (NMCSB) will be re-purposed and turned into tourist spots.

A wind of change is blowing through the historic coir factories of Alappuzha, past 100-year-old doors, halls and vaulted ceilings. The spaces that once resonated with the sounds of yarn being spun, toiling workers and political uprisings are now gearing up for a major makeover.

"These were once busy spaces but with changing businesses, many sections of the factories are unused and some are in a dilapidated condition," explains Benny Kuriaose, conservation architect. He heads the Alappuzha Heritage Project, under which factories at Coirfed, Kerala State Coir Corporation (KSCC), and New Model Co-operative Society

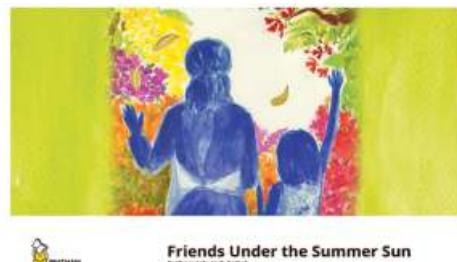
are in the process of being converted into art spaces and museums. The Coirfed building, a former coir processing unit, will house the Alappuzha Coir Museum, while the New Model Society Building will be converted into a coir history museum.

At Port Museum on the beach, the cafe will be partially alfresco to remain accessible to the public even after gallery hours. Citing the example of Admiral Hotel in Copenhagen, which was a granary before it turned to offer a new role, veteran conservation architect Ramesh Tharakan says, "Old warehouses can be retrofitted into interesting and dynamic hospitality as well as retail spaces. European cities are replete with examples of such transformation".

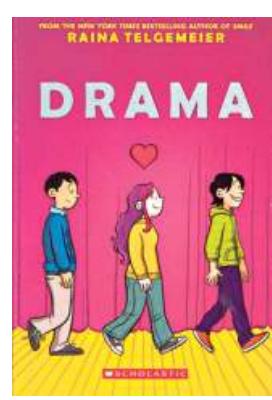
Kuriakose, is part of an integrated plan (estimated to cost around ₹260 crore) that includes conserving the heritage of Alappuzha, also called the Venice of the East, and will include rejuvenation of its canals and construction of walkways. Unlike the gentrification of Mumbai's textile mills that became shopping malls, this project, he says, is in sync with the history of the town.

**Yarn history and a cafe**  
Naushad PM, MD of the Muziris Heritage Project, says the collaboration by different government departments – Tourism, Coir, Port – will see 21 museums take shape, of which three will be exclusively dedicated to coir. "A yarn museum will come up at the Coirfed building [formerly Darragh Smail]. The KSCC will house a coir history museum, and the NMCSB will have a Living Coir museum," he explains. While preparations for an immersive coir experience are underway, two spaces in KSCC and NMCSB are already experimenting with art – Lokame Tharavadu, an upcoming mega show of contemporary art, will exhibit works, installations and paintings of 268 artists of Kerala.

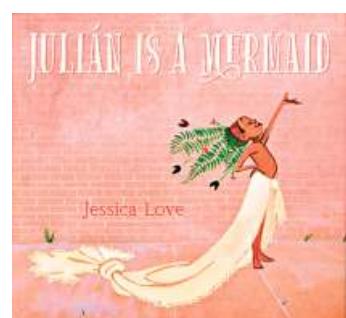
At Port Museum on the beach, the cafe will be partially alfresco to remain accessible to the public even after gallery hours. Citing the example of Admiral Hotel in Copenhagen, which was a granary before it turned to offer a new role, veteran conservation architect Ramesh Tharakan says, "Old warehouses can be retrofitted into interesting and dynamic hospitality as well as retail spaces. European cities are replete with examples of such transformation".

**Where do you begin?**

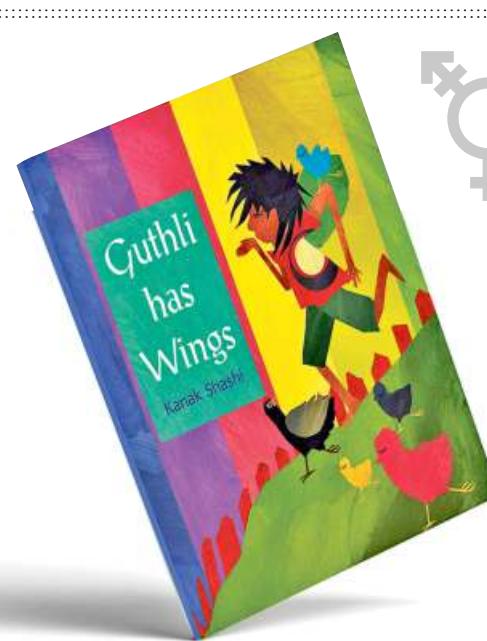
In *Friends Under the Summer Sun* by Ashutosh Pathak and Kanak Shashi (Pratham Books), Nimmy visits her neighbour Shri Akka to bake a cake. She's fascinated by Akka's collection of sequined sandals and beautifully painted nails, before finally asking 'Are you a boy or a girl?'



Raina Telgemeier's *Drama* (Scholastic) is a coming-of-age graphic novel about seventh grader and theatre lover Callie whose close friends, twin brothers Jesse and Justin, come out as gay.



*Julián Is a Mermaid* (Penguin Random House) by Jessica Love tells the story of a boy who wants to become a mermaid and participate in the Coney Island Mermaid Parade.



Book covers of *Guthli Has Wings* and *I Want to Ride a Motorbike*, (right) Maulik Pancholy, and (below) Shals Mahajan  
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



# Gender fluidity and children's books



Early reader recommendations that could teach children and remind parents about the importance of acceptance

MENAKA RAMAN

We recently watched *The Queen's Gambit* with the kids. (This was after my sister breezily replied 'Sure!', when I asked if it was appropriate for children. I guess she forgot about the volley of expletives 20 minutes into episode one.) Later in the show, there's a moment of attraction between the characters Beth Harmon and DL Townes. But soon after this, audiences are left wondering if Townes might be gay.

"Wait! I thought he liked Beth!" my husband exclaimed.

"Appa," our nine-year-old replied matter-of-factly, "He could be bi."

When I was nine, I had no clue what bisexuality was. I'd just figured out what being gay meant. But today, children are far more aware of sexuality from a younger age thanks to a slowly growing presence of LGBTQI+ characters and families in books and on screen.

Writer and queer feminist activist Shals Mahajan says that talking about gender and sexuality in books for young readers is important. "All children must know that there are different ways of being and functioning," they said. This opportunity to explore differences is crucial as "by the time children are five years old, they already can form rigid stereotypes and the pictures and texts in their literature aid in this process [Schlossberg and Goodman 1972]."

#### The lived experience

But are there enough books for young readers that help prevent these 'rigid stereotypes' from forming? Surprisingly, data around this was hard to come by, both for India and globally. The only numbers I could find were from the US-based Cooperative Children's Book Center who noted that in 2017, only 4% of books received could be categorised as LGBTQI+.

Mahajan feels that while English language children's books in India are moving towards more representation, the world that these books are set in remain largely normative. "They are usually hetero, upper class and caste families where men and women play fairly gendered roles. In that world we have this one person or character who doesn't fit in or is different. And that is a problem. Because this is a false kind of inclusivity," they said, adding that access to books – in terms of language and reach – is also a problem. "More often than not it is urban, middle class children who have the opportunity to read many of these books."

Publishers like Pratham Books are cognizant of this gap and are trying to bridge it. By digitising their content, and openly licensing it on their StoryWeaver platform, they offer thousands of free storybooks in hundreds of languages which can be read across devices. "Translation tools also help customise the books for localised requirements, pioneering a new publishing model that transfers agency to the user," adds Purvi Shah, director, StoryWeaver.

her identity, Guthli goes into a shell. LGBTQI+ characters in children's books often struggle to find acceptance. But a lack of support isn't a problem for Rahul Kapoor, the protagonist of *The Best At It* (HarperCollins, 2020) written by Indian American actor and activist Maulik Pancholy. The new middle grade novel traces 12-year-old Rahul's search for something that he's the best at, while trying to grapple with OCD, racism and making sense of his feelings for his neighbour, Justin. What really stood out for me in the book is how Rahul's best friend, parents and grandfather accept him fully for who he is.

