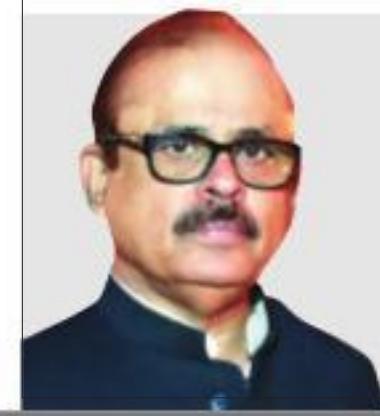




PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT, ALWAYS IN SESSION



GROSS MISHANDLING
OF FUNDS BY
NITISH GOVT: CAG



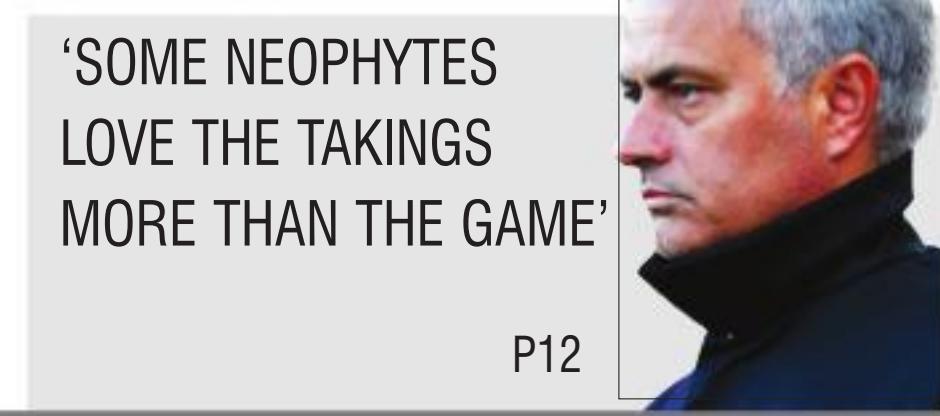
'CORRUPTION THE
ISSUE IN KERALA'

P4



INDIAN-ORIGIN
SWORN IN AS US
SURGEON GENERAL

P7



'SOME NEOPHYTES
LOVE THE TAKINGS
MORE THAN THE GAME'

P12

WEATHER

Mainly clear sky. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 34 and 17 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: NIL

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Max: 81% Min: 36%

TEMPERATURE

Max: 32.0°C (O)

SUN RISES

06:16 hrs

MOON RISES

17:10 hrs

Min: 16.0°C (I)

SUN SETS

18:36 hrs

MOON SETS

06:07 hrs

10 Covid patients dead in Mumbai mall hospital fire

2 already dead from Covid-19 before blaze: Hospital

SNS & PTI

MUMBAI, 26 MARCH

Ten patients died in a fire at a Covid-19 hospital in a Mumbai mall on Friday, police said, adding more misery to a state that has emerged as the hardest hit in the pandemic.

DCP Prashant Kadam said 10 coronavirus patients died in the blaze. The hospital had earlier said two deceased were coronavirus patients who were already dead from the disease when the fire broke out. It is yet to comment on the remaining eight deaths. Civic and hospital officials have also not disclosed how many people were rescued from there after the blaze.

The fire broke out at the Sunrise Hospital in the Dreams Mall building in Bhandup area around midnight, the official said. The hospital is situated on the top floor of the four-storeyed mall building.

Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray who visited the spot in the afternoon said strict action will be taken against those found responsible for the fire. Thackeray apologised to the families of the victims and announced Rs 5 lakh to the kin of each deceased.

Thackeray said permission was granted to the hospital "on a temporary basis" last year to run a Covid-19 centre. The blaze comes amidst an upsurge in coronavirus cases in Mumbai. The cause of the fire has not been ascer-



Firefighters attempt to douse the blaze at Dreams Mall, affecting patients at nearby Covid-dedicated Sunrise Hospital in Mumbai.



At least 10 people killed in a fire at a mall building housing a COVID-19 hospital in Bhandup West area of Mumbai

► The fire broke out at the Sunrise Hospital in the Dreams Mall building in Bhandup area around midnight. The hospital is situated on the top floor of the four-storeyed mall building

► Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray said permission was granted to the hospital "on a temporary basis" last year to run a Covid-19 centre

tained yet, BMC control room sources said. Thirty fire engines, 20 water tankers and ambulances were rushed to the spot. Fire fighting operation is underway, the official said.

Patients who were evacuated were shifted to another hospital, the official said.

Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar who visited the site expressed surprise that a hospital was operating inside the mall.

"I have seen a hospital at a mall for the first time," the mayor said, adding action will be taken if irregularities were found in allowing the facility to operate inside the mall.

Modi recalled the role played by the Indian Army in the freedom war and said, "I salute the brave soldiers of the Indian Army who stood with the brothers and sisters of Bangladesh in Muktijuddo. Those who sacrificed them-

ate there. The hospital in a statement said, "There was a fire on the first floor of Dreams Mall, Bhandup and the smoke reached up to the Sunrise Hospital located on the top floor. When fire alarms sounded, all patients were safely evacuated to the fire refuge area."

A civic official said the BMC had issued notice to the mall last year for alleged floating fire safety norms.

Former NCP MP Sanjay Patil said he had written to the BMC commissioner last year drawing the civic body's attention to the alleged floating of fire safety norms there.

Jacket as tribute to Bangladesh's Father of the Nation. "I am grateful that Bangladesh has included me in this event. It is a matter of our pride that we got the opportunity to honour Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with Gandhi Peace Prize," he said.

AGENCIES

President Kovind under medical observation:
President Ram Nath Kovind is undergoing check-up at the Army's Research and Referral hospital here after complaining of chest discomfort on Friday morning. It said he is undergoing routine check-up and is under observation. "President of India visited Army Hospital (R&R) following chest discomfort this morning. He is undergoing routine check-up and is under observation," the hospital said in a medical bulletin. "His condition is stable," it added.

HC verdict on Vedanta PSC: Delhi High Court on Friday set aside a single-judge order directing the Centre to extend till 2030 its production sharing contract (PSC) with Vedanta Ltd and ONGC to produce oil from the Barmer oil field in Rajasthan. A Bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh allowed the Central government's appeal against the single Judge's order of 31 May 2018 in favour of Vedanta, formerly Cairn India.

P8

Modi hails Mujib's leadership on Dhaka visit

SNS & PTI
DHAKA, 26 MARCH



Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday hailed 'Bangabandhu' Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's leadership and the contributions of the Indian Army in Bangladesh's 1971 Liberation War as he joined his counterpart Sheikh Hasina and President Abdul Hamid in celebrating the golden jubilee of the country's independence and the birth centenary of its founder.

Prime Minister Modi on Friday went from Delhi to Dhaka on a new custom-made VVIP aircraft, using it for the first time on a foreign journey.

Addressing Bangladesh's 50th Independence anniversary at the National Parade

Four killed in Bangladesh protest

COX'S BAZAR

At least four people were killed in the Bangladeshi city of Chittagong on Friday after police fired rubber bullets at protesters during a demonstration against the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a police official said. "We had to fire teargas and rubber bullets to disperse

them as they entered a police station and carried out extensive vandalism," Rafiqul Islam, the police official said, referring to protesters.

Protests against Modi's visit were also flared in the capital Dhaka, where dozens of people, including two journalists, were injured in clashes with police, witnesses said.

AGENCIES

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Modi was wearing a 'Mujib

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AGENCIES

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AGENCIES

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Modi was wearing a 'Mujib

SC sets aside NCLAT order restoring Mistry as exec chairman of Tata Group

SNS & PTI
NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

In a major victory for the Tata Group, the Supreme Court on Friday set aside a National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) order restoring Cyrus Mistry as the executive chairman of the conglomerate.

A bench of Chief Justice S.A. Bobde, Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian said it is allowing the appeals filed by the Tata Group.

"The order of NCLAT dated 18 December, 2019 is set aside," the bench said while pronouncing the verdict and putting at rest the long-drawn legal battle of the salt-to-software Tata con-

glomerate. The bench, which dealt with the SP (Shapoorji Pallonji) Group's contention regarding separation, said the valuation of the group's shares depends upon the value of the Tata Sons' stake in listed equities, immovable assets and others.

"We will leave it to the parties to take the Article 75 route or any other legally available route in this regard," the bench said. The SP Group had told the top court that Mistry's removal as the chairman of TSPL at a board meeting held in October 2016 was akin to a "blood sport" and "ambush", in complete violation of the principles of corporate governance.

The SP Group, which owns 18.37 per cent shares in TSPL, had said the latter moved the top court to block its plan to pledge shares for raising funds and that reeked of vindictiveness.

The apex court had, on 10 January last year, granted relief to the Tata Group by staying the NCLAT order by which Mistry was restored as the executive chairman of the conglomerate.

SC junks plea to stay sale of electoral bonds ahead of polls

The NGO in its petition had claimed that there is apprehension that any further sale of electoral bonds before the upcoming Assembly elections, including in West Bengal and Assam, would further increase illegal funding of political parties

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Friday dismissed a plea seeking stay on further sale of electoral bonds ahead of Assembly elections.

A bench headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde declined to stay sale of the electoral bonds as sought in the application moved by the NGO, Association for Democratic Reforms.

The Centre had earlier told the bench, also comprising Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian, that the bonds would be issued from 1 April to 10 April.

The NGO had claimed that there is a serious apprehension that any further sale of electoral bonds before the upcoming Assembly elections, including in West Bengal and Assam, would further increase illegal and illicit funding of political parties through shell companies.

While reserving its order on the NGO's application, the apex court on 24 March had flagged the issue of possible misuse of funds received through electoral bonds by political parties for illegal purposes like terrorism and had asked the Centre whether there was any control over these funds.

The top court said the government should look into misuse of electoral funds for illegal purposes.

Stage set, daggers drawn for first phase of polling in Bengal

SOMA MOOKHERJEE
TIRTHANKAR MITRA
KOLKATA, 26 MARCH

The impact of the decade-long development work of the Trinamul Congress regime will be tested against the back to back poll rallies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other senior leaders as 30 Assembly constituencies, including the extensive tribal belt of Jhargram, go to the polls tomorrow.

Incidentally, the first phase poll includes seats from a large swathe of the state where BJP candidates won for the first time in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. In a way, the permanence of the hold on the newly-acquired support base of the saffron camp will be tested tomorrow.

This phase also includes two seats of Contai where the influential Adhikaris cross-

ing over to the BJP has boosted the morale of the saffron camp. After the BJP made its first inroads in 2018 rural polls, Trinamul Congress has failed to check the further spread of saffron influence in these areas in the Lok Sabha elections of 2019.

But the ruling party does not seem to have got its act together as Trinamul had to support an independent candidate, Dibyojyoti Singh Deo in Joypur, Purulia, after its candidate Ujjal Kumar's candidature was cancelled by the Election Commission on technical grounds.

Strangely enough, there are pockets of Congress influence in Baghmundi represented by veteran Congress leader Nepal Mahato. No candidate was fielded by the BJP which is supporting Ashutosh Mahato, an AISU candidate.

Bringing back the disgruntled youths into the mainstream by giving them jobs and such schemes as Khadhy Sathi and Swastha Sathi and

Kanyashree scheme for the girls had earned rich dividends in previous elections. But given the unexpected results in the 2019 Lok Sabha poll, the electoral battles in Saltora, Chhatna, Ranibandh and Raipur are unlikely to be cakewalks for Trinamul candidates.

The political scenario of Jhargram closely resembling Bankura after Trinamul's Lok Sabha reverses prompted the party leadership to field a new candidate.

Birbhabha Hansda, a well-known face in Santhal films. Before she faced the camera, Birbhabha was in close touch with politics, being the daughter of Naren Hansda and Chunibala Hansda of Jharkhand (Naren) Party. She takes on childhood friend Madhuja Sen Ray, a CPI-M candidate and the BJP candidate Sukhomoy Satpati.

Salboni, in West Midnapore, has become the cynosure after the CPI-M fielded Sushanta Ghosh who hit the headlines after several skeletons were unearthed near his home in Garbeta. But his campaigns in Salboni has rejuvenated the rank and file who are trying to wrest the seat from two-time sitting MLA Srikantha Mahato.

At Midnapore constituency, TMC candidate and actor June Malia takes on Samir Kumar Dash of BJP and Tarun Kumar Ghosh of CPI-M in her maiden electoral venture.

Once synonymous with the blood and gore of the Nandigram movement, Khejuri, this time has a debutant candidate Partha Pratim Das.

Veteran TMC leader Jyotirmoy Kar has been shifted from his old constituency Patashpur to Contai (South) after the party leadership fielded Chandrima Bhattacharya in DumDum (North).

Salboni, in West Midnapore,

is Phase-I Fact Sheet of the 2021 Assembly Polls. It shows the total number of seats (294), the number of seats polled in Phase-I (30), the number of polling stations (10,268), the number of EVMs (Control units - 12,848, Ballot units - 13,075, VVPATs - 13,780), the total electorate (73,92,709), the gender ratio (55% Male, 44% Female), and the number of Electoral Photo Identity Cards (EPIC) issued (100%).

Party-wise candidates include AITC (29), BJP (29), CPM (18), BSP (11), Cong (6), CPI (4), A

Both our parties have one common goal to defeat a tyrannical and dictatorial TMC

RAJU BISTA, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, DARJEELING

ON THE GNL'S DECISION TO SUPPORT BJP CANDIDATES IN THE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

In another virus spike, Capital records 1,534 cases, 9 deaths

Delhi's active cases jump to 6,051, positivity rate rises to 1.80 per cent, death toll mounts to 10,987

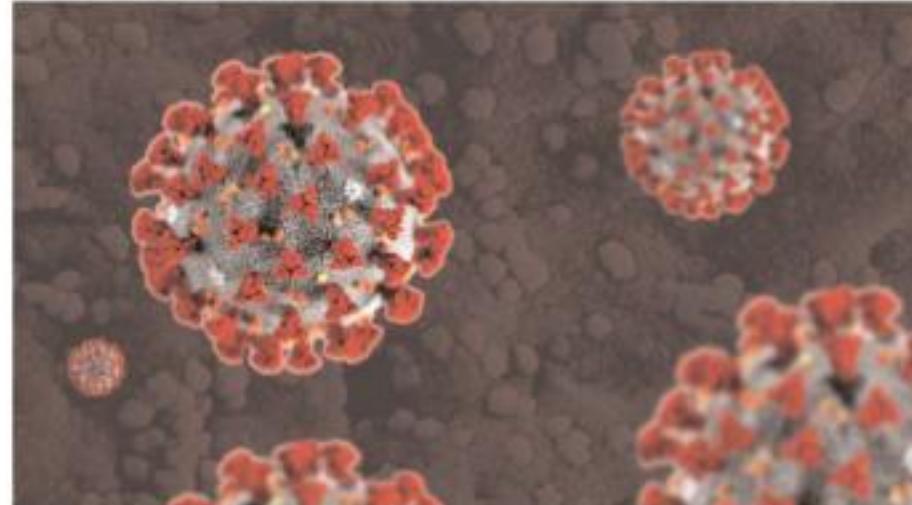
SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

In yet another spike, Delhi reported over 1,500 coronavirus infections for the second consecutive day today, even as it logged 9 more Covid deaths, highest in around two months, according to the latest health bulletin issued by the Delhi government's health department.

The 1,534 new infections pushed the national capital's tally to 6,54,276, while over 6.36 lakh patients have recovered from the virus here.

This is the highest number of Covid cases reported in Delhi since 16 December



when 1,547 people had tested positive for the virus, according to official data.

The active cases rose to 6,051 from 5,497 the previous day. The positivity rate rose to 1.80 per cent from 1.69 per cent

a day ago, the health bulletin said.

The positivity rate was 1.52 last Wednesday, 1.31 percent on Tuesday, 1.32 percent on Monday and 1.03 percent on Sunday.

With 9 more fatalities, Delhi's Covid toll mounted to 10,987, the bulletin stated.

Delhi had yesterday reported 1,515 Covid cases and 5 coronavirus-linked fatalities.

On 24 March, Delhi had recorded 1,254 Covid cases and 6 fatalities. It had on 22 March reported 1,101 coronavirus infections and 4 Covid deaths, which was the first time since 24 December that the city recorded more than 1,000 Covid cases.

The city had recorded 888 cases last Monday, 823 on Sunday, and 813 on Saturday.

The total number of Covid cases in Delhi on 1 January was

over 6.25 lakh and the fatalities tally had stood at 10,557.

The number of daily cases had started to come down in the city in February. On 26 February, the month's highest daily count of 256 cases was recorded. However, the daily cases began to rise again in March and it has been steadily increasing over the past several days.

Amid the Covid upsurge in the national capital, the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) has ordered that there will be no public celebrations in the city during upcoming festivals such as Holi, Shab-e-Barat, and Navratri.

Two workers died after reportedly inhaling toxic gases while cleaning a septic tank of a banquet hall in east Delhi's Ghazipur area, police said on Friday.

The deceased, identified as Lokesh (35) and Prem Chand (40), were reported to be residents of Trilokpur in Delhi. They had allegedly entered the tank to clean it on Thursday evening and

Teams from the fire

department, the Delhi Disaster Management Authority and the MCD visited the spot, he said, adding that the two men were taken to a hospital, where they were declared brought dead.

A case under section 304A (causing death by negligence) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and section 9 of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act has been registered, the official added.



The passing out parade of the 20th batch of DANIPS probationer officers was held at Police Training College, Jharkhand Kalan, in the Capital on Friday. They took their oaths in a colourful ceremonial parade after successfully completing their basic training, according to a press release issued by Delhi Police. The city police chief, S.N. Shrivastava, took the salute of the marching contingents.

Centre, Delhi govt in war of words over poor quality foodgrains distributed from fair price shops

PTI

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The Centre has sought an action-taken report from the Delhi government over poor quality of foodgrains distributed from fair price shops in the city during the COVID-19 lockdown period.

But Delhi Food and Civil Supplies Minister Imran Hussain on Friday claimed that the issue of "rotten" grains received from the Centre was raised immediately and a complaint lodged with it.

The development comes amid the Centre's objection to the Kejriwal government's plan to deliver rations at doorsteps of eligible beneficiaries of the public distribution system.

The Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Dis-

tribution, in a communication dated March 18, reminded the Food department of the Delhi government regarding "various discrepancies" found during an inspection of fair price shops in Delhi region.

Earlier, in October 2020, in a letter to the Delhi chief secretary, the ministry had sought an action-taken report from him.

The letter had stated that a survey of 71 fair price shops in Delhi was conducted by the ministry's five teams of Department of Food and Public Distribution officials in August and September 2020.

A total of 138 samples were collected (70 wheat, 68 rice) which were analysed by the Central Grain Analysis Laboratory.

Nature-based classroom introduced by NDMC

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

To connect the school children with nature while learning, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) in association with the Directorate General of Human Resource Development wing of Ministry of Finance has introduced a project, "Srishti-Learning about Nature Class", in its school.

This classroom was inaugurated by Neetu Lal Butalia, Director General-Human Resource Development Wing of Ministry of Finance, Department of Revenue, Atal Adarsh Bengal Balika Vidyalaya at Gole Market here today in the presence of Shailesh Kumar, Additional Director General and DPS Singh, Director (Education), NDMC.

Under this Project 'Srishti', the nature-based classroom is developed with a herbal and aromatic plant yard in which sapling of Basil (Tulsi) Dill, Rosemary, Aloe, Fennel, Sage, Lemon Grass were planted. Along with these, an open-air eco-shade (Gazebo) equipped for teaching and learning tools like table, chair, white-

board and microphone for instructor and eco stools for students are provided.

On the occasion, Butalia while explaining the object of the project said that keeping in the mind with learning about nature, 'Srishti' has been developed under the Swachhta action plan in the school for the students.

"It is important to expose young minds to the wealth of nature and nudge them to love, understand, appreciate and nurture nature whose bounties touch every human life," said Butalia.

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"It is important to expose young minds to the wealth of nature and nudge them to love, understand, appreciate and nurture nature whose bounties touch every human life," said Butalia.

Director Education, NDMC, DP Singh said that this activity will not only enrich the knowledge of students but also will have a positive effect on the whole learning process.

Classified

SITUATION VACANT

172-A, Western Avenue, Sainik Farm, New Delhi-110062.

3. Sh. Nitin Jain, s/o R/o 172-A, Western Avenue, Sainik Farm, New Delhi-110062.

4. M/s. Lumax Automotive Systems Limited (Under Liquidation) Through Official Liquidator, 8th Floor, Lok Nayak Bhawan Khan Market, New Delhi-110095.

Also at: Plot No. 99, Udyog Vihar, Phase-IV, Gurgaon-122015.

Also at: 63-64, Gokhale Market, Delhi-110054.

Whereas the abovenamed applicant has instituted a case against of Rs. 43,28,66,945.12/- Rupees Forty Three Crores Twenty Eight Lacs Sixty Six Thousand Nine Hundred Forty Five and Twelve Paisa Only) against you and whereas it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in ordinary way. Therefore, this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance in this Tribunal on 20-04-2021 a 10:30 a.m. Take notice that in case of your failure to appear on the abovementioned day before this Tribunal, the case will be heard and decided in your absence.

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

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

(ii) Meeting ID and Password for the next date of hearing qua cases to be taken up through Video Conferencing and for that purpose:-

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

Given under my hand and seal of this Tribunal on the 15th day of March, 2021.

By Order of this Tribunal

Sd/- Assistant Registrar, DRT-I, New Delhi

NOTICE U/S 11 OF ACT NO. VII OF 1890 OF GUARDIAN & WARD ACT.

IN THE COURT OF SH. DHARMESH SHARMA District & Sessions Judge RCT/West District Room No. 201, Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi MHA - 02/2020

PUBLICATION/CITATION

Nitin, s/o Sh. Chhote Lal, r/o H. No. T-455/A, Prem Nagar Road, Baljeet Nagar, New Delhi-110008.

Given under my hand and seal of this Tribunal on the 8th day of March, 2021.

By Order of this Tribunal

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Sd/- Assistant Registrar, DRT-I, New Delhi



The BJP has turned itself into a Borrowed Janata Party in Bengal.
They don't have their own leaders to match Mamata Banerjee in Bengal

CLAIMING THAT SAFFRON PARTY WOULD BITE THE DUST DESPITE CREATING AN UNPRECEDENTED HYPE

NEWLY APPOINTED TMC VICE-PRESIDENT YASHWANT SINHA

NEW DELHI, SATURDAY 27 MARCH 2021

Covid spike: HP govt shuts schools, colleges till 4 April

CM Thakur announces a slew of restrictions to tackle virus upsurge; 3 April declared holiday

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SHIMLA, 26 MARCH

Keeping in view the spike in Covid-19 cases in Himachal Pradesh, the state government on Friday ordered closure of all the educational institutions — including schools, colleges, universities and technical institutes — up to 4 April as a precautionary measure, barring those classes which are having their examinations.

This was decided at a high level meeting presided over by Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur here.

The CM said that schools having residential facilities need not close their hostels. However, they will have to comply with all the Covid safety protocols or Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to keep these residential areas cut off and appoint a Compliance Officer to comply with all the orders.

Thakur said that teachers



and other school/college staff would continue to attend the institutions.

The CM said that no social and cultural events would be organised in the state by the

government and that gatherings would be restricted to a maximum of 200 persons for indoor events and 500 per cent capacity for outdoor events.

He said that nursing and

medical institutions would continue to function as usual. He said that congregations and langars inside the temples would also be banned. However, normal darshans would

be allowed.

Thakur also said that 3 April would be a holiday for all the offices in the state and that there would be no public celebration of Holi.

The CM urged the people to celebrate Holi at their homes with their family members only. He said that all the frontline workers would be sensitised to get themselves vaccinated against Covid and completing their second vaccine dose as per schedule at the earliest.

It was also decided in the meeting that the district administrations would take judicious call on imposing more restrictions keeping in view the Covid positivity and fatality rates in their respective districts.

Chief Secretary Anil Khachi, Additional Chief Secretaries RD Dhiman and JC Sharma, Secretary Health Amitabh Awasthi, Mission Director NHRM Dr. Nipun Jindal, and other senior officers were also present on the occasion.

HP to have its Science, Tech & Innovation Policy soon

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SHIMLA, 26 MARCH

Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) have an important role in the nation's development. The new Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP-2020) of Government of India (GoI) aims to bring about profound changes through short, medium and long-term mission mode projects by building a nurtured ecosystem that promotes research and innovation on the part of both individuals and organizations.

Principal Secretary Environment, Science and Technology Kamlesh Kumar Pant said this while presiding over the Stakeholder Meet of Himachal Pradesh Council for Science & Technology (HIMCOSTE) here on Friday.

He said that the multi disciplinary approach of STI should be adopted to keep pace with changing times and stress should also be given on upgradation and its implementation at field level.

The Principal Secretary said there is a need to align the Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) with national priorities like Swachh Bharat Mission, Make in India, Skill India, Atmanirbhar Bharat and Vocal for Local.

He said that with focus on development of indigenous



technologies, the HIMCOSTE initiated to frame the Science Technology & Innovation (STI) Policy for Himachal Pradesh in the year 2019 on the lines of the National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy which has now been revised in the year 2020.

He said that to finalise the state policy, HIMCOSTE constituted a Core Group of renowned scientists from different fields like Plant Genetics & IPR, Agriculture, Horticulture, Engineering, Applied

Biotechnology, Forestry, Bio-sciences & Biodiversity, Remote Sensing, Water, Wildlife, Mathematics, Meteorology, Climate Change and Physics etc. from different Universities and Research Institutions across the state and after having brainstorming discussions with the Core Group on the STI Policy draft, the comments from different stakeholder departments were followed by internal discussions.

Pant said that with regard to the state specific policies,

the Science, Technology and Innovation inputs assume greater significance in the hill states like Himachal Pradesh in view of its geographical constraints and the challenges for its development.

He further said that as far as the S&T Policies for mountain states is concerned, only the Uttarakhand state has moved in this direction so far and now Himachal Pradesh would be the second state having its own S&T Policy. He further informed that in this

policy, 19 Core Issues which have the relevance from the States perspective having the linkage in one or the other way with the National policy have been taken care of.

Director (DEST) -cum-Member Secretary, HIMCOSTE Sudesh Kumar Mokhta said that the meet with Stakeholder Departments, Working Group Members, Academicians, and Researchers would help in further refining the document taking into consideration the National Policy and its relevance from the State's perspective with their valuable suggestions and comments.

Former Vice Chancellor CSK Agriculture University Palampur SK Sharma while giving overview on draft document on STIP stressed the need of making Science Congress a regular affair that should be held at least once in a year to promote STI.

Principal Scientific Officer Dr SS Randhawa, HIMCOSTE made a presentation on the Draft Document on STIP. Vice Chancellors and Former Vice Chancellors of various Universities, Heads and representatives of the about 30 stakeholder departments, Members of Working Group, and Scientist from various Academic and Research Institutions participated in this meet.

TB incidence dips in Kangra

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 26 MARCH

The Tuberculosis (TB) incidence is on the decline in Kangra, the biggest district of Himachal Pradesh that accounts for nearly one fourth of the population of the state.

It is among five districts in the state to get an honour from the Union Health and Family Welfare ministry for decline in the incidence of Tuberculosis over last five years.

The average decline in TB incidence in Kangra district has been 39.4% over the baseline incidence of 220 (per

lakh) over five years, as per assessment by the external teams, who visited and verified the TB programme performance earlier this year.

The other four districts to witness the decline are Una, Hamirpur and two tribal districts of Lahaul Spiti and Kinnaur.

As per assessment, the composite TB score (programme performance score) in Kangra was found to be 86.2 for 2020, which is well above the eligibility criterion of 80%.

District TB Officer, Dr RK Sood, who received the award from Union Health Minister

Harshvardhan at a function in Delhi on World TB Day earlier this week, said the review revealed that overall the number of new TB cases in Kangra district has decreased over the last 5 years.

A total of 6204 households with 27204 members were surveyed. As many as 21668 members were available or ready to participate in the survey. A total of 1255 samples were tested, out of which 22 cases were diagnosed. Out of the 22 diagnosed, 7 cases were new, 7 were already on treatment and 8 had a previous history of TB. No under-reporting was observed."

Punjab CM sanctions ₹1.25 cr for devp of 5 Galwan martyrs' villages

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 26 MARCH



crore sanctioned for the development of these five villages, the CM also approved Rs 18 crore for the Punjab State War Heroes Memorial and Museum at Amritsar.

Further, in order to provide boarding and lodging facilities to ex-servicemen, war widows and their family members, the CM also sanctioned Rs 4 crore for the construction of Sainik Rest Houses at Mansa and Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar.

Capt Amarinder also approved Rs 39.50 lakh for the construction of the Victory Tower and renovation of War Memorial at Asafwala in Fazilka district. This memorial was constructed to commemorate the gallantry deeds of the soldiers, who laid down their lives during 1971 Indo-Pak war in Fazilka sector.

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- JANAKPURI B-1/2, Main Najafgarh Road, Opp. Metro Pillar 543
- NOIDA, Nirula's Sec-2, Near Metro Station, Sec-15, Noida, UP
- LAJPAT NAGAR, 49, Main Ring Road, Adj. Haldi Ram, Near Moolchand Crossing



PUBLIC NOTICE



General Public of Delhi is hereby informed that in case of a missing/kidnapping of a child, the first few hours are crucial for the police to trace the missing child. Parents often do not inform the police about missing of their child immediately and let go the benefits of the initial crucial hours. Later, it becomes difficult for the police to trace the child.

In view of above, Delhi Police appeals to the citizens of Delhi to inform/report about their missing/kidnapped child at the earliest to local police so that necessary steps to recover the child are initiated expeditiously.

**Commissioner of Police
Delhi**

DP/9273/2021

RAGING STIR



Farmers protesting against the Centre's controversial farm laws during the Bhart Bandh at Mohali (SAS Nagar) roundabout on Friday.

PARDEEP SAINI

PTI

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

A Delhi court has issued non-bailable warrant (NBW) against a man who was out on bail in a case registered under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, after he failed to appear before it in a case of north-east Delhi riots in February last year.

Additional Sessions Judge Amitabh Rawat issued NBW against Faizan Khan in the case

after he did not appear before the court despite repeated calls.

"Since accused Faizan Khan is absent despite repeated calls, hence, issue NBW against him with notice to his surety for next date of hearing," the court said in its order passed on March 25.

Khan's counsel said she will move an application for cancellation of NBW against him.

The court also directed the police to supply hard

copies of the charge sheets filed in the matter to all the 18 accused and put up the matter for further hearing on April 8.

Khan, then salesperson of a telecom service provider who allegedly sold a SIM card on a fake ID to co-accused Asif Iqbal Tanha, was granted bail by the Delhi High Court in October last year.

The police had alleged that the SIM card obtained on a fake ID was used to co-

ordinate protests against the CAA.