"In middle grade books, there's this idea of aspiration or, what I like to call, realistic possibility. I wanted to show that an Indian family could be supportive of a kid who is LGBTQI+," Pancholy told me over a Zoom call. Pancholy says that representation helps, and that we need more of it to validate LGBTQI+ kids' own experiences.

Writer and filmmaker Aarthi Parthasarathy recalls the "lack of diversity of how girls could be" in the books she read as a child. In her book *I Want to Ride a Motorbike* (Pratham Books), 14-year-old Dia desperately wants to learn how to ride a motorbike but keeps hearing that it's not something that girls do. Help comes from her Anitha Chithi who lives with Farah Aunty in Bombay. While not overtly stated, one can tell from the illustrations that the women are a couple, subtly reinforcing the normalcy of same-sex relationships.

The recent Delhi High Court ruling rejecting three applications for the legalisation of same-sex marriage in India shows that we have a long way to go in respecting the LGBTQI+ community's right to choose. Over the years, I've had so many conversations about parenting with 'liberal' parents who say things like, 'I'm okay with whatever my child wants in life... as long as they're not gay, you know?'

On the other hand, the children I've spoken to are far more open. Until their parents pass their prejudices on to them. The books here are for children, but really, it's the grown-ups who should probably read them first.

Menaka Raman is a children's book author (*Loki Takes Guard*) and + columnist.



#### Stop the prejudice

The numbers may still be small, but the books are there if you're looking for them.

In *Guthli Has Wings* by Kanak Shashi (Tulika Books, 2019), Guthli is a happy child who loves fairies, cycling and drawing. But when she wears her sister's frock for Diwali, Guthli's mother tells her, 'Boys are not fairies, they are princes,' and forces her to change her clothes. Denied

"In middle grade books, there's this idea of aspiration or, what I like to call, realistic possibility. I wanted to show that an Indian family could be supportive of a kid who is LGBTQI+." - MAULIK PANCHOLY

## FOOD SPOT

### Festival of FLAVOURS

Since it wasn't safe to step out and mingle, ordering in some Chinjabi from Noodle Bowl seemed the only option



Chong do chicken ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



I was a wee lad when I had my first Chinese meal in Delhi. It was at Ginza in Connaught Place. Your childhood food memories mould your tastes, no matter how many cuisines and flavours you try out as you grow older. That explains why Chinjabi – a mix of Chinese and Punjabi – continues to enthral me.

I was in a nostalgic mood last week, as it was Holi and we were cooped up inside. I thought back to the old Chinese restaurants we used to frequent on festive occasions. The yearning for some old-fashioned Delhi-style Chinese food – doused with a generous dollop of soya sauce – grew. I went looking for a suitable Chinese eatery that I had not tried out before.

The result was a place called Noodle Bowl, a popular chain with branches everywhere. I looked up Swiggy, and found that the menu included pork, which many restaurants sadly do not serve any more.

After a brief discussion at home, we decided on Chong do chicken (₹359), five spice lamb (₹479), crispy pork pepper salt (₹379), vegetable spring roll (₹109), chicken momos (₹109 for four), vegetable fried rice (₹189) and half a plate of vegetable noodles (₹119).

First the bad news: The dishes more or less looked the same. Now the good news: They, however, had their own characteristic flavours,

quite a nice taste. The pork was crunchy, had an aftertaste of pepper, and was a good appetiser. Both the lamb and the chicken dishes did come in a soya dressing, but I enjoyed them. The lamb was tender and the sauce, cooked with onion, ginger and capsicum, nicely tangy.

What was really nice was the chicken: pieces of chicken breast with spring onions, red and yellow pepper, black mushroom, Chinese cabbage and lemon juice. The sauce was mildly sweet, possibly because of the peppers, and I really enjoyed that. The crunchy veggies added to the taste and texture. The chicken pieces were deliciously squishy and went well with the fried rice.

The rice was long-grained, and came with bits of veggies, and a nice aroma. The noodles, however, were nothing much to write home about, quite like the spring rolls, which were too hard. The dim sums got a B from us – neither very good, nor too bad.

Noodle Bowl is value for money, and the portions are generous. Four of us had this meal, and there was enough left over for lunch and half a dinner the next day.

I am not all that fond of Chinese dessert, so I ended with two kinds of gujiyas (it was around Holi, after all). One was from Hira Sweets, with a filling of thickened milk and khoya. The second from Pitara was a soft gujiya, with a filling of stewed apples, walnut and jaggery. It was delicious, and healthy to boot.

Holi turned out to be quite nice after all. It wasn't the festival of colours, but certainly one of flavours.

The writer is a seasoned food critic

## PODCASTS FOR KIDS

### Hooked at first listen

A summer playlist that includes folk tales, India's space programme, and the story of the ta-dum sound that introduces Netflix

APARNA NARRAIN

After a year of online classes and kids glued to screens of various kinds, give digital fatigue the boot this summer holidays. Introduce your children to podcasts.

Parents who are dipping their toes into this auditory world for the first time, don't worry. As Kitty Felde, award-winning journalist and host of Book Club for Kids, suggests, try a 'podcast tasting'. 'Listen to one episode every night from a different podcast [and] see which one your child likes. Which one do you like? Make a date to listen together: in the car, at bedtime, while walking the dog together. That podcast can be a jumping off place for a longer discussion between you and your child about topics you never even imagined.'

Here is a list to get you started:

#### For 10 to 13 years

##### 1) Veergatha

Baalgatha, a mix of contemporary tales and stories from the *Panchatantra*, *Jataka* and *Hipotadesha* may be the most well-known from Gaathastory's bouquet of podcasts, but its selection for pre-teens is picking up too. "Veergatha honours the National Bravery Award winners and others who have done courageous deeds", says Bengaluru-based Amar Deshpande, who started the platform with his wife Mrunal. What is common to all the content is their intention that "every story should have a moral" and an India connect. "We have a library of about 4,000 curated stories that we rewrite and edit, and correlate to topical events," he says, adding that the aim is to educate while bringing in different elements. New seasons of all their podcasts out this month.

##### 2) Newsy Jacuzzi

How do you tell your child what's going on in the world? Should you even? Well, it is not too bad when a kid explains things. New Delhi-based Leela Sivasankar Prickitt, 8, with a little help from her mother, Lyndee, discusses everything from planes powered by 'water' to less kid-friendly topics such as Black Lives Matter. What makes it fun are the sound effects (honking cars and planes taking off) accompanying each bulletin. Listening to other young news correspondents from across the world is an added perk.

##### 3) Radiolab for Kids

A curated collection from the archives of Radiolab, a Peabody-winning show created in 2002 by Lebanese-American radio host and producer Jad Abumrad, Radiolab for Kids comprises family-friendly content. If your child has ever asked you, 'What do dogs see when they look at the rainbow?', this is where you will find the answer.



#### 13 to 16 years

##### 1) Mission ISRO

How did India's space programme start? Who were the people who were dreaming of missions to space and even an Indian on the Moon, in a country that was barely 10 years into Independence? Narrated by the inimitable Harsha Bhogle (who jumped at the chance to work on something to do with his other love: science), the 12-episode *Mission ISRO* is equal parts history lesson and thrill ride and has already won much acclaim on Twitter, including by comedian Danish Sait.

Created by All Things Small, cofounder and COO Gaurav Vaz, says: "We realised India's foray into space hasn't really been chronicled. There is no single place you can go and find all of this data. It's only in various people's minds from their lived experience. We saw the opportunity that *Mission ISRO* could be the comprehensive story of Indians [in] space." While saying the English may be a little harder for really young children, Vaz adds, "But the minute you are being taught science and history in school, I think you can consume a podcast like this. Right from middle school onwards. You're taught about India's freedom fight, about the British rule, about the sun and moon and solar system and astronomy. This intersects the two. There's no real reason why it's only for older kids."