While granting him the relief, the high court had said "it is not the case of the investigating agency that the petitioner (Khan) was part of any such WhatsApp groups which were made to coordinate/organize protests against the CAA. Moreover, there is no allegation against the petitioner that he engaged in any form of terror funding or such other ancillary activity".

It had further said that the transaction relating to the SIM card had allegedly taken place in December 2019, whereas the violence erupted in north east Delhi around February 23-25, 2020.

The high court had said that Khan shall not directly or indirectly influence any witness or tamper with the evidence and added that the trial court shall not be influenced by the observations in the present matter.





Saddened to hear about Anil Dharker passing away...A stimulating mind...who thrived on ideas

CENTRAL BOARD OF FILM CERTIFICATION CHAIRMAN PRASOON JOSHI
ON THE DEATH OF NOTED JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR ANIL DHARKER

i
ndia

Bharat Bandh: Farmers block roads, rail tracks

Heavy police force deployed in Punjab, Haryana amid protest against agri laws



BKU activists block the Kala Aam Chauraha in Bulandshahar as part of Bharat Bandh on Friday.

SNS & PTI

CHANDIGARH, 26 MARCH

Farmers gathered at several national highways, key roads and some railway tracks in Punjab and Haryana on Friday morning as part of their nationwide protest against the Centre's new agri laws.

According to the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), the Bharat Bandh is being observed from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. to mark four months of the farmers' agitation at Delhi's three borders - Singhu, Ghazipur and Tikri.

Protesters squatted on railway tracks at 44 locations across Punjab and Haryana, causing disruptions in train traffic.

"As of 11 a.m., kisan agitators are sitting at 44 locations. Total 35 passenger trains have been detained and 40 goods trains are affected so far. Four Shatabdi trains have been cancelled," Northern Railways spokesperson Deepak Kumar said.

Heavy police force has been deployed in the two states as part of security measures, an

official said.

The farmers have gathered at several highways and roads in the two states including in Bathinda, Ludhiana, Amritsar, Patiala, Mohali, Rohtak, Jhajjar and Bhiwani districts.

A group of farmers who were holding a protest in Zirakpur and Kharar towns in Punjab, both on the outskirts of Chandigarh, said they were allowing ambulances and other emergency vehicles to pass.

Some of the protesters blocked the Ambala-Delhi highway near Ambala Cantt, police said.

The farmers also blocked the Ambala-Rajpura Highway on the Haryana-Punjab border near Shambhu barrier, and the Ambala-Hisar Highway near Ambala City. Blockades on various state highways were reported in Naraingarh and Mullan in Haryana, police said.

The SKM, an umbrella body of protesting unions, appealed to protesting farmers to be peaceful and not get involved in any kind of illegitimate debate and conflict during the bandh.

Meanwhile, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), apex religious body of the Sikhs, has also supported the nationwide protest.

SGPC president Jagir Kaur had said on Thursday that its offices would be kept closed on Friday.

Farmers led by leaders of Bhartiya Kisan Union and joined by trade unions blocked highways and roads in different

"All shops, malls, markets and institutions will remain closed under complete Bharat Bandh. All minor and big roads and trains will be blocked. All services will remain suspended except for ambulance and other essential services. The effect of Bharat Bandh will be served inside Delhi as well," SKM had said in a statement.

Farmer leaders have said road and rail transport will be blocked and markets will also remain closed.

They also claimed that trade unions from organised and unorganised sectors, and transport and other associations too have extended support to the call for Bharat Bandh.

Meanwhile, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), apex religious body of the Sikhs, has also supported the nationwide protest.

SGPC president Jagir Kaur had said on Thursday that its offices would be kept closed on Friday.

Farmers led by leaders of Bhartiya Kisan Union and joined by trade unions blocked highways and roads in different

parts of Meerut region. Important highways and roads in Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Baghpat, Bulandshahr, Bijnore, Rampur and other parts of western UP were blocked.

According to BKU spokesperson in UP, Dhamendra Malik, Bharat Bandh was peaceful and no untoward incident was reported from anywhere.

In Meerut farmers blocked NH-58 (Delhi- Dehradun) at Daurala and some other parts.

In Baghpat, farmers led by BKU blocked Delhi- Gangetic highway for hours. Similar blockage of roads in Bijnore and Muzaffarnagar led to disruption of traffic. In Bulandshahr, highways at Dibai, Khurja, Secunderabad, Anoopshahar and Gulaothi were blocked.

Thousands of farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, have been camping at Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur demanding a complete repeal of the three farm laws and a legal guarantee for the minimum support price on their crops.

Farmers led by leaders of Bhartiya Kisan Union and joined by trade unions blocked highways and roads in different

Political shelter to Ansari for 2 yrs: SAD seeks probe into 'conspiracy'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 26 MARCH

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) on Friday accused the Punjab government of giving political shelter to underworld don Mukhtar Ansari by keeping him as a "state guest" in Ropar jail on a trumped-up charge for two years and demanded a judicial inquiry into the "criminal conspiracy".

Welcoming the Supreme Court judgement which directed that Ansari be transferred to Uttar Pradesh for interrogation, SAD spokesman Dr Daljit Singh Cheema said the verdict had lowered Punjab's image in the country.

"An impression has gone out that the Congress government in Punjab can stoop to any level to extend protection to a criminal. The verdict is an indictment of the

Punjab government which has misused its powers to prevent the transfer of Ansari's custody to the Uttar Pradesh police for two years. The government clarify its motives behind harboring a hardened criminal in its jails and as to why it spent a huge amount of money to hire top lawyers to prevent Ansari's transfer to Uttar Pradesh," the SAD leader said.

Dr Cheema demanded that the inquiry should cover all these aspects as well as the "case" in which Ansari had been arrested and brought to Punjab after a property dealer received a threat from "one Ansari" on 7 January, 2019.

He said despite the vague nature of the complaint, the Mohali police was quick enough to register a case in the matter the very next day.

got a production warrant against the gangster on 12 January and presented him in the court on 22 January. After this however, the Mohali police went into a reverse gear and failed to present a challan in the case for sixty days. Ansari also did not apply for bail and the state government was content with not only keeping him in jail but also giving excuses to prevent him from being transferred to Uttar Pradesh.

Dr Cheema said the conduct of the Punjab government has sent a wrong example. He said if state governments were not ready to cooperate with another how we could expect other countries to repatriate criminals to India.

He said such actions only served to embolden criminals and could lead to a further increase in crime in the state.

Nilotpal Basu meets EC members on Kerala polls

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

CPI (M) politburo member Nilotpal Basu today met members of the Election Commission to seek a clarification on whether elections to three Rajya Sabha seats from Kerala were put on hold.

Basu had yesterday written a letter to Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora regarding an Election Commission Press note on keeping in abeyance the Rajya Sabha elections from Kerala.

A press release issued by the party today said that Commission members explained that the Commission's decision, as stated in their Press note of 24 March, "should not be construed as putting the entire process in abeyance but was limited to clarifying the reference by the government."

FAIR PROTEST



Members of Delhi Pradesh Mahila Congress protest outside Delhi Deputy CM Manish Sisodia residence against Liquor policy on Friday.

Jaishankar to face Pakistani counterpart at conference

SNS & PTI
NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

held in the Tajikistan capital of Dushanbe on 30 March.

The Ministry of External Affairs today announced that Jaishankar will visit Tajikistan on 30-31 March at the invitation of his counterpart Sirojiddin Muhriddin. During the visit, he will have discussions with the leadership of the Central Asian country covering all aspects of bilateral relations as well as

regional and international issues of mutual interest.

The ninth ministerial conference of "Heart of Asia" is being held at the joint initiative of Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

The conference is part of the Istanbul Process, a regional initiative on security and cooperation for a peaceful Afghanistan. Reports in the Pakistani media have suggested that the foreign ministers of India and Pakistan might also hold a bilateral meeting.

Meanwhile, Indian and Pakistani armies held a brigadier-level meeting at Poonch-Rawalkot crossing on Friday as a follow-up to their agreement to observe ceasefire along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir.

Tunes, taglines of poll campaigns

TIRTHANKAR MITRA
KOLKATA, 26 MARCH

This election has been entwined with lyrics, songs and incisive taglines. Parties clashed over catchy tunes to censure each other. They are also meant to intimidate political opponents and inspire followers to shout raucous slogans during rallies and sing copy-cat tunes between thumping beats.

The jingle "khela hobe" have cut across the political divide. Be it Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee or Prime Minister Narendra Modi, both are saying it in their respective rallies hoping that the match will swing their way.

But there are others which are a part and parcel of this background music adding to the variety heard during every

(Aunty go) which is a take on the 19th century Italian protest song "Bella Ciao". It zeroes on the shortcomings of the Trinamul dispensation.

"Tumpa toke niye brigade jabo" (Tumpa, I will take you to Brigade) and of course "Lal pherao, hal pherao" (Bring back red, to usher in a better state of existence). But as BJP and TMC so far emerged as the principal opponents in the electoral battle, the Left's smart word play notwithstanding, the jingles of the saffron and grass-flower camps are doing the maximum rounds.

Such was the impact of the "khela hobe" slogan, it took BJP's chief star campaigner Modi to give a rejoinder "Khela khatam, Vikas shuru" (the game ends, development begins) at the 7 March rally at Brigade Parade ground.

Even as heated debates are on whether the game will have some rules or will be a no holds barred affair, Trinamul Congress's Birbhum leader placed a less than subtle clue. Addressing a rally, he said "Khela bho. Bhoyonkar khela hobe, Ei Mati to khela hobe" (There will be a game. It will be a dangerous game. It will be played on this ground).

A late entrant in the electoral jingle fray, Congress has come up with the slogan "Adhirashay buk bendoche, bat e balle e choy" thereby making a pun of PCC chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury's first name, it seeks to hit the aspirations of its political rivals for an over boundary.

Come 2 May, when the election results will be declared, the people will know whose political aspirations has been hit for a six.

Gross mishandling of funds by Nitish govt: CAG

MANOJ CHAURASIA
PATNA, 26 MARCH

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has pointed at gross mishandling of funds by the ruling Nitish Kumar government in Bihar. It said the government didn't spend the available funds for various departments in a prudent manner and rather used the borrowed funds for discharging existing liabilities.

According to the CAG report for the year which ended on 31 March 2019, the Bihar government surrendered more than 94 percent of the total savings of Rs 49,172.17 crore during the year. Rs 27,527.23 crores were surrendered on the last working day of March 2019, leaving no scope for utilisation of these funds. What was further strange, the

using them for development activities or capital formation.

The CAG report has also highlighted how the contingency fund was improperly used. "In 2018-19, the state government temporarily increased the corpus of Contingency Fund from Rs 350 crore to Rs 707.61 crore. During the same period, the government made 109 withdrawals amounting to Rs 4,353.49 crore from this fund out of which 34 withdrawals were made for events of foreseeable nature," said the report.

It said the utilisation certificates of Rs 55,405.09 crore were outstanding as of 31 March, 2019 from 33 departments. "High pendency of utilisation certificates is fraught with risk of misappropriation of funds and fraud," the

CAG report apprehends. The report mentioned that total 68 projects were due for completion during the period 2011-2012 to 2018-19. Since the details of all these projects were not furnished by the departments, their revised cost was not exhibited in the Finance Accounts and was thus unascertainable, the report said.

The report also revealed the state government has six Reserve Funds but there were no transactions under three of them, which included Famine Relief Fund, Development and Welfare Fund and General and other reserve funds for the past 18-19 years. It said the revenue receipts in 2018-19 grew by Rs 14,347 crore over the past financial year yet they were lower than the budget estimate.

HIMACHAL PRADESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

e-Procurement Notice

NOTICE INVITING TENDER (NIT)

The Superintending Engineer, 4th Circle HPPWD Shimla-3, on behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh invites the percentage rate/item rate bids, in electronic tendering system, for construction of roads under National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development for each of the following works including their maintenance for five years from the eligible and approved contractors registered with HPPWD and HP Jal Shakti Vibhag (Contractors of HP Jal Shakti Vibhag are eligible to participate for the works having amount put to tender above Rs. 100 Lacs). Non registered contractors may submit the bids; however successful bidder has to register in appropriate class with appropriate authorities before signing the contract.

Submission of Original Documents: The bidders are required to submit (a) Online Payment Receipt towards the cost of bid document and (b) Online Payment Receipt towards EMD and (c) original affidavit regarding correctness of information furnished with bid document as per provisions of Clause 4.4(b) (ii) of ITB with Executive Engineer Shimla Rural Division HPPWD Dhami on a date not later than three working days after the opening of technical qualification part of the Bid, either by registered post or by hand.

Last Date/ Time for receipt of bids through e-tendering: 08-04-2021, 18:00 PM up-to 22-04-2021 17:00 (PM)

7. The site for the work is available.

8. Only online submission of bids is permitted; therefore, bids must be submitted online on website www.hptenders.gov.in. The technical qualification part of the bids will be opened online at 11:00 AM on 23-04-2021 in the office of Shimla Rural Division HPPWD Dhami by the authorized officers. If the office happens to be closed on the date of opening of the bids as specified, the bids will be opened online on the next working day at the same time.

9. The bidder is not required to quote his rate for routine maintenance. The rates to be paid for routine maintenance are indicated in the Bill of Quantities. Further, the payment for routine maintenance to the contractor shall be regulated based on his performance of maintenance activities.

10. The bids for the work shall remain valid for acceptance for a period not less than Seventy Five (75) days after the deadline date for bid submission.

11. Bidders may bid for any one or more of the works mentioned in the Table above. To qualify for a package/job of contracts made up of this and other contracts for which bids are invited in the same NIT, the bidder must demonstrate having experience and resources sufficient to meet the aggregate of the qualifying criteria for the individual contracts.

12. Other details can be seen in the bidding documents. The Employer shall not be held liable for any delays due to system failure beyond its control. Even though the system will attempt to notify the bidders of any bid updates, the Employer shall not be liable for any information not received by the bidder. It is the bidders' responsibility to verify the website for the latest information related to the tender.

13. Eligibility Criteria:- The bidders must have successfully completed similar nature of work not less than 40 % of estimated cost during the last five years (without liquidated damages or compensation).

Executive Engineer,
Shimla Rural Division,
HPPWD Dhami,
For Superintending Engineer,
4th Circle, HPPWD, Shimla-3.
On behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh



The focus is protecting those at highest risk of mortality
and those involved in pandemic response

UNION HEALTH MINISTER HARSH VARDHAN
FOCUSING ON SURGE IN COVID CASES IN THE COUNTRY

THUMBNAILS



A woman sells Holi colours before celebrations. ■ SNS

Covid hike: Indore, the worst-hit district in Madhya Pradesh in terms of COVID-19 outbreak, has reported 612 new infection cases, its highest single-day spike since the pandemic began, a health official said on Friday. ■ PTI

Illegal firearms recovered: An arms manufacturing unit here in Mirzapur area here was busted on Friday, police said. The factory, located in an old structure near Bhooma village under Mirzapur police station, was raided and a person working there was arrested. ■ PTI

Mother kills son: A woman allegedly killed her mentally challenged 18-month-old son and attempted to put the blame on her sisters and her father, police said on Friday. ■ PTI

Over 300 poachers arrested in Gujarat

GANDHINAGAR, 26 MARCH

More than 300 poachers were arrested in Gujarat for hunting scheduled animals, reptiles, and birds in over two years, the state government told the legislative Assembly on Friday.

Responding to an unstarred question by Congress MLA C J Chavda, state forest minister Ganpat Vasava said a total of 336 poachers, including 11 hunter gangs, were arrested between April 2018 and September 2020 in Gujarat.

Action was taken against the accused under various sections of the Wildlife Protection Act, he said.

At least nine lions, eight leopards, 86 blue bulls, one crocodile, nine pythons, 17 turtles, three monkeys, etc were killed by poachers, he said. In a related written reply, the minister informed the House that 17 people had been killed and 120 injured in attacks by wild animals between 2019 and 2020. As many as 23 people were arrested for poaching migratory birds at Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary, one of India's largest wetland bird sanctuaries located in Ahmedabad district, he said, adding that two poachers are absconding. ■ PTI

LDF govt seeks judicial probe against central agencies

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE KOCHI, 26 MARCH

In an unprecedented move, the Primary Vijayan-led LDF government in Kerala on Friday decided to go for a judicial probe against the Central agencies, including the Enforcement Directorate (ED), investigating gold smuggling and related cases.

The state cabinet which met here on Friday decided to appoint a judicial Commission to probe against the Central agencies, including the ED for derailing the investigation in the gold and dollar smuggling cases. The cabinet also decided to appoint retired high court judge VK Mohanan as the chairman of the judicial Commission. It has also been decided to seek the permission of the Election Commission to implement the decision, since a model code of conduct is in force.

Assam readies for first phase polling

The VVPAT along with EVM will be used at every polling station

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE GUWAHATI, 26 MARCH

Assam enters the first phase polling of State legislative assembly elections covering 47 constituencies across 12 districts tomorrow, as necessary arrangements are put in place by the authority.

State chief electoral officer Nitin Khade informed that all steps have been taken to conduct safe, smooth and peaceful polls in 11,537 polling stations.

In the first phase, 81,09,815 general electors (out of which 40,32,481 are females and 124 are trans-genders) will exercise their franchise, where 264 candidates of various political parties with many independents (including 23 women) are in the fray.

The highest number of voters recorded in Jonai (ST) assembly constituency (31,11,660) and lowest one in Thowra constituency (1,15,364 electors).

The Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) along



with Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) will be used at every polling station as the election authority wants to enhance the transparency and credibility of the process.

The arrangements have

been made to ensure availability of adequate number of VVPATs, which would allow the voters to verify their votes.

Following the Covid pandemic guidelines, the authority decided to allow maximum 1,000 electors in a polling

station instead of earlier stipulation of 1,500.

The option of postal ballot facility has already been extended to the electors who are infected with coronavirus (or suspected positive) and in home or institutional quarantine along with those marked with disabilities, above 80 years of ages, etc.

Moreover, every polling station will be equipped with assured minimum facilities like drinking water, toilet, arrangements for lighting ramp of appropriate gradient for persons with disabilities.

The manifesto also promised it will enforce a deradicalisation policy to identify and quash organisations and individuals fanning communal exclusion and separatism.

In a first, ITBP deploys retired combat canines as 'therapy dogs'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

from these central forces are usually handed over to animal NGOs or kept at a retirement home within the organisation for post-retirement care. A first batch of five dogs who have been living in their 'retirement home' at the ITBP national training center for dogs and animals at Bhanu near Chandigarh have been inducted for a second innings in the task of being 'therapy dogs'.

Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Sudhakar Natarajan, the veterinary chief of the ITBP, tells PTI that Pooja, Tom, Rambo, Rani and Gravey, who recently retired from active service, are just over 11-years-old and have served in various anti-Naxal operations and counter-insurgency grids of the country along with their handlers accompanying Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) patrols. "All five dogs have started visiting ITBP hospitals and have given unalloyed joy in engaging with these dogs in non-verbal communication," the report said.

"Many are long-term patients and they expressed unalloyed joy in engaging with these dogs in non-verbal communication," the report said.

"Also, these dogs have interacted with children with special needs, and the spark seen in their eyes is to be seen to be believed. An immediate connection between the child and dog was remarkable," Natarajan said about the preliminary findings of the new move.

A compliance report submitted by the border force to its administrative department, the Union home ministry, on Thursday said that the force plans to visit local schools, where specially-abled children are taught, with these 'therapy dogs' to spread joy.

The report said the experiment is being watched and analysed. "Our veteran K9 (canine) heroes have just been deployed as therapy dogs. The response of patients (ITBP troops under treatment in their hospitals) was very encouraging.

"Many are long-term patients and they expressed unalloyed joy in engaging with these dogs in non-verbal communication," the report said.

UNIVERSITY OF DELHI

Public Notice

(Recruitment of JRF)

Applications are invited for JRF (01) in Department of Mathematics, University of Delhi, Delhi-7 under the project funded by DST-SERB (EEQ Scheme), Govt. of India. Qualifications, Fellowships and other details are available at University website: du.ac.in and Department website: maths.du.ac.in. Last date for application is 07th April, 2021.

Dr. Sachin Kumar (PI)

CANCELLATION OF TRAINS

It is notified for the information of passengers that the services of following Special Express trains will be discontinued due to operational reasons from the dates shown against each:-

Train No. & Name	Date of Cancellation
04241 Lucknow NR - Anand Vihar (T) AC Special Express	From 27.03.2021 till further advice
04422 Anand Vihar (T) - Lucknow NR AC Special Express	From 27.03.2021 till further advice
04423 Lucknow NR - Hazrat Nizamuddin Special Express	From 27.03.2021 till further advice
04424 Hazrat Nizamuddin - Lucknow NR Special Express	From 27.03.2021 till further advice
04425 Pune - Hazrat Nizamuddin Special Express	From 27.03.2021 till further advice
04426 Hazrat Nizamuddin - Pune Special Express	From 27.03.2021 till further advice

Note: All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., may be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

For any kind information, passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.



Please join us on [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Instagram](#)

PARTIAL CANCELLATION/DIVERSION/REGULATION OF TRAINS DUE TO NON-INTERLOCKING WORK

In order to upgrade the infrastructure, Railways will undertake the non-interlocking work for yard remodelling at Mau Jn. station. To execute this work, Railways will take suitable traffic block between 02.04.2021 to 05.04.2021. During this period following trains will temporarily be effected as under:-

SHORT TERMINATION/ PARTIALLY CANCELLATION OF TRAINS

Train No. & Name	Short Terminated at/Originated from	Partial Cancelled between Stations	Date (from the Originating Station)
05008 Lucknow Jn. - Varanasi City Special Express	at Bhatni Jn.	Bhatni Jn. - Varanasi City	01.04.2021 to 04.04.2021
05007 Varanasi City - Lucknow Jn. Special Express	from Bhatni Jn.	Varanasi City - Bhatni Jn.	02.04.2021 to 05.04.2021
05138 Prayagraj Rambag - Mau Jn. Special MEMU	at Aunrihar Jn.	Aunrihar Jn. - Mau Jn.	02.04.2021 to 05.04.2021
05137 Mau Jn. - Prayagraj Rambag Special MEMU	from Aunrihar Jn.	Mau Jn. - Aunrihar Jn.	02.04.2021 to 05.04.2021

DIVERSION OF TRAINS

Train No. & Name	Diverted via	Date (from the Originating Station)
04006 Anand Vihar (T) - Sitamarhi Special Express	Aunrihar Jn. - Ballia - Chhapra	02.04.2021 to 04.04.2021
04651 Jaynagar - Amritsar Jn. Special Express	Chhapra - Ballia - Phephna Jn. - Ghazipur City - Aunrihar Jn. - Jaunpur Jn.	02.04.2021 to 04.04.2021
04652 Amritsar Jn. - Jaynagar Special Express	Jaunpur Jn. - Aunrihar Jn. - Ghazipur City - Phephna Jn. - Chhapra	04.04.2021
09165 Ahmedabad Jn. - Darbhanga Jn. Special Express	Varanasi Jn. - Aunrihar Jn. - Ghazipur City - Ballia - Chhapra	02.04.2021

REGULATION OF TRAINS

Train No. & Name	Regulation	Date (from the Originating Station)
04005 Sitamarhi - Anand Vihar (T) Special Express	will be regulated for 60 Minutes in Varanasi Division	05.04.2021
09166 Darbhanga Jn. - Ahmedabad Jn. Special Express	will be regulated for 40 Minutes in Varanasi Division	05.04.2021

Note: All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including social distancing, sanitization etc., may be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

For any kind information such as detailed Time-Table and stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.



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SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

BJP will enact laws to check 'love, land jihad': Shah

Control the Gun

The United States of America is in mourning again. Six days after Atlanta, ten people were done to death in a grocery store, named King Soopers, in Boulder, Colorado. Thus has the loop of mass shootings lengthened. The nationality of the victims, not to forget the colour of the skin ~ the usual provocation ~ is as yet unknown. Of paramount interest to the people of the country must now be the dire imperative of gun control, which has not attained fruition for decades and via several Presidents. President Joe Biden, who had contested the election last November using gun control as his campaign plank, has signaled that he is ready to sign the bills pertaining to the prevention of "gun violence" into law.

On March 11, the House of Representatives passed the Thompson and Clyburn's background check bills once again. Senator Chris Murphy who introduced the companion bill to Republican Thompson's bill, is tasked with passing the bill in the Senate. Without eliminating the filibuster, this legislation will require 10 Republicans to join 50 Democrats to support the bill, a herculean challenge in so partisan a political environment that 43 Senate Republicans refused to convict Donald Trump for inciting unprecedented insurrection against the United States. This is a forbidding challenge. The bills on the background check and the ban on assault weapons were signed into law more than 27 years ago, the last time Congress passed a meaningful gun control bill. With 253-plus voter suppression bills in 43 states, Republicans are only interested in regaining power that serves the interests of the corporate gun lobby.

It bears recall that the gun violence prevention movement has over time worked tirelessly to secure a Democratic majority in the House of Representatives, the Senate and the White House. It is time for Democratic senators to reform the rules to force a vote on measures to prevent life-saving gun violence prevention measures.

The Oval Office must not squander this opportunity to take meaningful action to end the crisis ignited by gun violence. Without ending the Senate filibuster, public safety policies with broad American support will not reach President Biden's desk. The risk of the nation witnessing more of the tragic deaths, as in Atlanta and Colorado, not to forget St Bernardino and Ferguson among many more, is dangerously real.

If indeed President Biden executes the legislation on gun control, it will rank as a signal achievement of his presidency. Mass shootings must end. The United States keeps its fingers crossed. Besides Congress, much will of course hinge on the White House. The dithering on the part of former Presidents doesn't inspire optimism.

NK flexes muscles

When North Korean generals greeted the launch of two ballistic missiles on Thursday with collective clapping ~ visually a standing ovation ~ the impression conveyed to the world was one of collective glee over having flexed their muscles after such tests had been kept in abeyance. It was the country's first ballistic launch after a year. The other compulsion arguably was to showcase the launch as the first since Joe Biden assumed power over two months ago.

While the United States, Japan and South Korea have condemned the tests, President Biden has been rather more emphatic. Not the least because under the resolutions of the Security Council, the government of Kim Jong-un in Pyongyang is banned from testing ballistic missiles. The launch, Mr Biden said, was a violation of UN resolutions and that the US was consulting its partners and allies. "There will be responses and if they choose to escalate, we will respond accordingly. But I'm also prepared for some form of diplomacy, but it has to be conditioned upon the end result of denuclearisation." According to North Korea's official statement, the two weapons struck a test target 600 km off North Korea's east coast, disputing Japanese assessments that they flew just over 400 km. "The development of this weapon system is of great significance in bolstering up the military power of the country and deterring all sorts of military threats," said Ri Pyong Chol, the senior leader who oversaw the test.

President Kim Jong-un, ever so willing to convey a dire signal to America, South Korea and Japan, was not present. Pyongyang claims the new missile is able to carry a payload of 2.5 tons which would make it capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. For all that, there is no readymade answer to the obvious query ~ Why has North Korea tested the missiles now? Given the nature of geopolitics, the timeline is no less critical than the event per se. The obvious response of countries opposed to nuclear proliferation is that the North has the wherewithal.

Additionally, Pyongyang has new weapons to try out. The recent messages, notably the one advanced by President Kim's sister, warning the United States not to cause a "stink" and that the Biden administration would "pay a price" would suggest the North is making a point. It is hard not to wonder whether the test is not a consequence of the caveat from Kim's powerful sister. Arguably, Pyongyang was also protesting against the extradition of its citizen, Mun Chol Myong, from Malaysia to the US, and the recent UN Human Rights Council resolution against North Korea.

Whatever the reason, the message North Korea is sending the world is very different from what it is conveying to its people. While Mr Kim is playing to the international gallery, notably the White House, by flexing his military muscles, he is in parallel trying to portray an image of economic reformer to North Koreans.

Ties reaffirmed

In recent years, India has expanded its spending on US weapons, bringing in billions of dollars in helicopters, howitzers, cargo planes and other equipment. India also takes part in Malabar, a naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea that also includes the United States, Japan and Australia



Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin, a retired Army general selected by Biden to run the Pentagon, is the first Cabinet member in the new administration to visit India. He met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other senior officials on 19 March 2021 as the United States works to expand partnerships to counter an increasingly assertive China.

"Secretary Austin commend-ed India's leadership role in the Indo-Pacific and growing engagement with like-minded partners across the region to promote shared goals," said John Kirby, a Pentagon spokesman. "The two sides reaffirmed their commitment to promote a free and open regional order." "India and US are committed to our strategic partnership that is a force for global good," he said.

Austin's trip in India casts a wary eye at China, whose forces engaged in combat with Indian troops at their shared, disputed border last year, causing fatalities on both sides. The incident has helped foster the belief that India may be open to new collaboration with the United States and other countries on China issues. The senior defence official said the United States wants to exchange views on security in the region, "where we see China's assertive behaviour and malign influence at a number of points."

In recent years, India has expanded its spending on US weapons, bringing in billions of dollars in helicopters, howitzers, cargo planes and other equipment. India also takes part in Malabar, a naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea that also includes the United

States, Japan and Australia. In 2018, the United States also made a symbolic change with a direct nod to India. Its four-star military headquarters overseeing operations in the Pacific and Asia was renamed Indo-Pacific Command, after decades of it being called US Pacific Command.

After holding wide-ranging talks with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Austin said India is an increasingly important partner amid rapidly shifting international dynamics and Washington was committed to a "forward-looking" defence partnership with New Delhi as a central pillar of its approach to the region.

"As the world faces a global pandemic and growing challenges to an open and stable international system, the US-India relationship is a stronghold of a free and open Indo-Pacific region," he said. The US Defence Secretary said as the Indo-Pacific region faces challenges to a free and open regional order, cooperation among like-minded countries is imperative to securing the shared vision for the future.

"We discussed opportunities to elevate the US-India Major Defence Partnership...a priority of the Biden-Harris Administration through regional security cooperation, military-to-military interactions, and defence trade," Austin said. "In addition, we are

continuing to advance new areas of collaboration, including information sharing, logistics cooperation, artificial intelligence; and cooperation in new domains such as space and cyber," he added. "As the Indo-Pacific region faces acute transnational challenges, such as climate change, and challenges to a free and open regional order, cooperation among like-minded countries is imperative to securing our shared vision for the future," he said. "Despite today's challenging security environment, the partnership between the US and India, the world's two largest democracies, remains resilient and strong and we will seek every opportunity to build upon this major partnership," he added.

In his statement, Austin also referred to Prime Minister Modi's comments that India stands for "freedom of navigation and overflight, unimpeded lawful commerce, and adherence to international law".

"This is a resounding affirmation of our shared vision for regional security in the Indo-Pacific. And it's clear that the importance of this partnership, and its impact to the international rules-based order will only grow in the years ahead," he said.