A second season is currently in the works.

##### 2) Geek Fruit

Is your mind palace full of pop culture trivia? Then this is probably the podcast for you. Join Jishnu, Dinkar and Tejas, three fans from Mumbai started *Geek Fruit* in 2015 with the idea of building a community of geeks. While the very first topic was *Star War*, over the course of 340 episodes, everything from the boy reporter Tintin, British panel show like *Would I Lie To You?* and dystopian sci-fi series *Black Mirror* to *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, Hayao Miyazaki's films, *The Avengers: Infinity War*, and Jim Carrey's movies in the 90s have been talked about.

##### 3) Dear Hank and John

Listen in as the Green brothers - authors and YouTubers John (of *The Fault in Our Stars* fame) and Hank - banter [the vibe is high energy and fun], and offer humorous, dubious and even heartfelt advice in response to questions from listeners such as "Why do things burn when not coming into the atmosphere but not when leaving?" and "Does milk expire when it's inside a cow? Episodes end with the news from planet Mars and AFC Wimbledon, the English football club John sponsors.

# U.S., Iran agree to indirect nuclear talks

Announcement marks the first major progress in efforts to return both countries to the 2015 accord

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
BRUSSELS

The U.S. and Iran said on Friday that they would begin negotiations through intermediaries next week to try to get both countries back into an accord limiting Iran's nuclear programme, nearly three years after President Donald Trump pulled the U.S. out of the deal.

The announcement marked the first major progress in efforts to return both countries to the 2015 accord, which bound Iran to restrictions on its nuclear programmes in return for relief from U.S. and international sanctions. President Joe Biden came into office saying that getting back into the accord was a priority. But Iran and the U.S. have disagreed over Iran's demands that sanctions be lifted first, and the stalemate threatened to become an early foreign policy setback for the Biden administration.

State Department spokesperson Ned Price called the resumption of negotiations,



Talks resume: Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, centre, during a virtual meeting of the JCPOA in Tehran. ■ AFP

scheduled for Tuesday in Vienna, "a healthy step forward". But Mr. Price added: "These remain early days, and we don't anticipate an immediate breakthrough as there will be difficult discussions ahead."

Mr. Trump pulled the U.S. out of the accord in 2018, opting for a "maximum pressure" campaign of stepped-up U.S. sanctions and other tough actions. Iran responded by intensifying its enrichment of uranium and building of centrifuges, while

maintaining its insistence that its nuclear development was for civilian and not military purposes. Iran's moves increased pressure on major world powers over the Trump administration's sanctions and raised tensions among U.S. allies and strategic partners in West Asia. Agreement on the start of indirect talks came after the EU helped broker a virtual meeting of officials from Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and Iran, which have remained in the

accord, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Mr. Price said next week's talks will be structured around working groups that the EU was forming with the remaining participants in the accord, including Iran.

## Primary issue

"The primary issues that will be discussed are the nuclear steps that Iran would need to take in order to return to compliance with the terms of the JCPOA, and the sanctions relief steps that the U.S. would need to take in order to return to compliance as well," Mr. Price said.

The U.S., like Iran, said it did not anticipate direct talks between the U.S. and Iran now. Mr. Price said the U.S. remains open to that idea, however.

In a tweet, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said the aim of the Vienna session would be to "rapidly finalize sanction-lifting & nuclear measures for choreographed removal of all sanctions, fol-

lowed by Iran ceasing remedial measures."

Iranian state television quoted Abbas Araghchi, Iran's nuclear negotiator at the virtual meeting, as saying during Friday's discussions that any "return by the U.S. to the nuclear deal does not require any negotiation and the path is quite clear".

"The U.S. can return to the deal and stop breaching the law in the same way it withdrew from the deal and imposed illegal sanctions on Iran," Mr. Araghchi was quoted as saying.

Russia's Ambassador to international organisations in Vienna, Mikhail Ulyanov, said "the impression is that we are on the right track, but the way ahead will not be easy and will require intensive efforts. The stakeholders seem to be ready for that".

Any return of the United States would involve complications. Iran has said before it resumes compliance with the deal, the U.S. needs to return to its own obligations by dropping the sanctions.

# At least 50 dead after train derails in Taiwan tunnel

It collided with a vehicle on tracks; 146 hospitalised

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
HUALIEN

At least 50 people were killed in Taiwan on Friday when a packed train collided with a vehicle on the tracks and then derailed inside a tunnel, in the island's worst railway accident in decades.

Officials said the devastating collision was caused by a railway maintenance vehicle which slipped down an embankment above the tracks near the eastern coastal city of Hualien.



Fatal crash: Rescue personnel helping stranded passengers down the roof of the train in Hualien, Taiwan. ■ VIA REUTERS

was packed with some 480 people heading down the east coast for the annual Tomb Sweeping Festival, a four-day public holiday.

The Taiwan Railways Agency said 146 passengers were sent to hospital in addition to the 50 confirmed dead.

A French national was among those killed while two Japanese and one Macau resident were injured.

One unnamed female sur-

vivor told TVBS news channel of trapped passengers — some crying out for help, others unconscious.

President Tsai Ing-wen visited an emergency response centre in the capital Taipei, and said investigators would get to the bottom of how such a deadly crash could have occurred.

"We will definitely clarify the cause of the incident that has caused major casualties," she told reporters.

## ELSEWHERE



Japanese PM to hold talks with Biden in U.S.

TOKYO

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga will visit Washington for talks with President Joe Biden on April 16, the government said on Friday. Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato told reporters that Mr. Suga will be the first foreign leader to meet Mr. Biden in person since he took office in January. ■ AP

# Biden vows support to Kiev after Russian buildup

His call to President Zelensky came after Kremlin warned the West against sending troops to Ukraine

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
MOSCOW

U.S. President Joe Biden affirmed his "unwavering support" for Ukraine in a call to President Volodymyr Zelensky on Friday after Kiev accused Moscow of building up military forces on its border.

The call, which was Mr. Biden's first conversation with Mr. Zelensky since the US leader's inauguration in January, came after Russia warned the West earlier Friday against sending troops to Ukraine to buttress its ally.

It also came as tensions

between the U.S. and Russia have hit rock bottom after Mr. Biden last month infuriated Moscow by agreeing with a description of his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin as a "killer".

The White House said in a statement that Mr. Biden "affirmed the U.S.' unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the face of Russia's ongoing aggression".

Mr. Zelensky, who this week accused Russia of amassing troops on Ukraine's border, said in a vi-

deo released by his office that "President Biden assured me that Ukraine will never be left alone against Russian aggression."

## Tensions raised

Weeks of renewed frontline clashes have shredded a ceasefire and raised fears of an escalation of the simmering conflict in eastern Ukraine.

Speaking to reporters on Friday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia would be forced to respond if the U.S. sent troops.

"There is no doubt such a

scenario would lead to a further increase in tensions close to Russia's borders. Of course, this would call for additional measures from the Russian side to ensure its security," Mr. Peskov said.

He declined to specify which measures would be adopted, while insisting that Russia was not making moves to threaten Ukraine.

"Russia is not threatening anyone, it has never threatened anyone," he said.

On Friday, Russia said its armed forces would hold military exercises close to

Ukraine's border to practise defence against attack drones.

More than 50 battalion combat teams comprising 15,000 people will take part in those, the military told reporters.

Kiev has been battling pro-Russian separatists in the eastern Donetsk and Luhansk regions since 2014, following Moscow's annexation of the Crimean peninsula after an uprising that ousted Ukraine's Kremlin-friendly president Viktor Yanukovych.

# 'Extremist' kills self, baby in Tunisia suicide attack

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
TUNIS

Tunisian authorities said a female suicide bomber killed herself and her baby during counterterrorism operations in mountains of central Tunisia.

Two other Islamic extremists were killed in the security operations, according to an Interior Ministry statement on Thursday night.

In one operation, Tunisian forces were tracking an extremist group in the Mount Salloum area of Kas-

serine province. They killed one suspected jihadist, whose wife then killed herself by activating an explosive belt, the statement said. The explosion killed her baby by in her arms, while an older daughter also at the scene survived, according to the Ministry.

In a second operation, in the Mount Mghila area, security forces killed a suspected leader of Jund Al Khilafa brigade, the statement said. The brigade has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group.

# + Myanmar junta shuts down Internet

Pro-democracy groups vow to use radio, SMS messages to keep up the protests

REUTERS  
YANGON

Opponents of military rule in Myanmar marched and laid bouquets of flowers on Friday while trying to find alternative ways to organise their campaign of dissent after the authorities cut off most users from the Internet.

Protests have taken place almost daily since the military overthrew the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1. Hundreds of civilians have been killed in a crackdown by security forces that has drawn international condemnation.

On Friday, security forces opened fire at a rally near Myanmar's second city Mandalay, wounding four people, two critically, according to three domestic media organisations.

The authorities, who had



Buddhist novices giving the three-finger salute to protesters marching in Dooplaya, Myanmar, on Friday. ■ AFP/KNU DDO PLA

already shut down mobile data in a bid to stifle the opposition to the ruling junta, ordered Internet providers from Friday to cut wireless broadband, depriving most customers of access.

In response, pro-democracy groups shared radio frequencies, offline apps that work without a data connection, and tips for using SMS messages as an alternative to data services.

"In the following days, there are street protests. Do as many guerrilla strikes as you can. Please join," Khin Sadar, a protest leader, said on Facebook in anticipation of the Internet blackout, referring to quick protests in unexpected places that break up when the security forces appear.

"Let's listen to the radio again. Let's make phone calls to each other too."

## Military slammed for child deaths

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
YANGON

Myanmar's junta faced fresh criticism on Friday over the deaths of more than 40 children and the "forced disappearance" of hundreds of people in its crackdown on pro-democracy protests.

Violence has ramped up in recent weeks, with Save the Children saying the death toll of youngsters had more than doubled in the past 12 days. "We are shocked that children continue to be among the targets of these fatal attacks, despite repeated calls to protect children," the charity said in a statement.

## SPORTSTAR



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Driver shot dead; police officer succumbs to injuries

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON

A car rammed into two police officers at a barricade outside the U.S. Capitol on Friday, and the driver got out of the vehicle while appearing to brandish a knife before being shot by authorities, two law enforcement officials said.

The U.S. Capitol complex was placed on lockdown after the shooting.

The driver has died after being shot by authorities, sources told AP.

The crash and shooting happened at a security checkpoint near the Capitol as Congress is on recess. It comes as the Washington region remains on edge nearly three months after a mob of



Security threat: Police officers near the car that crashed into two officers, near a barrier on Capitol Hill in Washington. ■ AP

armed insurrectionists stormed the Capitol as Congress was voting to certify Joe Biden's presidential win.

Yogananda Pittman, acting chief of U.S. Capitol Police, said the suspect rammed a barricade near the U.S. Capitol, and then exited the vehicle with a knife and lunged at the officers. The suspect was shot and died at the hospital. "One of our officers has succumbed to his injuries," she told a news conference.

Police said the pilgrims broke open the main gate of the shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, a 13th-century mystic Sufi saint, located in the town of Sehwan in the southern Sindh province.

The crowds attacked police and threw stones on Thursday night, police said. Several policemen suffered minor injuries and investigations are ongoing.

Shrines in Pakistan were closed recently as part of measures to help stem the spread of coronavirus.

# Govt. asks PSU refiners to review Saudi oil deals

Move comes in the wake of the West Asian nation ignoring India's calls to relax output curbs when prices started climbing

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Amid tensions with Saudi Arabia over oil production cuts, India has asked its state refiners to review contracts for buying crude oil from the West Asian nation and negotiate more favourable terms, a top official said.

Keen to break the producers' cartel dictating pricing and contractual terms, the government has told Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation (HPCL) to look for supplies from outside the region and use collective bargaining power to get favourable terms.

India imports 85% of its oil needs and is often vulnerable to global supply and price shocks. When oil prices started to rise in February,

it wanted Saudi Arabia to relax output controls but the Kingdom ignored its calls. This has led to the government now pressing for diversification of the supply base.

"Traditionally, Saudi Arabia and other OPEC producers have been our mainstay suppliers of crude oil," the official with direct knowledge of the discussions said. "But their terms have often been loaded against the buyer," the official added.

Indian firms buy two-thirds of their purchases on term or fixed annual contracts. These contracts provide assured supplies of the contracted quantity but the pricing and other terms favour the supplier, he said.

"While buyers have an obligation to lift all of the contracted quantity, Saudi and other producers have



**Uneven ride:** Term contracts provide assured supplies but pricing terms favour the supplier, says an official. ■ REUTERS

the option to reduce supplies in case OPEC decides to keep production artificially lower to boost prices. Why should the consumer have to pay for decisions of OPEC? If we commit to offtake, they

should also supply no matter what," he said.

More importantly, the buyer has to indicate at least six weeks in advance of their intention to lift quantity out of the annual term contract

in any month and has to pay an average official price announced by the producer.

"In an ideal market, the pricing should be of the day when the loading is taking place. That way we can get the advantage of any drop in international oil rates. But that is not the case. They (Saudi and other OPEC suppliers) insist on selling at their official selling price only," the official said.

## Shift to spot market

To begin with, Indian refiners will look to reduce the quantity they buy through term contracts and instead buy more from the spot or current market.

Buying from the spot market would ensure that India can take advantage of any fall in prices on any day and book quantities.

"It's like the stock market. You would want to buy shares on a day or time when the prices are low. So is the case with crude oil – we would want to buy when we see there is a drop," he said.

Indian refiners have raised spot purchases from 20% a decade back to 30-35% of the total oil bought now.

"We want pricing flexibility as well as the certainty of supply even during times when production falls due to any reason," the official said, adding that the state-owned refineries have been asked to coordinate buying and also explore joint strategy with private refiners such as Reliance Industries and Nayara Energy.

West Asia accounts for 60% of oil bought by India. Latin America and Africa are the other big supplier blocks. The deal, contested by

# Reliance Retail extends deadline for Future deal

RIL sets Sept. target to complete buy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Reliance Retail Ventures, the retail arm of Reliance Industries, has extended the timeline by six months to complete its ₹24,713 crore deal with Kishore Biyani-led Future group to buy its retail and wholesale business.



Amazon, is facing legal hurdles and a decision from the Supreme Court is pending over the petition filed by the e-commerce major.

The Future-Retail deal, announced on August 29, 2020, has already received clearance from the CCI, SEBI and the bourses, and the scheme of arrangement is now awaiting a nod from the NCLT and shareholders.

## SAIL clocks 'best-ever' quarterly sales of 4.27 MT

Firm's crude steel output rises 6%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Steel Authority of India Ltd. (SAIL) clocked its best-ever quarterly sales at 4.27 million tonnes (MT) during the March quarter of the last fiscal year, up 14% from the year-earlier period.

The domestic steel giant's crude steel production, too, increased by 6% during the quarter to 4.55 MT.

"(SAIL), the Maharatna PSU, has recorded its best-ever quarterly performance in both production and sales during Q4 FY'21," the company said. About annual figures, the company said despite the volatility in the market during the year, determined efforts by the



company to improve its volumes saw it clock its best-ever annual sales at 14.87 MT, a growth of 4.4% over 14.23 MT during FY20," it said.

SAIL chief Soma Mondal said, "[a] multi-pronged strategy has helped us top the performances during the month, quarter as well as the year."

## Royal Enfield sells 60,173 bikes in March

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

Eicher Motors Ltd., the makers of Royal Enfield motorbikes, has reported a sales volume of 60,173 units in March this year.