He said there was a discussion on engagement with like-minded partners through multilateral groupings such as the Quad and Asean. People familiar with the US official's visit had said

earlier that India's plan to procure around 30 multi-mission armed Predator drones from the US for the three services at an estimated cost of over \$3 billion is expected to figure in Austin-Singh talks. In June 2016, the US had designated India a "Major Defence Partner".

The two countries have also inked key defence and security pacts over the past few years, including the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016 that allows their militaries use of each other's bases for repair and replenishment of supplies as well as provides for deeper cooperation.

The two sides have also signed COMCASA (Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement) in 2018 that provides for interoperability between the two militaries and provides for sale of high-end technology from the US to India.

Austin had discussed violations of human rights in India during his meetings with external affairs minister S Jaishankar.

"We have to remember that India is our partner, a partner whose partnership we value. And I think partners need to be able to have those kinds of discussions. And certainly, we feel comfortable in doing that. And you can have those discussions in a very meaningful way and still make progress," Austin said in response.

Jaishankar is said to have agreed and emphasised that a strong relationship between the two democracies was not only important for both countries but for the rest of the world.

He refuted all charges and explained the true picture of human rights violations to Austin convincingly.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR editor@thestatesman.com

On being happy

SIR, This refers to the editorial "Don't worry, stay happy" (25 March). The United Nations report, 2021 on World Happiness lists Finland in the first place for the fourth time, Nordic and Antipodean countries occupy pride of place, while Germany and Israel are fairly excellent too. Our country is at rank 139 out of 149 countries surveyed.

The criteria bases on material improvement of the citizenry compassing basic necessities and includes gender equality, fulfilment of individual desires and visions, good family structures. We may accept the report in good earnestness or accept it with reservations. Pertinent to mention all

along we rely on happiness as per state of mind based on our ethos. Today the world is a global village; humanism and humanity are important, happiness not a state of mind but nation - centric.

Today money and money making are worshipped as never before; earlier importance was given to values leading to wisdom. Societal systems have undergone drastic change and who knows what is next.

The pandemic has affected the world and continues to do so with alarming signals; we are still unsure of its origin and mystery. Without money we cannot move in life. Any individual without money and empowerment

knows how relevant is the lucre in everyday survival.

Once acquired and solidified, if gives material happiness and comforts, yet a comfortable material standard may not lead to real happiness. The faces of comfortable people also tell another story of mental impoverishment and despair, say in rich Japan. Humans are turning increasingly narcissistic and towards taking their own lives.

It is imperative for our underdeveloped and middle income countries to be rich in all areas providing the very best as in happy countries. We also cannot afford the huge gap between the privileged and the unfortunate. Dissatisfaction in whatever form leads to trouble and negative tendencies.

Largest democracy India has the ability to move forward in all dimension. Rather than waiting for the moment when it climbs first to double digits and then to single, collectively we can achieve food, shelter, health care, ensure freedom and justice.

India needs discipline and commitment to carry out multi-prong strategies of growth with a human face. As individuals we must have sound minds and sound bodies to kick-start individual contributions, where flows human dignity, respect, love and trust.

Yours, etc. Partha Sarathy Sen New Delhi, 25 March.

BJP'S ASSAM BASTION

SIR, BJP is currently in office only in Assam. Even the opposition admits that BJP

remains invincible there. It is an admission of defeat even before joining the battle of ballot in Assam. A virtual walkover.

Now, let's come to West Bengal. BJP had won a paltry 3 seats in the last assembly elections that were held in 2016. From a mere 3 seats, BJP has come to a stage to give Mamata a run for her money by mounting a challenge to snatch power. Whatever may be the result in West Bengal is a gain for BJP and loss for TMC.

In Kerala, the two big players are Communists and Congress. In the outgoing assembly, BJP had only a single seat. It is making a valiant effort to spread its footprints in the southern state and to increase vote share, BJP has induced the highly regarded, E Sreedharan, the

Metro-man. BJP can never lose Kerala for it has in its kitty very little of Kerala. In Tamil Nadu, as in Kerala, BJP has no existence, having got 2.87 per cent vote share in the assembly elections held in 2016. It couldn't win a single seat. BJP is contesting a handful of mere 20 seats in alliance with AIADMK and that means, BJP will certainly gain in vote share and probably a few seats.

All a net gain. In the Puducherry assembly, Congress was in majority in the 2016 elections. BJP had not won even a single seat in the elections. In the current election, any victory would mean a substantial gain. All said and done, it is a win-win situation for BJP.

Yours, etc., C K Subramanian, Navi Mumbai, 25 March.

OVER TO THE BENCH

SIR, This refers to today's news report, "Mumbai ex-CP moves SC seeking CBI probe against HM Deshmukh". It may have started with 20 loose gelatin sticks found in an abandoned SUV outside industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence, but the case has blown up, and now, the fate of state home minister Anil Deshmukh hangs in the balance. Many questions remained unanswered in the entire episode beginning with the reinstatement of suspended police officer Vaze and his arrest to Chief Minister Thackeray's inaction to seek resignation of his Home Minister who has been accused of extortion, and not ordering a probe. But the issue goes beyond the immediate. No major party in the state has focused on police reforms, a possible reflection of the complicity of all actors in systemic corruption. Until the police are kept insulated from political interference, whether in terms of postings or transfers, or in terms of their investigations, the two will forever remain in quid pro quo arrangements.

In the context of politics and crime, the individuals seek political protection to preserve and expand their wealth, and in turn parties need illegal finances which are sourced from extracting resources from the institutions such as police, and citizens.

What is needed is a charter of wide-ranging reforms in the criminal justice system that could lead to quick judicial decisions. In the political finance regime; and in watchdog institutions, which should strongly enforce the law and expose wrongdoings. Maharashtra must address the nexus of politics, police and crime.

Yours, etc., N Sadhasiva Reddy, Bengaluru, 23 March.

A MEMBER OF THE **ANN**
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

ASIAN VOICES

Vaccination drive losing steam

Having gotten off to an impressive start, the government's vaccination drive seems to be losing steam at a most crucial time. The government's plan to inoculate 70 lakh people in the first month has not materialised ~ only about 49 lakh people have so far been vaccinated. And on Monday, the daily count of people who took the vaccine dropped to 70,933, which was around two lakh in the third week of February.

Also, on Monday, the daily number of deaths from the virus rose to its highest in 10 weeks. And the number of people infected reached near 3,000. So, while the virus is back to its menacing best, the number of people receiving the vaccine is decreasing.

As this newspaper reported on Tuesday, many people, particularly in the rural areas, know very little about the vaccination drive, which is one of the main factors driving down the number of people receiving the vaccine. The majority of people interviewed by this newspaper said that they would have taken the jab, had they known about it.

This is a most unfortunate situation, where people are not being able to take a potentially lifesaving vaccine, simply because they are unaware of it.

Another reason why the number of people showing up at the vaccination centres is dropping, according to experts, is because of the hassles involved in the registration process

The Daily Star
and the fact that people have to take a printout of their registration document to the vaccination centres.

Not everyone ~ and especially the poor ~ has access to computers and printers, which makes this step of the process questionable. The government must, therefore, rethink many aspects of this drive before it withers away completely and the vaccines go to waste.

As the number of daily infections and deaths soar once again, we must come to terms with the harsh reality that the pandemic might still be far from over.

It is dangerous for us to think otherwise at this moment. Therefore, the government must double down on its vaccination drive and raise awareness among the populace regarding the high rate of infections and the potential benefits of getting vaccinated.

It must also evaluate the weak-points of its drive ~ for example, the complexity of the registration process for some ~ and come up with simple solutions to them.

IN MEMORIAM
SENGUPTA ARDHENDU SEKHAR — OFA. G. Office, Shillong. Passed away 2016. In fond remembrance on his birth centenary today. From family in Kolkata.



'Corruption the issue in Kerala'

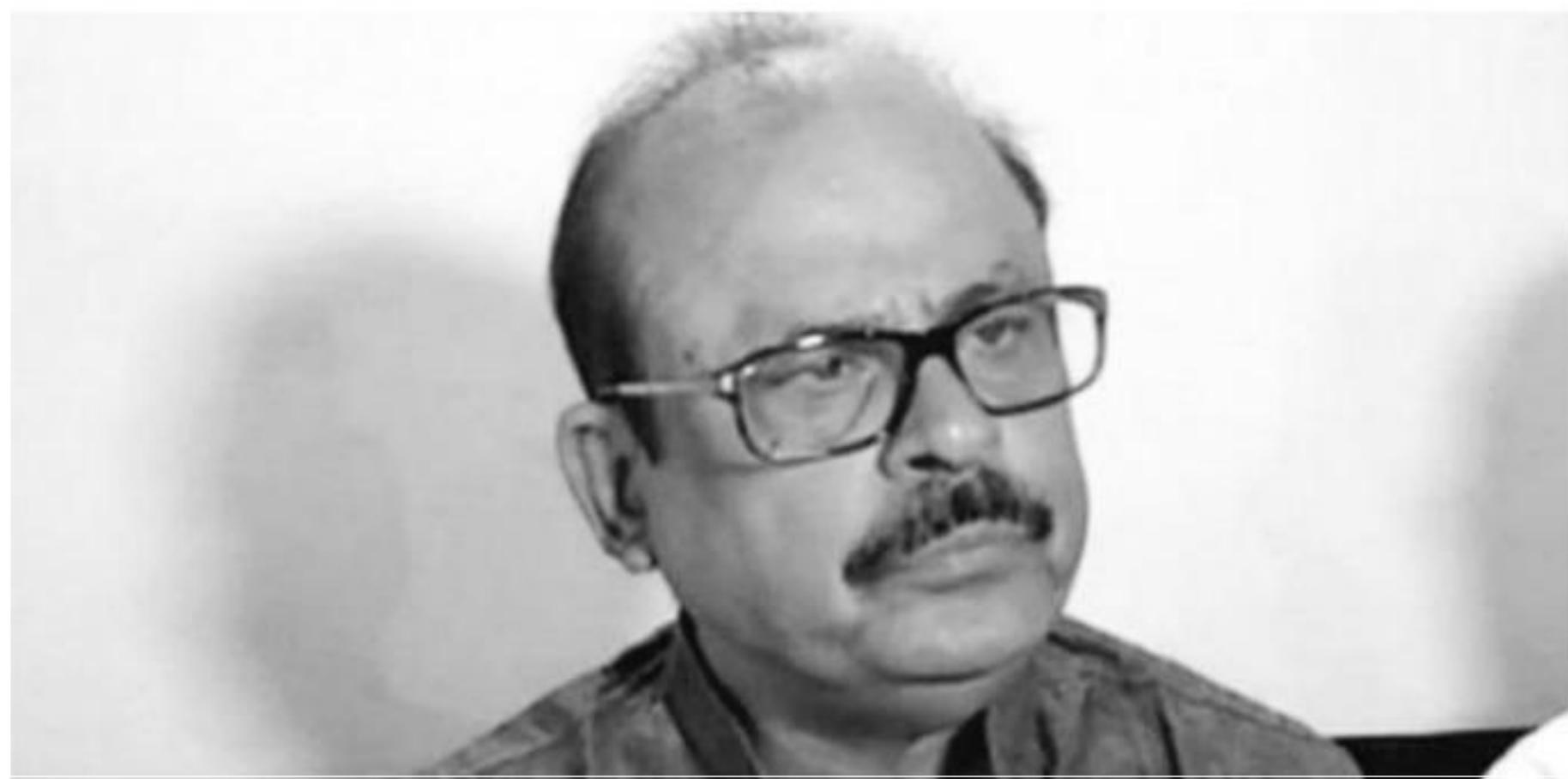
The All India Congress Committee (AICC)'s general secretary in charge of Kerala and Lakshadweep, **TARIQ ANWAR** is a veteran politician. He has been in active politics since 1972 when he joined the Congress party. He got elected for the first time to the Lok Sabha from Katihar (Bihar) in 1980. In 1999, he quit the Congress along with Sharad Pawar to form the NCP. Between 2012 and 2014, he was Union minister of state for agriculture and food processing in the then Congress-led UPA government in which the NCP was a key ally. In 2018, he quit the NCP to return to the Congress. He was subsequently inducted into the top echelons of the AICC as a general secretary. In an interview with **ABHIJEET ANAND**, Anwar spoke on various issues relating to the current round of Assembly elections, stressing on the importance of forging alliances in West Bengal, Kerala and Assam. Excerpts:

Q. The Congress seems to be focusing on Kerala assembly elections. Is it sure of winning there?

A. The tradition there is that for every alternative tenure the regime changes. Once it is the Left (that gets the mandate) and the next time it is the Congress-led United Democratic Front. This time, I think, it is the turn of Congress-led coalition. We are expecting that we will get a mandate this time.

Q. Don't you think as a national party you should concentrate in places where the BJP is strong?

A. We are working hard everywhere. This is the age of alliances. We have taken some secular parties with us and we will work to save democracy and to save secularism. The Congress ideology is very clear. So this time we will try that out of these five states where Assembly elections are being held, the Congress and its allies will win. We are trying for that. In Kerala also there are fronts — the LDF and the UDF. We will try to see that in all five states the BJP is stopped. That is why we have also forged alliances in states like West Bengal and Assam. Our priority is clear: Communal, fascist forces must be stemmed. For that purpose, we can forge alliances with all



secular parties.

Q. Is the Congress trying to make Kerala polls into a prestige issue because Rahul Gandhi is an MP from the state?

A. Every alternative tenure there is a change in regime in Kerala. People are expecting that this time the UDF will form the government. Owing to the anti-incumbency in the state, people are not happy with the Left government. Anti Incumbency factor is very strong. During these five years the government has not risen to the expectations of the people. At the same time, there have been so many scams and scandals like gold smuggling, nepotism in job appointments and dollar smuggling in the state. Kerala is politically very conscious. Its people understand politics. We are very much hopeful this time that the Congress will form the government here.

Q. You said corruption is a big issue in Kerala?

A. The CM's office is also directly or indirectly involved in gold-smuggling and other things. Enquiry is going on. There is a general perception that this Left Front government

has been the most corrupt government in the state.

Q. Will national issues like price rise and farmers' protest have any impact on the Kerala elections?

A. It is the central government which comes under attack for farmers' protest and price rise. I think the BJP will be affected directly by price rise and farmers' agitation because the central government deals with it directly. It does not come under the purview of the state government.

Q. There is a view that having Left as an ally in West Bengal has put the Congress on the back foot in fighting the Left as an opponent in Kerala. What is your take?

A. I told you that we always see the largest interest. In Bengal, the BJP is the biggest threat. Communal politics is harmful for the nation. So there we think that at any cost we should stem communal forces. But in Kerala, politics is different — our fight here is between the LDF and the UDF.

Q. Do you think the Kerala fight will become tougher if E Sreedharan is declared as the BJP's CM face?

A. I don't think people will take it

seriously. He has no public life background. He is good administrator or a technocrat. In public life he has no contribution. In this state, people are politically conscious. They cannot go by these kind of gimmicks. I say it is a kind of a gimmick. On the one hand, they are saying that those who are over 75, should not be in active politics like Advani ji, Joshi ji. So many people were compulsorily retired by Modi. Now an 87-year-old person is brought into politics and given a ticket for contesting election and they are projecting him as the future CM of Kerala. This is a contradictory action of the BJP.

Q. How would you react to a Congress member's view that it is promoting communal agenda by allying with certain parties?

A. The question does not arise. We cannot compromise with communal forces. We have all along been against the BJP and the RSS. We have alliances with those parties which are not communal. Some of these parties are formed by the Muslim leadership. They don't claim their party is working only for a particular community. They are secular. Their ideology is secular. As regards the BJP and the RSS' ideol-

ogy — everybody knows that they are working for a particular community and a particular religion. The AIUDF in Assam, the Indian Secular Front in Bengal and the IJML in Kerala never claim that they are representing a particular community. They are taking every one along with them. They are nationalist. No doubt that they belong to a particular community. At the same time, they are nationalist and they are patriots.

Q. There is resentment in the Congress over distribution of tickets. How is the party dealing with it?

A. Today, it is happening in every party. I was recently reading in the newspapers that Amit Shah had to change his travel schedule while coming to Delhi (from Assam) and had to stop over (at Kolkata) to hold urgent discussions with the Bengal BJP leadership for whole night (after the state BJP released their candidates' list). There is major resentment in the Bengal BJP (over the allotment of tickets). Their old workers who sacrificed for the BJP are feeling that they are being cheated and the defectors are being given preference.

Q. Your party is divided in two factions in Kerala. How has this affected its election preparations and organisational strength?

A. In every party there is some groupism, some differences, especially in democratic parties. It always happens. It is very difficult to get all of them together. At the same time, they are all working for the Congress party. Of course, somebody belongs to this group or that group. But it is within the party. While trying to influence leadership, they sometimes create a group. But at the same time, they are loyal to the party and the leadership.

Q. But senior Congress leader from Kerala PC Chacko quit the party alleging groupism in it?

A. Of course, the Congress party had given him (Chacko) so many opportunities. But he is not a very important factor in Kerala politics. He has no mass base.

OCCASIONAL NOTE

The Calcutta Hospital Nurses' Institution has a very strong claim upon the sympathy and support of the public, and its report, just issued, for 1920, shows that once more all the help that its friends can give will be needed to keep pace with its requirements. Expenses have increased considerably during the last few years, and, although the Committee have been enabled to meet their liabilities up to date, thanks to the support accorded to them, the future financial position is causing considerable anxiety. There is a serious shortage of nurses at the Eden Hospital at the present time, while at the end of the year, as the report points out, a considerably larger staff will be required for the new minor hospitals in the Medical College group. The new Eye Hospital and the Carmichael Hospital (Tropical Diseases) are to be opened in the latter part of the present year, and, with the exercise of the greatest economy, about Rs 30,000 a year at least will be needed for the salaries alone - none too large - of the nursing staff required. Although, the Committee anticipate a deficit of over Rs 50,000 for the year 1921 unless special support is forthcoming. If this fact be realised, it can hardly be doubted that there will be more Indian names in next year's list of subscribers than are to be found in this year's report.

ADMINISTRATION OF ADEN

The question of the transfer of Aden to the Colonial Office is under consideration. The Government would have welcomed an expression of the opinions of the Council of State and Legislative Assembly on the proposed transfer. Mr. Denys Bray would remind the Hon. Member that the proposal has long been a matter of common knowledge. It was, indeed, endorsed unanimously by the Aden Chamber of Commerce as far back as January 19, 1920, and it has been open to any Hon. Member to raise a discussion on it by means of a resolution at any stage. The whole question, including the future incidence of expenditure, is still under discussion and the correspondence cannot be laid on the table at present.

AIR ROUTES IN INDIA

The Secretary of the Commerce Department has addressed a letter to local Governments and administrations outlining the policy of the Government of India for the control and development of civil aviation in India. The Government of India are of opinion that they should retain sole power of general regulation of air traffic and control of the main air routes. Air traffic is at present regulated under the Indian Aircraft Act (1911) and the Indian Aircraft Rules (1920), and now the Government is considering the question of amendment of the Act and Rules to bring them in accordance with modern requirements. In all these matters, which are reserved for the control of the Government of India, the Government will ordinarily be guided by the advice of the Air Board.

RAJSHAHI JAIL SENSATION

Details of the sensational escape of about 700 prisoners from the Rajshahi Jail on Thursday reached Calcutta last night. It appears that prisoners in the morning, were taken outside the jail to work in a field. They were brought back under the escort of about a dozen armed warders, and were near the gaol gates when they attacked and overpowered the warders and opened the gaol gate. A large number of prisoners who were partaking of their meals rushed out and joined in the fight against the warders whose guns were snatched away. In the scuffle one prisoner was shot. Before armed police arrived on the scene the prisoners had disappeared in various directions. Twenty-five of them are reported to have been arrested on the same day by the armed police.

Poverty and the cost of nukes

SHUBHAM SHARMA

Domestic politics is a powerful determinant in the Indo-Pak nuclear dyad. The Indian right-wing has been a perennial supporter of acquiring nuclear weapons. Pokhran II was milked for political benefits. The crater was revered as a 'shakti sthal', its soil was distributed, perhaps to make deterrence amulets for the poor against the economic bombshells dropped by the embrace of neo-liberal policies. Luckily, private capital did not have any control over the nuclear programme.

But in Pakistan it was different. Military dictator Zia-ul-Haq saw the need to ally with big business against Bhutto's pseudo-socialism. From the perspective of Islamabad's external policy, the alliance with private capital helped muster resources for the military's modernisation. Agha Hasan Abidi of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) bankrolled the procurement of military equipment and another businessman, Seth Abid crucially helped in the procurement of components for the nuclear programme. The cooperation was duly reciprocated. Both the entrepreneurs drew their pound of flesh as Zia went about undoing Pakistan People's Party's (PPP) nationalization policy and empower the business and industrial elite. The latter was also employed to undo PPP's popular support base which included the labour and students' union writes Ayesha Siddiqua.

This strategy of aligning the trad-



er-merchant class and big business against the progressive elements came to fruition with the rise of Nawaz Sharif, a scion of the Ittefaq group of businesses and industries, who became premier twice in the 1990s. And it is no wonder that it was under Nawaz Sharif's tenure as prime minister that Pakistan acquired the nuclear bomb. Such an egregious intertwining of military and civilian interests was one of the many attempts by the former to weaken fledgling civilian democratic rule and create civilian clients.

Nawaz Sharif under Zia rose just as Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto had done under the tutelage of Gen. Ayub Khan. Almost on all occasions, the Pakistani

military has used such civilian clients as succour and to make them act as a civilian face of its unchecked and unbridled power. Under such circumstances, it is the military that wields complete control over its nuclear weapons with little or no control by the civilian administration. The existing crisis is even more exacerbated with the new 'prime minister select'. In Pakistan, democracy is the first to be bombed and obliterated which, fortunately, is not the case in India.

With the advent of nuclear weapons, the discipline of international relations saw a burst of deterrence theories. Although intellectually tantalizing, these are largely bogus and always stuck in a rigmarole. The

existence of nuclear weapons is the sine qua non for such scholarship; therefore there is nothing in them which could ensure a world free of nukes.

Its development as an episteme is bracketed in the oft-repeated charms of national security, national interest, survival, and capability maximization etc., which have very limited democratic participation apart from the participation of suited bureaucrats and so-called experts meeting in shiny seminars funded by big business. None of them have their homes, farmhouses, research centres, and libraries in and around places where nuclear weapons are exploded thus far from the threat of radiation-induced intergenerational infirmities.

Both India and Pakistan share unimaginable miseries in the social and economic realms. India's bid to become a great power and Pakistan's bid to become a respectable power is in no way predicated upon the presence of nuclear weapons. Had nuclear weapons been an index of greatness, Pakistan, proportionally speaking, would have enjoyed a great power status in the comity of nation-states. But as we all know, it is far from the truth. Almost a quarter i.e., 24.3 per cent of its population is eking out a living below the poverty line. Ghastly is also the case of India which does not follow the international \$1.90 boundary but pegs per capita rural and urban expenditure of Rs. 32 and Rs. 42 respectively as determinants of poverty. Since the English language does not have a single word antonym of poverty other than rich, those wretched people of India who spend more than Rs.32 and Rs. 42 are con-

sidered to be rich. The existence of nukes in no way betters their chances of escaping the poverty trap; instead their usage endangers their already wretched life the most.

Therefore, it is only through a democratic movement from below that nuclear weapons could be shunned and de-operationalised. All prior attempts at the international and the regional level have either been mired in great power imperialism which tends to make all such multilateral bodies exclusive clubs or cloaked in the thick quackery of security.

In the West, the anti-nuclear peace movements succeeded in the tabooing of nuclear weapons but have failed to register success mainly because of their absence in the political domain. South Asia too faces a similar conundrum as in India none other than the Left takes the consequences of nuclear weapons seriously. The rest either fall in line or remain silent. And in Pakistan there is no question of a political debate on nuclear weapons because of the predominance of the military-mullah combine. The latter combination departs from all other instances because the establishment sees its nukes as symbols of lost Islamic power. And hence, the missiles are named after Islamic kings and warlords of the yore, Ghori and Ghazni are two such examples.

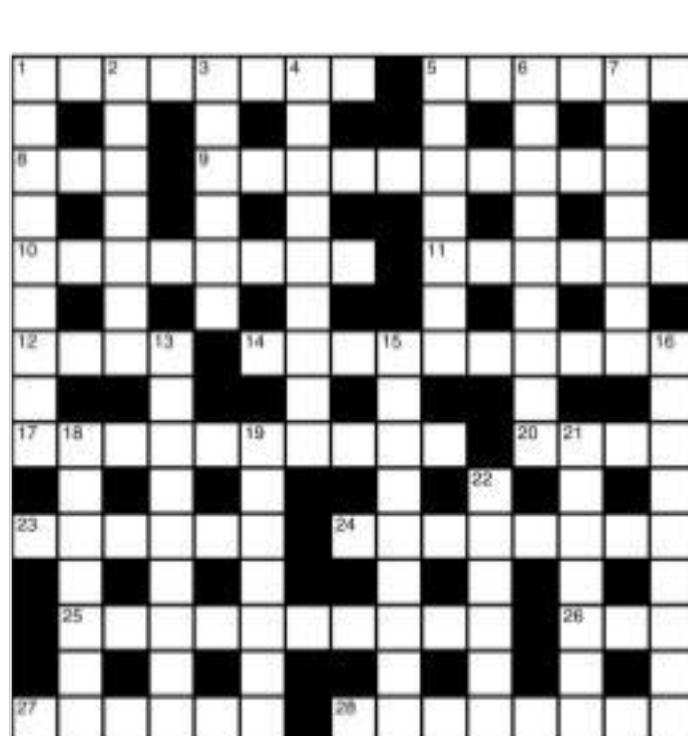
Notwithstanding this, we should keep the flame of a nuclear-free South Asia burning, at least as long as the threat of nuclear war haunts us.

The writer is a student of world history at the University of Cambridge.

concluded.

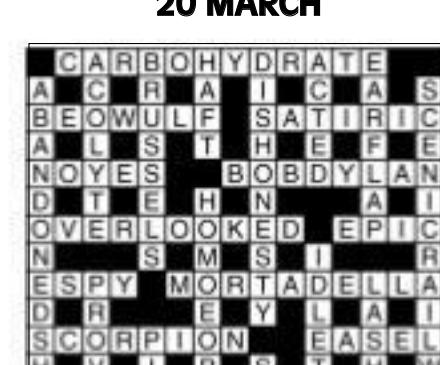
NO 28866

CROSSWORD



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

SOLUTION FOR 20 MARCH



ACROSS

- 1 Bambi largely recollected keeping close to fizzy drink — this one? (8)
- 5 Indulge oneself? Wife needs to approve (6)
- 8 Minor employee from firm heading for glory (3)
- 9 Improvised reason trial isn't fair? (4-6)
- 10 So, as slept around, not a virgin (8)
- 11 Choose English team's first striker (6)
- 12 Too dismal, song needs outer sections removed (4)
- 14 A mine boring copper, overdue to cave in (10)
- 17 Call me back about way to reach understanding (10)
- 20 Cry from unknown Member

DOWN

- 1 Key clue for "moor"? (9)
- 2 Plant causing disappearance of pests? (7)
- 3 Coax Jack into finally wearing fancy lace (6)
- 4 Quickly gathering ore's not

- 5 exactly rocket science! (9)

- 6 Treat domestic animal cruelly – this one? (7)
- 6 Reasonably good island breaks in this area (9)
- 7 Scrap old pieces covered in banned pesticide (7)
- 13 Run ragged with Tana, go ape (5-4)
- 15 One can time railway route (9)
- 16 Tense from start to finish, counting on jazzman (9)
- 18 Left to occupy post, returning to Jersey (7)
- 19 Thriftily manage hot American group (7)
- 21 21st century boxing the start for Tyson Fury (7)
- 22 Tycoon, not married, is related in father's side (6)

RAILWAY ACCIDENT AT KIDDERPORE DOCKS

Early on Saturday morning an accident took place at the Kidderpore Docks, when a train ran into a gate and carried away the stone structure. Five persons received injuries and one man has since died. The train, with a full load, was proceeding along the docks from south to north. When it was nearing No. 4 gate, which is to the west of the double-leaf bridge, the gatemen closed the gate and at the same time the drop gate across the road was lowered. The western half of the gate, however, swung back and before the driver could pull up the engine ran into it. About a dozen men were standing against the drop gate and five of them were struck by falling stones.

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

THUMBNAILS

Trai on bulk messages: The telecom regulator on Friday released a list of 40 "defaulter" principal entities, including large banks like HDFC Bank, SBI and ICICI Bank, that are not fulfilling the regulatory norms on bulk commercial messages despite repeated reminders. Hardening its stance on the issue, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India warned that defaulting entities should comply with the stipulated requirements by 31 March 2021 "to avoid any disruption in the communication with customers" from 1 April 2021.

Mi expansion: Smartphone maker Mi India plans to double its offline retail touch points to over 30,000 from 15,000 now in the next one year. The company also aims to double the number of exclusive Mi stores from 3000+ to 6000+ over the next two years, according to a Press statement from the company. The initiative is expected to generate employment for over 10,000 individuals, it said, adding that a support package of Rs 100 crore has been planned to help the retail partners set up and run these stores over the next two years.

BMW Motorrad: BMW Motorrad India has launched all-new BMW M 1000 RR ~ the first M model from the company. Available as completely built-up units, the motorcycles can be booked at all BMW Motorrad India dealerships immediately. Vikram Pawah, president, BMW Group India, said: "The all-new BMW M 1000 RR is born on the race-track and stands for absolute dedication and the will to perform."

Purple.com deal: Purple.com, a leading online beauty destination, closed a \$45-million deal from Verlinvest, Sequoia Capital India, Blume Ventures, and JSW Ventures. While the three existing investors reinforced their commitment, Purple welcomed Sequoia Capital India. The investment will further bolster the brand's ambition to deliver 8-10X growth in the next 4-5 years, according to a Press release.

Vivo smartphone: Smart phone maker Vivo has unveiled Vivo X60 series of flagships in major international markets, including India. Featuring professional photography capabilities, premium sleek design and unparalleled performance, the X60 series 5G consisting of ~ X60, X60 Pro and X60 Pro+ marks the inaugural Vivo devices to be conceived in collaboration with ZEISS, said a Press release.

Sebi norms: The Securities and Exchange Board of India on Friday put in place a new registration framework for registered intermediaries transferring business to other legal entity.