In a statement, the company said this was not comparable with March 2020 figures on account of COVID-19 and associated lockdown. Exports stood at 5,885 units.

The company, meanwhile, reported a 12% dip in its FY21 sales to 6.12 lakh units. Exports contracted 2% to 38,622 units.

During March, sales volume for bikes with an engine capacity of up to 350cc contracted 10% to 5.58 lakh units.

## Emission rules: coal-fired units get 3 more years

Plants missing goal can pay fine to run

REUTERS

CHENNAI

The government has pushed back deadlines for coal-fired power plants to adopt new emission norms by up to three years, and allowed utilities that miss the new target to continue operating after paying a penalty, according to a notice.

India had initially set a 2017 deadline for thermal power plants to install Flue Gas Desulphurization (FGD) units that cut emissions of sulphur dioxides. But that was postponed to varying deadlines for different regions, ending in 2022.

The new order dated April 1 from the environment Ministry said plants

near populous regions and the capital New Delhi will have to comply by 2022, while utilities in less polluting areas have up to 2025 to comply or retire units.

Operators of coal-fired utilities have long been lobbying for dilution of the pollution standards, citing high compliance costs.

A task force will be constituted by the Central Pollution Control Board to categorise plants in three categories "on the basis of their location to comply with the emission norms", the Ministry said in its order. In case of non-compliance, a penalty of up to ₹0.20 will be levied for every unit of electricity produced.

## No plans to exit India, says Franklin Templeton's Sapre

'Parent firm sought diplomatic route for fair hearing'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund on Friday said its commitment to India remains "steadfast" and the fund house has no plans to exit its operations in the country.

This comes following media reports suggesting intervention by the fund house's U.S.-headquartered parent seeking the diplomatic route for a "just and fair" hearing by market regulator SEBI in the investigation pertaining to six wound-up debt schemes. According to the reports, Franklin Templeton had threatened to exit India if it was not given a fair hearing.



Sanjay Sapre

around sale of business in India are incorrect and simply that – rumours". He said Franklin Templeton was an early entrant in the Indian mutual fund industry and stayed put even while many other global asset managers decided to leave.

He, however, did not deny reports of engaging with government authorities.

"Our engagement with government authorities, in India and globally, is also something we... do, as a matter of course." The intention in reaching out remains bringing current matters to an appropriate and satisfactory conclusion, he said.

## INTERVIEW | N. MURUGAN

## Millet-based products set to gain increasing acceptance

Our goal is to boost nutrition: Southern Health Foods CEO

N. ANAND

The United Nations has declared 2023 as the International Year of Millets. India is fast catching up with the western world in millet consumption, said N. Murugan, CEO, Southern Health Foods, makers of the Manna brand of foods. Excerpts:

Millet-based products are fast gaining acceptance in the West. How is the scenario in India?

■ India, Nigeria and China are the largest producers of millets in the world, accounting for more than 55% of the global production. For many years, India was a major producer of millets.

However, in recent years, millet production has increased dramatically in Africa. In India, pearl millet is the fourth-most widely cultivated food crop after rice, wheat and maize. It occupies an area of 6.93 million hectare with an average production of 8.61 million tonnes and productivity of 1,243 kg/ha during 2018-19.

Why is India slow in adopting millet-based products?

■ Millets are available almost across India. They need very little water for growing.

The awareness of the benefits of millets is still low and this is the reason for lesser number of players working on value-added millet products in India.

However, we see this increasing in the coming years as many States will start supporting millet cultivation both on account of the benefits and the fact that they need less water.

So, we see a slow expansion of millet-based products in the next few years and a big explosion

Given the high incidence of diabetes, millets are wonder grains with their low GI

sure, will happen soon.

### Your growth strategy?

■ Ours is a food and beverage company that wants to make consumers healthier by increasing the nutrition content in food intake.

in these products after that.

Why are many firms not keen on entering this sector?

■ There are only a handful of players in the branded and/or in the organised sector at the moment. However, it is going to change in the next 12 to 24 months.

How does Southern Health Foods fit into this?

■ We want to make many foods and beverages more nutritious for consumers through millets and multi-grains. Most of our products have a high percentage of millets in them.

In a country such as India where there is a high incidence of diabetes, millets, being complex carbohydrates with low GI [glycemic index], are indeed wonder grains and [hence] we see a huge relevance in shifting consumers to millets and millet-based products.

We will communicate the same to consumers through the media.

We want to be one of the pioneers in leading the country's millet revolution that,

we are

On the pandemic's impact on your operations...?

■ Our sales did not drop as 80-90% of our volume came through sales of health-mix products. Currently, we operate our units at 70% to 80% of capacity in a single shift and this will increase with an increase in demand.

The lower demand also means limited supply and higher prices. This will change as more consumers start trying out millets and value-add millet products.

## FT MF's 6 shut schemes get ₹15,776 crore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund on Friday said its six shut schemes have received ₹15,776 crore from maturities, pre-payments and coupon payments since closing down in April, 2020.

The fund house shut six debt mutual fund schemes on April 23, citing redemption pressures and lack of liquidity in the bond market. The schemes together had an estimated ₹25,000 crore as assets under management (AUM).

It said that the net asset value of all the six schemes were higher as on March 31, vis-a-vis their respective NAVs on April 23, 2020.

Franklin Templeton MF said its primary focus has been, and remains on returning money to unit holders as quickly as possible.

ABT steps into Mumbai with health drink

LALATENDU MISHRA

ABT Ltd., one of south India's larger corporate houses with a revenue of \$1.4 billion, has forayed into Mumbai and Pune with 'Mirakle' – a vitamin C drink that it claimed can boost the immunity levels of consumers.

The health drink is approved by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, said the company.

"The drink is infused with 1,000 mg of vitamin C which is known for enhancing resistance to various diseases," said Manickam Mahalingam, CMD.

"Given the viral infections, Mumbai is a very promising market and we hope to gradually strengthen our footprint across the country," he added.

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**STEP LIVE Junior**



# Knight Riders bolster armoury, mount campaign for third title

The Kolkata side has recruited multidimensional players, added experience and improved its options in all departments in a bid to return to its glory days

## IPL COUNTDOWN

Y.B. SARANGI

After narrowly missing out on a playoff berth in two successive seasons, Kolkata Knight Riders has strengthened itself in two key areas ahead of the Indian Premier League's 14th edition.

The two-time champion has added experience and also enhanced its options in every department.

The side has fortified itself with multidimensional players, hiring four all-rounders – Shakib Al Hasan, its 'lucky charm' in two title wins, Australian Ben Cutting, old hand Pawan Negi and newcomer Venkatesh Iyer – and two wicket-keeper-batsmen – New Zealander Tim Seifert and domestic stalwart Sheldon Jackson.

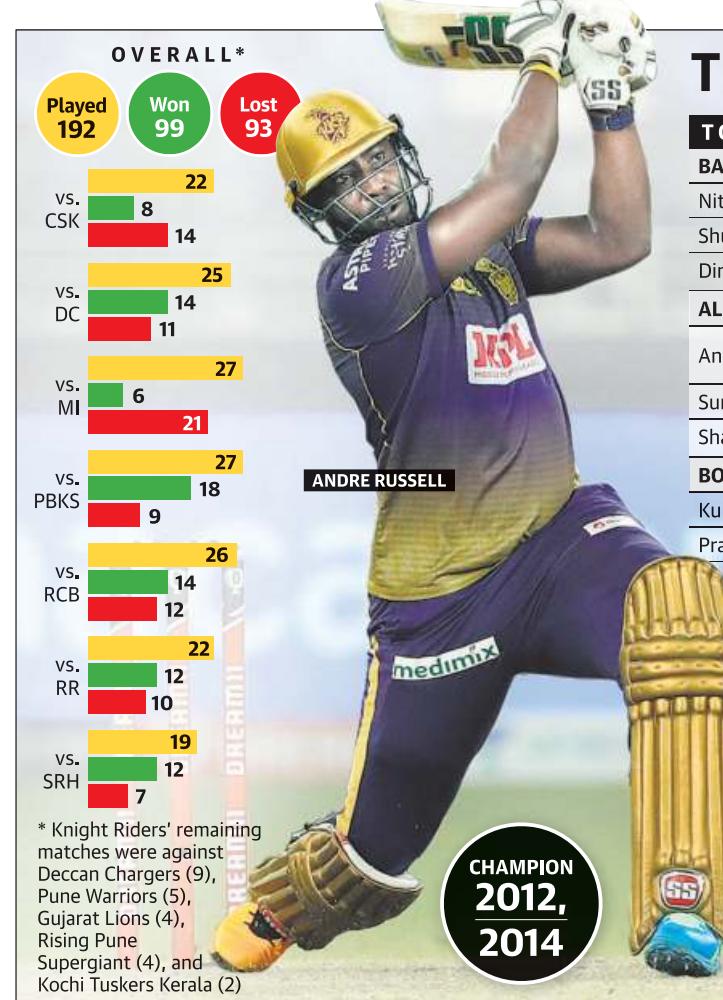
Last season, KKR's progress was dented to some extent because of the underperformance of Sunil Narine and Andre Russell, two vital components in the team's makeup.

Shakib and Cutting are seen as alternatives to the Caribbean duo, but some experimentation cannot be ruled out.

Seifert and Jackson are considered backups for vice-captain Dinesh Kar-

## X-factor

**Varun Chakaravarthy:** Varun Chakaravarthy, who impressed last season with a bag of 17 wickets (including a five-for), is a vital member of the attack. The spinner, known for his variations, will have gained in confidence after being named in the Indian squad following his success. He should, however, be prepared for newer challenges



\* Knight Riders' remaining matches were against Deccan Chargers (9), Pune Warriors (5), Gujarat Lions (4), Rising Pune Supergiant (4), and Kochi Tuskers Kerala (2)

## KNIGHT RIDERS' 2021 FIXTURES

April 11	vs. SRH	7.30 p.m.	Chennai	May 3	vs. RCB	7.30 p.m.	Ahmedabad
April 13	vs. MI	7.30 p.m.	Chennai	May 8	vs. DC	3.30 p.m.	Ahmedabad
April 18	vs. RCB	3.30 p.m.	Chennai	May 10	vs. MI	7.30 p.m.	Bengaluru
April 21	vs. CSK	7.30 p.m.	Mumbai	May 12	vs. CSK	7.30 p.m.	Bengaluru
April 24	vs. RR	7.30 p.m.	Mumbai	May 15	vs. PBKS	7.30 p.m.	Bengaluru
April 26	vs. PBKS	7.30 p.m.	Ahmedabad	May 18	vs. RR	7.30 p.m.	Bengaluru
April 29	vs. DC	7.30 p.m.	Ahmedabad	May 21	vs. SRH	3.30 p.m.	Bengaluru

\* Shakib's record when he was with KKR from 2011 to 2017

thik. The recruitment of Harbhajan Singh – who will play the dual role of being a lead spinner and a mentor to younger colleagues – and experienced batsman Karun Nair offers flexibility and provides cover in case of injuries and health issues.

Eoin Morgan, who missed the final two ODIs

against India after splitting his webbing, is optimistic of being fit to lead KKR from the beginning.

**Suitable opening partner**  
Finding a suitable opening partner for Shubman Gill and additional finishers will be high on the captain's agenda.

Gill and Nitish Rana are

important members of KKR's batting unit while Rahul Tripathi and Rinku Singh can chip in if required.

KKR will also need to devise ways to improve its PowerPlay scores.

Australian Pat Cummins will lead the pacers. Kiwi Lockie Ferguson and a bunch of promising Indians

– new international Prasidh Krishna, Shivam Mavi, Kamlesh Nagarkoti and Sandeep Warrier – will be additional sources of firepower.

With the diversity of its spin department – left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav and mystery spinner Varun Chakaravarthy complement Harbhajan's off-spin – KKR has the potential to keep the best of bowlers in check.

The think-tank will be keen to see Harbhajan, who trained at his hometown Jalandhar, perform well in the purple and gold.

England white-ball analyst Nathan Leamon will give the side an edge, but it must play positively in order to win its third crown.

## QUICK SINGLES

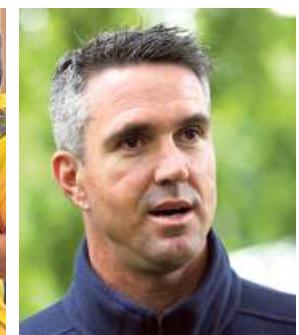


Jadeja says meeting Dhoni is always exciting

Chennai Super Kings (CSK) all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja on Friday shared his picture with skipper Dhoni saying that whenever he meets the former India captain, the level of excitement is always the same. "Whenever I meet him it feels like I'm meeting him for the first time! Still Same excitement when I met him in 2009. #bonding #respectforever," Jadeja tweeted.

**Warner, Williamson and Haddin arrive**

Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) skipper David Warner, Kane Williamson (in pic) and assistant coach Brad Haddin have landed in Chennai and will be in quarantine, according to the protocol. "Just landed, looking forward to getting out of the seven days quarantine," Williamson said on SRH's Twitter.



No international games during 'biggest show in town': Pietersen

The cricket boards should realise that IPL is the "the biggest show in town" and no international game should be scheduled during the course of the T20 event, former England captain Kevin Pietersen opined on Friday. "Cricket boards need to realise that the @IPL is the biggest show in town. DO NOT schedule ANY international games whilst it's on. V v simple!," Pietersen tweeted.

**MI's New Zealand trio reaches Chennai**

New Zealand cricketers Trent Boult (in pic), Adam Milne, and Jimmy Neesham arrived in Chennai on Friday to link up with the Mumbai Indians squad. "National duties to IPL duties. The trio has landed in Chennai! Welcome Trent, Adam, and Jimmy," MI tweeted.



## Tendulkar in hospital as precautionary measure

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

MUMBAI

Sachin Tendulkar was on Friday admitted to hospital as a precautionary measure six days after announcing that he had coronavirus.

"As a matter of abundant precaution under medical advice, I have been hospitalised," Tendulkar said on Twitter. "I hope to be back home in a few days. Take care and stay safe everyone."

Pakistan legend Wasim Akram sent his special wishes. "Even when you were 16, you battled the world's best bowlers with guts and aplomb... so I am



Tendulkar. ■ FILE PHOTO

sure you will hit COVID-19 for a six!" said Akram. "Recover soon, master! Would be great if you celebrate India's World Cup 2011 anniversary with doctors and hospital staff... do send me a pic!"

## Eight Wankhede groundsmen test positive

AMOL KARHADKAR

MUMBAI

Eight groundsmen of the Wankhede Stadium were COVID-19 positive during the tests conducted ahead of IPL 2021.

Mumbai is scheduled to host 10 league games from April 10 to 25.

*The Hindu* understands that all the groundstaff – 19 – underwent RT-PCR tests over the last week.

While three returned positive during the tests conducted on March 26, five more positive cases were reported on Friday from the tests held on April 1.

## Karunaratne and Thirimanne bat well

Chasing 377, Sri Lanka 146 for two

SL IN WEST INDIES

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

NORTH SOUND (ANTIGUA & BARBUDA)

Sri Lanka skipper Dimuth Karunaratne (75) and his opening partner Lahiru Thirimanne (39) added 101 as the visitors, chasing a target of 377, were 146 for two at tea on the last day of the second and final Test against the West Indies on Friday.

Earlier, West Indies had declared its second innings at 280 for four, with Kraigg Brathwaite missing out on the rarefeat of centuries in both innings of a Test when he was dismissed for 85.

**The scores:** West Indies 354 &



280/4 dec. (Kraig Brathwaite 85, Kyle Mayers 55, Jason Holder 71 n.o.) vs Sri Lanka 258 & 146/2 (Dimuth Karunaratne 75), at tea.