PTI

Will invite financial bids for Air India soon: Puri

Govt has started the process to sell 100 per cent stake in the state-run carrier

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

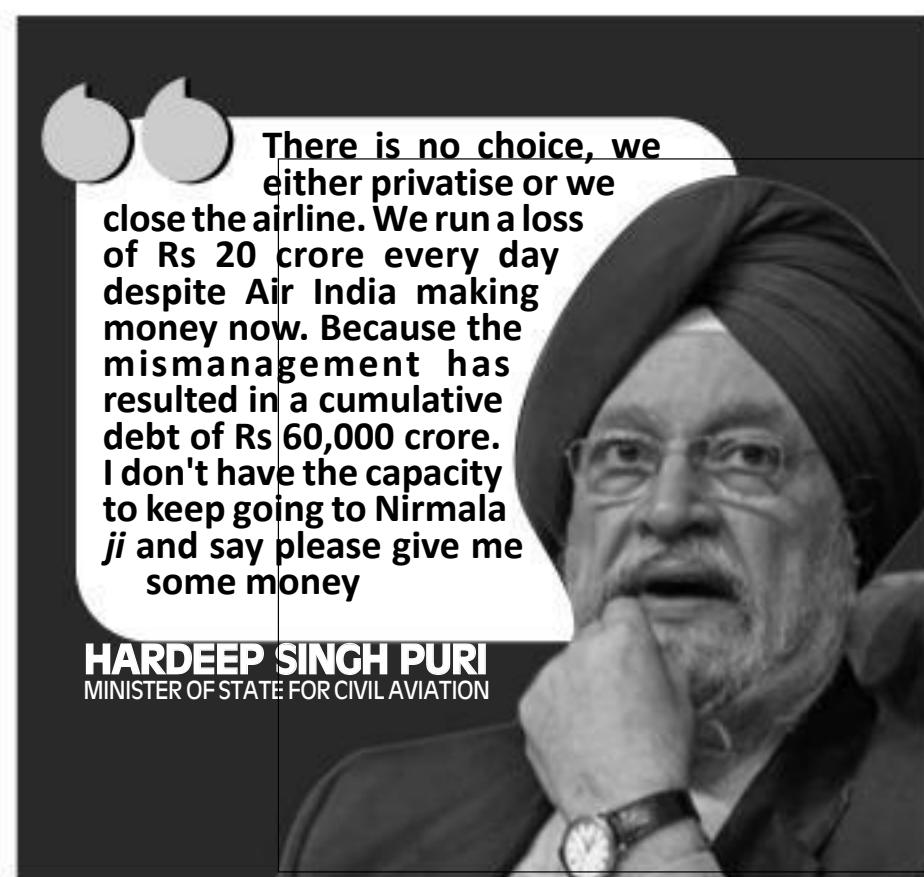
The government is looking at a new timeline for Air India disinvestment and financial bids will be invited in the coming days, Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri said today.

Noting that there is no choice but to either "privatise or close" Air India, he said the government will have to keep the airline running till it gets divested.

"We are looking at another timeline now, what is called data room for prospective bidders to look at... that is opened up, 64 days for the financial bids to come in. After that it is the question of taking a decision and handing over the airline," the minister of state for civil aviation said.

He was speaking at a session at the Times Network India Economic Conclave.

The government has started the process to sell its entire 100 per cent stake in Air India that has been in losses since it merged with Indian Air-



HARDEEP SINGH PURI
MINISTER OF STATE FOR CIVIL AVIATION

lines in 2007.

"...There is no choice, we either privatise or we close the airline. We run a loss of Rs 20 crore every day despite Air India making money now. Because the mismanagement has resulted in a cumulative debt of Rs 60,000 crore. I don't have the capacity to keep going to Nirmala ji and say please give me some money"

He was speaking at a session at the Times Network India Economic Conclave.

The government has started the process to sell its entire 100 per cent stake in Air India that has been in losses since it merged with Indian Air-

say please give me some money," he said in an apparent reference to seeking funds to run Air India from the finance minister.

He also noted that earlier attempts at Air India privatisation were not successful because the attempts were half-hearted.

Puri also spoke about the

domestic civil aviation sector, which is recovering from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

"If we had not seen the virus raising its ugly heads again, I would have opened up domestic civil aviation 100 per cent by 1 April in the summer schedule... The total revival of the sector in terms of domestic aviation, opening up, has been delayed by 15-20 days," the minister said.

He also took a dig at the Congress for their criticism over privatisation of airports.

"I am talking about confused Congress politician (CCP). One of the better things they did was the privatisation of the two airports (Delhi and Mumbai) for which they can legitimately claim credit. Delhi and Mumbai airports are success stories," Puri noted.

According to him, privatisation of Delhi and Mumbai airports resulted in revenues of Rs 29,000 crore for AAi (Airports Authority of India) between 2006 and 2020. That is the money used to privatisate Tier II and III airports.

Commenting on the transition, M&M Group chairman Anand Mahindra said:

"One of the reasons we had succeeded and thrived over the past 75 years was that we were good at introducing change in the right measure at the right time."

He further said: "Anish is

the right leader for the Mahindra Group. As the MD and CEO, he will have a complete oversight of all Mahindra Group businesses, including our global operations, the transformation agenda and synergising and driving several strategic programmes."

Shah had joined Mahindra in 2015 as the group president-strategy, where he led strategy development; built capabilities such as digitisation and data sciences; enabled synergies across group companies and managed the risk and performance review of organisations.

Commenting on the transi-



Anish Shah to take over as MD & CEO of Mahindra

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Mahindra & Mahindra (M&M) today said its current deputy managing director and group chief financial officer Anish Shah will take over as the managing director and chief executive officer from 2 April 2021. He succeeds Pawan Goenka, who will retire as the MD and CEO, and member of the board of directors of M&M Ltd on 2 April 2021. M&M had on 20 December 2019 announced a top management succession.

In November, when Anand

Mahindra transitions to the

role of non-executive chair-

man, Shah will become the

first professional MD and

CEO in the history of the

Mahindra Group to have a

complete oversight of and

responsibility for the Mahin-

dra Group businesses, the

company said in a statement.

Shah had joined Mahin-

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Odisha Assembly stalled by Cong

Demand discussion on farm laws

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, 26 MARCH:

The impact of the Bharat Bandh by peasant organizations reverberated in the Odisha Assembly with the Congress paralyzing proceedings throughout the day.

Echoing the demand for repeal of the three farm laws, the Congress members trooped into the well as soon as the House assembled for the day.

Congress MLA Taraprasad Bahinipati said protesting farmers are observing a bandh throughout the country, we demand a discussion on the three farm laws.

Odisha reported 8 rape, 4 murder cases everyday in 2020

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, 26 MARCH:

As many as eight rape cases besides four murders are being perpetrated on an average everyday in Odisha, according to the White Paper 2020 tabled in the state assembly on Friday.

A total of 2,984 rape cases were registered last year of which 2,907 cases were found to be true. Charge sheets were filed in 2,054 cases. As many as 1.34 lakh cognizable offences, 1,29,305 cases were found to be true and charge sheets were filed in 93,229 cases. Of the 1,470 murder cases registered last year, 1,392 were found to be true and charge sheets have been submitted in 694 cases.

Similarly, the police registered 2,166 loot cases and filed charge sheets in 882 cases. Of the total cases, 2,127 were found to be true.

As many as 1,816 accused persons have been arrested and stolen properties worth Rs 4.24 crore were recovered during the year.

However, the report stated, the law and order situation was peaceful during 2020.

Twenty-seven cases of ani-

World Bank funded mangrove regeneration prog fails

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KENDRAPARA, 26 MARCH:

With barely one percent survival rate, the World Bank funded mangrove regeneration project in Bhitaranika National Park in Odisha has raised questions over proper utilization of funds.

An RTI activist Lambodhar Barik whose query revealed the one percent survival figure states that there is room for suspicion that the funds were misutilised.

The World Bank funds earmarked under Integrated Coastal Zone Management

Programme (ICZMP) for regeneration of mangroves in the denuded wetland areas of Bhitaranika National Park seem to have gone down the drain, he said.

The Rajnagar Mangrove (Wildlife) Forest Division replying to RTI query by Barik revealed one percent survival out of the 105,225 species planted seven years ago at seaside Goja, Charigharia, Debendranarayanpur and Chittakholia.

An NGO- Action For Protection of Wild Animal (APOWA)- had been entrusted with the plantation pro-

gramme by the then forest authorities. The plantation was claimed to have been done in 42 hectares of forest land. However there is almost no trace of the planted mangrove species.

The survival of planted mangroves has been found at 1% in most of the areas. Therefore, it could be construed that the regeneration programme was a complete failure. We are looking into whether post-plantation care like fencing was undertaken or not," said Bikash Ranjan Dash, the Divisional Forest Officer, Rajnagar Mangrove (wildlife) Forest Division.

hit by water scarcity.

There are several villages without any water source and women folk continue to trek distances to fetch water from streams or dig up a pit.

Long queues with pitchers early in the morning are a common site.

The situation at Nelametta village was the same and everyday villagers would fight at the lone tube well.

There were many who would not leave the spot blocking the rest from access to water.

PWarralu decided to bring an end to such quarrels. I had heard of a lottery system in

bet of the husband's name. The person with 'A' will get the first spot and if there are more than two with their names beginning with A, the second alphabet will be considered and accordingly they will take water without any fight.

The villagers agreed to follow.

The villagers however charged that the local authorities have ignored their repeated demands for an overhead water tank and ways to solve the water scarcity problem.

The tubewell provides 10 buckets of water in 24 hours, they complained.

The Bhima Mandali site near Naktideul in Sambalpur district, among the oldest Rock Art site of Odisha spread over 100 metres and open caves separated by forest cover, is neglected and vandalized due to lack of protective measures. There are sixteen cave shelters, of which four have rock art.

An INTACH team led by Dr. Biswajit Mohanty visited the site last week and reported on the sad state of affairs of this ancient site. They found that most of the rock art is indecipherable and faded, with graf-

fitti scrawled on the rock face.

Mohanty expressed concern on the damage being caused by tourists and vandals. There is an illegal ashram built in the vicinity, he noted. The local forest officials confirm that the area is part of Landimal reserve forest which is spread over 150 sq.kms and adjoins Hatidhra forests with abundant wildlife.

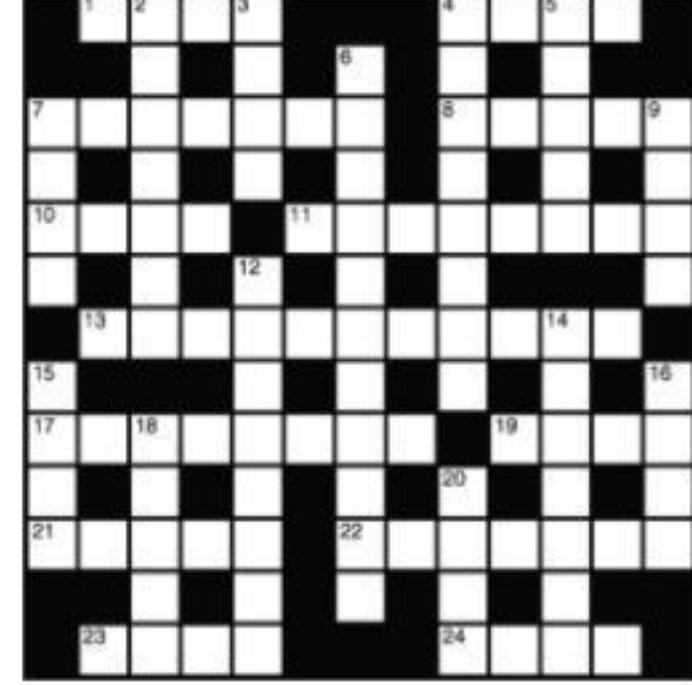
According to historian and INTACH member Anil Dhir, Odisha has the richest repository of rock art in Eastern India with more than a hundred rock shelters with rock paintings and engravings.

The rock art at Tilori in Kandhamal district has numerous geometric symbols, dots, lines along with animals and human figures dating from the late Pleistocene period.

Biswajit Mohanty, said he has written to concerned authorities for proper preservation, signage, guards at the site.

LEISURE

10 MINUTE CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1 Flightless bird (4)
4 Nobleman (4)
7 Submissive (7)
8 Repri mand (5)
10 Highest point (4)
11 Reminiscent (8)
13 Basically (11)
17 Complete (8)
19 Type of star (4)
21 Ignominy (5)
22 Foreboding evil (7)
23 Undiluted (4)
24 Location (4)

DOWN
2 Control and make use of (7)
3 Dry (4)
4 Bucolic (8)
5 Call to mind (5)
6 Enjoyment (11)
7 Hitch (4)
9 Responsibility (4)
12 Recklessly determined (4-4)
14 Careful watch (7)
15 Felines (4)
16 Raised platform (4)
18 Clay rock (5)
20 Fail to hit (4)

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1 Aisle, 12 Hard-hitting, 16 Chateau, 18 Amply, 20 Alibi, 21 Neutron, 22 Sag, 23 Erect.

DOWN
1 Once, 3 Amazing, 4 Traduce, 5 Cygnets, 6 Chaos, 7 Deter, 8 Constituent,
9 Onset, 10 Conga, 11 Soldier, 12 Hard-hitting, 13 Amazing, 14 Traduce, 15 Cygnets, 16 Chao-

BEETLE BAILEY/Mort Walker



RED EYE/Bill Yates & Mel Casson



DADDY DAZE/John Kovaleski



NEED TO KNOW

HOSPITALS

- AIIMS 2658500, 2658900
- Moolchand Medcity (formerly Hospital) 4200000 & 24-hour Chemist Shop 420000447
- Vidyasagar Institute for Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences 26924300, 26924304
- Batra Hospital & Medical Research Centre 29051280, 29958747
- Deen Dayal Upadhyay 25496320, 25494403
- Guru Tegh Bahadur 23717473, 23325320

RAILWAY INQUIRY

- General Inquiry 139
- Toll Free Nos. 1800112511
- SMS Inquiry Nos. 57886, 54959, 5676747

ROADWAYS INQUIRY

- ISBT (General Inquiry): 23868836, 23865181
- AIR INDIA Flight Inquiry and Reservation 00801801407
- INDIGO AIRLINES New Delhi City Office 43513185, Call Centre 09910383838, 18001803838, Reservation 43513186; Indigo Airlines Air-

FLIGHT INQUIRY

- Port 011-25671580; Terminal I-B 25671576, Palam Road 25671579, 18001803838
- JET AIRWAYS Flight Inquiry and Reservation 39841111
- EMIRATES Flight Inquiry and Reservation 33773377
- Air Canada Flight Inquiry 25656421/25656431 Reservation 41538183
- Air France Flight Inquiry and Reservation 23466262 (City) 25652294 (Airport)
- Kuwait Airways Flight Inquiry and Reservation 23354373

SCRABBLE® BRAND



PAR SCORE 170-180

by JUDD

FOUR RACK TOTAL TIME LIMIT: 20 MIN

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JUDD'S TOTAL 202



Some of them went in and they're hugging and kissing the police and the guards. You know, they had great relationships. A lot of the people were waved in and then they walked in and they walked out...