## Babar stars, Pakistan wins off final ball

Skipper's 103 trumps van der Dussen's 123 for hosts

PAK IN SA

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

CENTURION

A century by Babar Azam set up a three-wicket last-ball win for Pakistan in the first ODI against South Africa at SuperSport Park on Friday.

Chasing a target of 274, Babar and Imran-ul-Haq (70) put on 177 for the second wicket, taking the visitors to within 88 runs of victory with 18.2 overs left when the former was caught behind off speedster Anrich Nortje. Babar hit a stroke-filled 103 off 104 balls, but his dismissal triggered a collapse as Nortje took four wickets in four overs.

Mohammad Rizwan and Shadab Khan steadied the

innings with a sixth-wicket stand of 53 before both fell. However, Faheem Ashraf hit the winning run off the final ball.

Earlier, Rassie van der



Babar Azam... leading the way. ■ AFP

Dussen's unbeaten 123, his maiden International century, lifted the hosts to 273 for six.

South Africa was struggling at 55 for four before van der Dussen and David Miller (50) revived the innings with a fourth-wicket stand of 116.

Van der Dussen, 32, had been dismissed three times in the 90s – twice in ODIs and once in a Test – since making his debut two seasons ago. However, his effort was overshadowed by Babar and Pakistan on this day.

**The scores:** South Africa 273/6 in 50 overs (Rassie van der Dussen 123 n.o., David Miller 50) lost to Pakistan 274/7 in 50 overs (Babar Azam 103, Imran-ul-Haq 70, Mohammad Rizwan 40, Anrich Nortje 4/51).

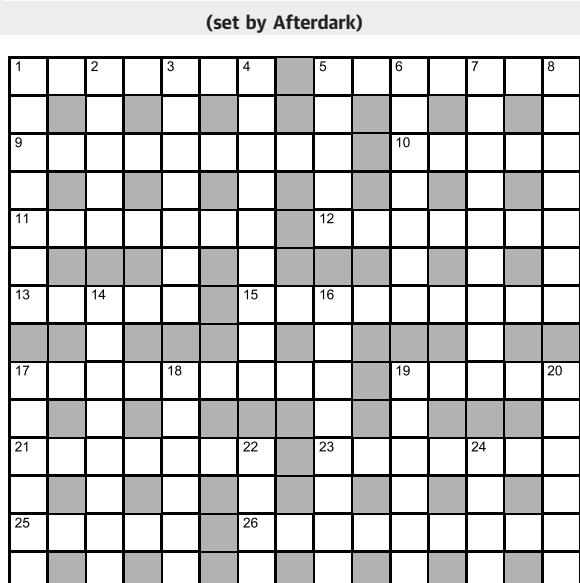
## TH CROSSWORD + 13212

(set by Afterdark)

Never go off the grid.  
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at <https://rgo.page.link/jjpTn>

SCAN TO PLAY



### ACROSS

- 1 Like to keep track of escalations (7)
- 5 Escaped emptiness after a meeting with journalist (7)
- 9 Auditor's treat at open air restaurant (9)
- 10 Operated front door with electronic key (5)
- 11 In Delhi & Kerala, it's enough rice (7)
- 12 Toilets are shabby? It's an understatement (7)
- 13 Managed company diversity (5)

The clues 31 Across and 32 Across of *The Hindu Crossword* 13212 by Incognito regrettably had errors. Visit [thefindit.com](http://thefindit.com) to play the updated puzzle!

## SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to puzzle 13211

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

S	T	E	A	O	E	W		
L	A	S	H	G	I	V	E	N</

# Top recognition for Viswanath, Tendulkar, Dhoni and Mithali

Anantapur Sports Academy wins 'Sports for Social Good' award for its work in rural Andhra Pradesh

## ACES AWARDS

### SPORTS BUREAU

G.R. Viswanath was conferred the 'Lifetime Achievement Award' while Sachin Tendulkar, M.S. Dhoni and Mithali Raj were also honoured in the 2021 Sportstar Aces Awards on Friday.

"To receive a recognition of this nature at this stage of my life is an unexpected and very pleasant surprise," Viswanath said.



Tendulkar shared his ambitions for the sport in the country in the years to come. "I hope India moves from being a sport-loving nation to a sport-playing one. We will have a younger, healthier and fitter India," said the 47-year-old, who was honoured with the 'Inspirational Giant of Indian Sport' award.

India ODI captain Mithali

### The second list of Sportstar Aces award winners

- Sportsman of the Decade (Cricket): M.S. Dhoni
- Sportswoman of the Decade (Cricket): Mithali Raj
- National Team of the Decade: 2011 WC-winning Indian men's cricket team
- Sports for Social Good: Anantapur Sports Academy
- Inspirational Giant of Indian Sport: Sachin Tendulkar
- Lifetime Achievement Award: G.R. Viswanath



**Wristy:** G.R. Viswanath playing his trademark square-cut.



Viswanath with the trophy.



Mithali Raj.



Sachin Tendulkar... Inspirational Giant of Indian Sport.



M.S. Dhoni.



Moncho Ferrer.

## 'Delighted with the Sportstar Aces award for ASA'

I appreciate our team for their work over the years, says Programme Director Ferrer

### V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM HYDERABAD

"We are delighted to share with you that our Sports for Development Programme, Anantapur Sports Academy (ASA), has won the prestigious Sportstar Aces Award 2021, in the 'Sports for Social Good' category," Moncho Ferrer, Programme Director, said in a statement on Friday.

The Sportstar Aces Awards by Sportstar Magazine and The Hindu Group recognise sporting achievements and efforts to contribute to the country's sporting fabric in equal measure, and ASA is being honoured for its role in tying sports together with attention to social indicators."

Ferrer, who received the award through a virtual ceremony (because of COVID-19 restriction) held on Friday, said their sports programme is all about sports for good.

"I appreciate our team at Anantapur Sports Academy for their work over the years



**What a feeling!** Anantapur Sports Academy boys are overjoyed on receiving the trophy. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and thank the children for their participation," he said.

"This award reminds us that we are on the right track, and encourages us to work towards realising our vision to leverage the power of sports for the benefit of underprivileged and marginalised children and youth in Anantapur district," he added.

P. Sai Krishna, Director of Anantapur Sports Academy said, he would like to thank

the Sportstar Aces Awards team for including a Sports for Good category for the first time to acknowledge the efforts of sports for development organisations across India.

"On this note, we also thank the support from our local community including parents, schools as well as our numerous partners we have been fortunate to collaborate over the years," he said.



**Special moment:** Anantapur Sports Academy, winner of the 'Sports for Social Good' award.

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

## Calm Niki Poonacha trumps tempestuous Lorenzo Bocchi

Sets up a semifinal clash against Dalibor Svrina

### ITF MEN

#### KAMESH SRINIVASAN NEW DELHI

Niki Poonacha can fight hard, and still stay quiet on court, sporting the best behaviour.

It was a glaring sight when the 25-year-old Niki retained his composure, and tamed the boisterous Lorenzo Bocchi of Italy, who was throwing tantrums right through the three-hour duel, for a 6-3, 6-7(4), 6-3 victory, in the \$15,000 ITF men's tennis tournament at the DLTennis Complex on Friday.

Serving well, stroking with varying pace and intensity, Niki did control the contest most of the time. A slight dip in concentration saw him deliver double-faults while serving for the match in the 12th game. That opening was grabbed by the Italian who played sharp in clinching the subsequent tie-break to get himself a fresh lease of life on court.

In the decider, Niki was in a spot of trouble as he trailed 0-2, but found the grip on his game to cruise to a 5-2 lead, even as the Italian made it a noisy affair with his ramblings. Niki served out the match at love in the



**It's all over!** Italian Bocchi congratulates Poonacha after losing in the quarterfinals. ■ KAMESH SRINIVASAN

ninth game to set up a semi-final against Dalibor Svrina of the Czech Republic.

The Czech beat the third seed Aidan Mchugh of Britain 4-6, 6-0, 6-2. The Briton was perhaps exhausted after a four-hour clash against lucky-loser Nitin Kumar Singh on Thursday.

Second seed Simon Carr was energetic in a baseline battle against Zsombor Velcz of Hungary and pulled through in three sets. He will play fourth seed Oliver Crawford of US in the semifinals.

In doubles, top seeds Arjun Kadhe and Saketh Myneni set up a title clash against Dalibor Svrina and Zsombor Velcz.

**The results: Singles (quarterfinals):** Niki Poonacha bt Lorenzo Bocchi (Ita) 6-3, 6-7(4), 6-3; Dalibor Svrina (Cze) bt Aidan Mchugh (GBR) 4-6, 6-0, 6-2; Oliver Crawford (US) bt Alexander Kotzen (US) 6-4, 7-5; Simon Carr (Irl) bt Zsombor Velcz (Cze) 6-3 2-6, 6-3.

**Doubles (semifinals):** Arjun Kadhe & Saketh Myneni bt Anirudh Chandrasekar & Niki Poonacha 6-4, 7-6(0); Dalibor Svrina (Cze) & Zsombor Velcz (Hung) bt Manish Sureshkumar & V.M. Ranjeet 6-1, 6-2.

## Manas fights his way past Rushil

Suhitha to lock horns with Sanjana

### NAT. JR. TENNIS

#### SPORTS BUREAU INDORE

Manas Dhamne fought his way past Rushil Khosla 7-6(2), 1-6, 7-5 in the semifinals of the National junior championships at the Indore Tennis Club on Friday.

Indo Europe Sports aims to promote relations between India and Europe besides North America, through football by training the youth.

capitalised on the available time to make his mark.

The 14-year-old Rushil, a talented player who has been slowly stepping up with good results, had defeated second seed Karan Singh in the earlier round.

In the final, Manas will play Sandesh Kurale who knocked out top seed Krishan Hooda in three sets.

In the girls section, Suhitha Maruri will play second seed Sanjana Sirimalla in the final.

**The results: U-18:**

**Boys: Semifinals:** Sandesh Kurale bt Krishan Hooda 1-6, 6-2, 6-4; Manas Dhamne bt Rushil Khosla 7-6(2), 1-6, 7-5.

**Doubles (final):** Aayush Bhat & Denim Yadav bt Anup Bangargi & Torus Rawat 7-5, 6-4.

**Girls: Semifinals:** Suhitha Maruri bt Anjali Rath 6-4, 7-5; Sanjana Sirimalla bt Lakshmi Prabha 7-5, 6-1.

**Doubles (final):** Reshma Maruri & Suhitha Maruri bt Sudipta Senthilkumar & Riya Uboveja 6-3, 7-5.

## TV PICKS

**Serie A:** Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 4 p.m. onwards; Sony Six (SD & HD), 6.30 p.m.  
**Premier League:** SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 5 p.m. onwards

## IN BRIEF



### Sedate start by Aditi at ANA Inspiration

RANCHO MIRAGE (USA) Aditi Ashok made a quiet start at this year's first Major, the ANA Inspiration, carding a one-over 73 to be tied 70th. Aditi is playing an Indian record-equalling 16th Major. Thailand's Patty Tavatanakit was in the lead with a six-under 66. PTI

### Karman Kaur in semifinals

MONASTIR (TUNISIA) Karman Kaur Thandi beat third seed Mallaurie Noel of France 6-1, 2-6, 6-1 to reach the semifinals of the \$15,000 ITF women's tennis tournament on Friday. In the semifinals, Karman will play Anna Kubareva of Belarus. **The results (quarterfinals):** Karman Kaur Thandi bt Mallaurie Noel (Fra) 6-1, 2-6, 6-1.

### CAS to hold Sun Yang's retrial in May

GENEVA The retrial of Olympic swimming champion Sun Yang will be held by the Court of Arbitration for Sport during the week of May 24-28 by video link from Lausanne. Sun's initial eight-year ban for alleged doping violations was overturned last year. AP

### Nets Hammer Hornets

LOS ANGELES Jeff Green scored a team-high 21 points as Brooklyn Nets became the first Eastern Conference team win 20 home games this season with a 111-89 rout of Charlotte Hornets on Thursday. **The results:** Heat 116 bt Warriors 109; Spurs 129 lost to Hawks 134 (OT); Nets 111 bt Hornets 89; Clippers 94 lost to Nuggets 101; Pelicans 110 lost to Magic 115 (OT); Pistons 120 bt Wizards 91; Cavaliers 94 lost to 76ers 114.

## SS Sports advances in Sood cricket

All-round performance by captain Deepanshu Phore and three wickets apiece by Prince Mehra and Abhishek Sakhuja saw SS Sports beat Youngster CC by six wickets to enter the pre-quarterfinals of the 31st All India Om Nath Sood Memorial tournament.

**The scores:** Youngster CC 174 in 39.2 overs (Gagan Vats 52, Jitesh Yadav 48, Prince Mehra 3/28, Abhishek Sakhuja 3/35) lost to SS Sports 175/4 in 23.5 overs (Deepanshu Phore 46, Deepak Khatri 43 n.o., Manan Bhardwaj 3/37).

### M-10 Academy in title clash

Delhi Under-19 player Ayush Doseja made an unbeaten 66 and Mridul Surroch helped Telefunken Club beat Delhi Cricket Hub by 21 runs in the D. Fours Under-13 tournament. **The scores:** Telefunken Club

184 in 36.4 overs (Saksham Negi 72, Parikshit Sehrawat 53, Saianish Vohra 3/46) bt DCH 163 in 33 overs (Swarnim Bansal 73).

**Big win for Signature FC** Suju Hangma and Sanjali Kermprai scored three goals each as Signature FC thrashed Goodwill FC 11-1 in a Football Delhi Women's League match.

In another game, Radhika's two goals led Friends United FC's 5-0 win against Ahbab FC while Hans Women FC won 4-0 against Eves SC. **The results:** Signature FC 11 (Suju Hangma 3, Sainjali Kermprai 3, Karishma Rai, Sibani Sharma, Bhawna Yadav, Ishaishi Khongwet, Sonia Marak) bt Goodwill FC 1 (Shibani Negi); Ahbab FC 0 lost to FUF C (Radhika 2, Charvi Diesh, Harshita, Yashodhara); Hindustan FC 1 (Ankush) bt Frontier FC 0; HWFC 4 (Aveka Singh 2, Anushka Samuel 2) bt Eves SC 0.

## Football scouts camp begins

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Mexican football coach David Fernandez believes the untapped talent in India needs to be spotted and trained in a systematic manner.

Fernandez, who is here as part of the World Sports Week Football Scouts Camp that began on Friday, said, "There is talent in plenty in India and it is only a matter of giving them the right kind of training. With nearly 30 academies likely to open in the next three years, and with UEFA Pro-licensed coaches to show the way, I have no doubt India's performance graph will go up."

Indo Europe Sports aims to promote relations between India and Europe besides North America, through football by training the youth.

The 13-year-old Manas, who is waiting to get his visa to train with the renowned coach Riccardo Piatti in Italy as part of support from IMG, will play Sandesh Kurale who knocked out top seed Krishan Hooda in the final.

In the girls section, Suhitha Maruri will play Sanjana Sirimalla in the final.

### The results: U-18:

**Boys: Semifinals:** Sandesh Kurale bt Krishan Hooda 1-6, 6-2, 6-4; Manas Dhamne bt Rushil Khosla 7-6(2), 1-6, 7-5.

**Doubles (final):** Aayush Bhat & Denim Yadav bt Anup Bangargi & Torus Rawat 7-5, 6-4.

**Girls: Semifinals:** Suhitha Maruri bt Anjali Rath 6-4, 7-5; Sanjana Sirimalla bt Lakshmi Prabha 7-5, 6-1.

**Doubles (final):** Reshma Maruri & Suhitha Maruri bt Sudipta Senthilkumar & Riya Uboveja 6-3, 7-5.