FORMER PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP

DEFENDING CAPITOL RIOTERS, SAYS THERE WAS ZERO THREAT

WEATHER

CITY	MAX	MIN
SINGAPORE	29°C	25°C H
HONG KONG	26°C	20°C H
TOKYO	11°C	07°C CL
LONDON	08°C	10°C R
DUBAI	26°C	20°C R
SAN FRANCISCO	09°C	04°C S
NEW YORK	16°C	10°C C
MOSCOW	08°C	05°C H

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

THUMBNAILS



Volkswagen cars stand inside a delivery tower in Wolfsburg, Germany on Friday. AP

Tornado hits Georgia: Tornadoes and severe storms have torn through the Deep South, killing at least five people as strong winds wrecked homes and downed power lines. The tornado outbreak rolled into western Georgia early Friday. Meteorologists said one large, dangerous tornado moved through Newnan and surrounding communities in the Atlanta area. AP

Sticky bombs in Af: Sticky bombs slapped onto cars trapped in Kabul's chaotic traffic are the newest weapons terrorizing Afghans in the increasingly lawless nation, as Washington searches for a responsible exit after decades of war. The primitive devices, sometimes made in mechanics' workshops for little money, are used by militants, criminals . AP

Aid groups call on Biden for plans to share vaccines

WASHINGTON, 26 MARCH

A coalition of nongovernmental organisations is calling on President Joe Biden to immediately begin developing plans to share an expected surplus of hundreds of millions of Covid vaccine doses with the world, once US demand for shots is met.

Biden has repeatedly said his primary focus is on ensuring all Americans can get vaccinated, and on Thursday he outlined a new goal to deliver 200 million doses cumulatively over his first 100 days in office.

But with all adults set to be eligible for shots by May 1, and the US set to have enough vaccine for its entire population by the end of July, Biden is being asked to facilitate the sharing of excess doses with the world and to do so without putting strings on the injections or engaging in vaccine diplomacy.

In a letter to Biden sent Friday and obtained exclusively by The Associated Press, the groups 30 NGOs including the ONE Campaign, the International Rescue Committee, Catholic Relief Services and Save the Children call on Biden's administration to commit to sharing excess doses through the World Health Organization-backed Vaccines Global Access, or COVAX, facility.

It is estimated that there could be twice as many deaths from Covid if rich countries monopolize the first doses of vaccines instead of making sure they are distributed globally, the groups write. "Vaccine hoarding could cost the global economy up to \$9.2 trillion. Wealthy countries will bear half of those costs because of supply chain disruptions and demand shocks."

They argue COVAX would ensure the vaccines are distributed in a way to maximize equity.

Other countries, such as Russia, China and Israel, have sought to use vaccine sales to bolster their geopolitical positioning. AP

Indian-American doctor sworn in as US Surgeon General



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON, 26 MARCH

Indian-American physician Vivek Murthy has been sworn in as the 21st Surgeon General of the US, a role in which his top priority would be to end the coronavirus pandemic that has severely hit the country and be a voice for science.

Honoured to be sworn in as your Surgeon General. I owe this day to my family who has guided & supported me every step of the way, Dr Murthy, 43, said on Thursday soon after being sworn in as the top doctor of the country by Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra.

He has occupied the position of America's Surgeon

General for the second time. In 2011, president Barack Obama tapped him to serve on the advisory group on prevention, health promotion, and integrative and public health.

I stand ready to work with you to end this pandemic & build a world where good health is within everyone's

grasp, he said. Ready to take on this position as the Nation's Doctor to help end this pandemic, be a voice for science, & support our nation on its path to rebuilding and healing, said Dr Murthy. During his confirmation hearing in February, he said that seven of his family members in India and America have died due to the virus. A day earlier Murthy was confirmed by the Senate by 57-43 votes. As US Surgeon General, Murthy will advise President Biden on the pandemic and will be the federal government's leading voice on public health.

In 2013, Obama nominated Dr Murthy to be the Surgeon General. He was the youngest ever to hold the

office at the age of 37.

During his previous tenure as 19th Surgeon General, Dr Murthy has created initiatives to tackle America's most pressing public health challenges. As America's Doctor he helped lead the national response to a range of health challenges, including the Ebola and Zika viruses, the opioid crisis, and the growing threat of stress and loneliness to Americans' physical and mental wellbeing. He also issued the first Surgeons General's report on Alcohol, Drugs and Health, in which he challenged the nation to expand access to prevention and treatment and to recognise addiction as a chronic illness, not a character flaw. Dr Murthy

continued the office's legacy on preventing tobacco-related disease, releasing a historic Surgeon General's report on e-cigarettes and youth.

Prior to his tenure as Surgeon General, Dr Murthy co-founded VISIONS, a global HIV/AIDS education organization; the Swasthya Project, a rural health partnership that trained women in South India to become community health workers and educators; TrialNetworks, a technology company dedicated to improving collaboration and efficiency in clinical trials; and Doctors for America, a non-profit mobilising physicians and medical students to improve access to affordable care.

Senate panel split over nomination of Indian-American Vanita Gupta to a key Justice Dept position: The Senate Judiciary Committee has ended in a tie vote over the nomination of Indian-American civil rights lawyer Vanita Gupta as associate attorney general of the United States, amid objections from the Republicans. The committee on Thursday voted 11-11 on Gupta's nomination. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a Democrat, can now file a discharge motion on her nomination to allow a full Senate vote on her nomination. If confirmed, Gupta, 46, would be the first woman of colour to serve as associate attorney general, and the first civil rights lawyer to serve in one of the top three positions at the US Department of Justice. More than 100 organisations have urged the Senate to confirm Gupta. Under the provisions of S. Res. 27, Leader Schumer may now file a discharge motion on Ms Gupta's nomination to place her on the executive calendar, the Senate Judiciary Committee said after it voted for the nomination of Vanita Gupta to be US Associate Attorney General by a vote of 11-11. Ahead of the vote, all Republican members of the Senate Judiciary Committee wrote a letter to Senator Durbin demanding a second confirmation hearing on Gupta. PTI

Quad meet: US to hold China 'accountable' in the region

Biden says will also press Beijing to follow the rules on a range of issues, including SCS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON, 26 MARCH

The United States, working with its partners and allies is going to hold China "accountable" in the region and also press Beijing to follow the rules on a range of issues, including the South China Sea, President Joe Biden has said.

Addressing his first formal news conference in the White House on Thursday, Biden referred to his recent meeting with leaders of the Quad countries involving India, Australia and Japan and said that soon he is going to invite an alliance of democracies to come to Washington DC to discuss the future.

Earlier this month, and apparently got the Chinese attention, that's why did it, I met with our allies and - how we're going to hold China accountable in the region, Australia, India, Japan, the United States, the so-called Quad, because we have to have democracies working together, he said while answering a question on US-China relations under his watch.

We are going to make it clear that, in order to deal with these things, we are going to hold China accountable to follow the rules, to follow the maritime

whether it relates to the South China Sea or the North China Sea or the agreement made on Taiwan or a whole range of other things, he asserted.

The virtual summit on 12 March was attended by President Biden, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga.

In a joint statement, the four leaders of the Quad had pledged to strengthen cooperation on the "defining challenges of our time" and said they will continue to prioritise the role of international law in the maritime domain and facilitate collaboration, including in maritime security, to meet challenges to the rules-based maritime

order in the East and South China Seas.

The first summit of the four leaders took place amidst China's increasing military muscle flexing in the Indo-Pacific region has become a major talking point among leading global powers. The US has been favouring making Quad a security architecture to check China's growing assertiveness.

Biden's restricted press conference, amidst the pandemic, was attended by 30 reporters from various media outlets, including two foreign correspondents.

President Biden, in response to a question, said he sees "stiff competition" with China. China has an overall goal -- and I don't criticise

them for the goal, but they have an overall goal to become the leading country in the world, the wealthiest country in the world, and the most powerful country in the world. That's not going to happen on my watch because the United States is going to continue to grow and expand, he said.

After becoming the 46th President of the United States on January 20, Biden has spoken with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping over the phone once. The phone call, he said, lasted for two hours.

Biden said as vice president during the Obama administration, he spent hours together with Xi, also General Secretary of the ruling Communist Party of China and the commander-in-chief of the military.

He noted that back in the 60s, America used to invest a little over 2 per cent of the entire GDP in pure research and investment in science. Today, it's 0.7 per cent. I'm going to change that. We're going to change that, Biden said.

"The future lies in who can, in fact, own the future as it relates to technology, quantum computing, a whole range of things, including in medical fields. And so what I'm going to do is make sure we invest closer to 2 per cent," he said.

China slams Biden claims 'exemplary' record in observing international rules: China on Friday hit back at US President Joe Biden for his assertion that he would make Beijing accountable to follow international rules, saying that it has an exemplary record in observing the UN-based international system, while Washington lagged far behind. The relations between the US and China are at an all-time low. The two countries are currently engaged in a bitter confrontation over various issues, including trade, the origins of the novel coronavirus pandemic, the communist giant's aggressive military moves in the disputed South China Sea and human rights. PTI



WOUNDED HEARTS



Mourners walk along the temporary fence put up around the parking lot of a King Soopers grocery store on Friday where a mass shooting took place earlier in the week Thursday. AP

UK MPs vote to extend emergency Covid laws until September

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON, 26 MARCH

British lawmakers have voted unanimously to extend the emergency legislation for lockdown measures to control the spread of coronavirus for another six months, until September. In a House of Commons vote on Thursday night, the Coronavirus Act 2020 was passed by 484 votes to 76, a majority of 408.

An unexpected rebellion within the ruling Conservative Party ranks saw 36 Tory backbenchers vote against the government legislation in opposition of the continuing curbs on freedoms and 21 Labour MPs as well as the Liberal Democrats also voted against the extension.



"I cannot answer whether we will be retiring it in six months. My preference would be yes, but given the last year, I think a prediction would be hasty," UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock told MPs ahead of the vote on the emergency powers, which must be reviewed every six months by law.

The minister said that 12 provisions in the legislation

were no longer needed because of progress that had been made in dealing with the deadly virus. These include easing some responsibilities on the social care sector, laws governing the retention of biometric data for health and security purposes, and obligations on businesses that work in the food supply chain.

The act was described as "draconian" by several MPs

ahead of the vote, with Steve Baker, deputy chairman of the anti-lockdown Covid Recovery Group, dubbing it "excessive and disproportionate". The libertarian in me is also trying to protect people's fundamental right to life and their ability to live their lives normally, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson had said ahead of the vote.

And the only way really to restore that for everybody is for us to beat the disease and the best path to freedom is down the cautious but irreversible road map that we've set out that's what the freedom lover wants, he said.

EU leaders grapple with surge of infections, vaccine issues: European Union leaders have

failed to settle a fight about the distribution of Covid shots among member states but pledged to strengthen vaccine export controls and production on EU soil amid a shortage of doses and spikes in new cases.

Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz criticised the allocation of shots in the EU, saying that some countries were receiving more than their fair share at the cost of others. As the leader of a coalition of six countries, he demanded a correction mechanism, raising tensions between capitals from where the leaders were holding their remote summit.

When member states have a lot less vaccines available to them than others, then I think

this is a big issue for Europe, Kurz said. This could cause damage to the European Union like we haven't seen in a long time.

EU medicines regulator approves new vaccine production sites: The European Medicines Agency has approved new manufacturing sites for coronavirus vaccines made by Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and AstraZeneca, in a move that could significantly boost Europe's supply of the shots. In a statement published on Friday, the European Union's medicines regulator said it had approved sites in the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland for the COVID-19 vaccines made by the companies.

Dominion Voting sues Fox for \$1.6Bn over 2020 election claims

WASHINGTON, 26 MARCH

Dominion Voting Systems on Friday filed a \$1.6 billion defamation lawsuit against Fox News, arguing the cable news giant falsely claimed in an effort to boost faltering ratings that the voting company had rigged the 2020 election.

It's the first defamation suit filed against a media outlet by the voting company, which was a target of misleading, false and bizarre claims spread by President Donald Trump and his allies in the aftermath of Trump's election loss to Joe Biden. Those claims helped spur on rioters who stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 in a violent siege that left five people dead, including a police officer. The siege led to Trump's historic second impeachment.

Dominion argues that Fox News, which amplified inaccurate assertions that Dominion altered votes, "sold a false story of election fraud in order to serve its own commercial purposes, severely injuring Dominion in the process," according to a copy of the lawsuit obtained by The Associated Press.

"The truth matters. Lies have consequences," the lawsuit said. "Fox sold a false story of election fraud in order to serve its own commercial purposes, severely injuring Dominion in the process. If this case does not rise to the level of defamation by a broadcaster, then nothing does."

Some Fox News on-air reporting segments have debunked some of the claims targeting Dominion. An email sent to Fox News on Friday morning, seeking comment on the lawsuit, was not immediately returned.

There was no widespread fraud in the 2020 election, a fact that a range of election officials across the country — and even Trump's attorney general, William Barr — have confirmed.

AP



If Beijing want to credibly rebut claims of human rights abuses in Xinjiang, it should allow the Human Rights full access to verify the truth

AFTER CHINA BANS UK POLITICIANS TO RETALIATE HUMAN RIGHTS SANCTIONS IN XINJIANG PROVINCE

Former Lankan Prez Sirisena denies prior info of Easter Sunday attacks

COLOMBO, 26 MARCH

Former Sri Lankan president Maithripala Sirisena on Friday denied charges that he had any prior knowledge of the 2019 Easter Sunday suicide bombings that killed 258 people, including 11 Indians.

This was Sirisena's first public reaction since he was accused of criminal negligence by the presidential panel appointed by him to probe the devastating attack.

Nine suicide bombers, belonging to local Islamist extremist group National Thawheed Jamaat (NTJ) linked to ISIS, carried out a series of blasts that tore through three churches and as many luxury hotels in Sri Lanka, killing 258 people and injuring over 500 people on 21 April, 2019.

The probe panel found Sirisena and the top defence establishment supervised by him and the defence minister guilty of negligence.

The panel has asked that the Attorney General establish legal proceedings against them. Addressing Parliament, Sirisena denied any prior knowledge about the attack.

PTI

Modi's visit: Four killed in violent protest in Bangladesh

Critics accused Modi's Hindu-nationalist party of stoking religious polarisation in India

AP & AGENCIES

COX'S BAZAR/ DHAKA,

26 MARCH

At least four people were killed in the Bangladeshi city of Chittagong on Friday after police fired rubber bullets at protesters during a demonstration against the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a police official said.

"We had to fire teargas and rubber bullets to disperse them as they entered a police station and carried out extensive vandalism," Rafiqul Islam, the police official told media, referring to protesters.

Protests against Modi's visit were also flared in the capital Dhaka, where dozens of people, including two journalists, were injured in clashes with police, witnesses said.

Modi's visit sparked violent protests at Dhaka's main mosque that were dispersed by police using tear gas and rubber bullets—killing scores of people—after clashes broke out between groups of demonstrators, officials and wit-

nesses said.

Critics accuse Modi's Hindu-nationalist party of stoking religious polarisation in India and discriminating against minorities, particularly Muslims.

Bangladesh PM Hasina, a key partner for India in maintaining regional stability, welcomed Modi at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka on Friday morning.

By Friday afternoon, hundreds of protesters had gathered outside the Baitul Mukarram mosque. Witnesses said violent clashes broke out after one faction of protesters began waving their shoes as a sign of disrespect to Modi, and another group tried to stop them.

Local media said the protesters who tried to stop the shoe-waving are aligned with the ruling Awami League party. The party criticized the other protest faction for attempting to create chaos in the country during Modi's visit.

Local TV showed protesters throwing stones at the police, who were heavily pre-



sent on the streets near the mosque. Somoy TV reported that at least 40 people were injured, including journalists, and were taken to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital for treatment.

Abdul Mazid, a businessman who joined the prayer, said that he was trapped in the mosque after trying to flee when violence erupted during the prayer. "I had a feeling that something was going to happen. I am still inside the mosque," he said by phone. "There is huge violence, I can

see from here."

A police official said members of several Islamist groups had joined the protests, but it was not immediately clear which groups they were representing. The official spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations. He declined to give any figures for how many people were injured.

While Modi's trip is mainly focused on Bangladesh's anniversary celebrations, the visit also has a political agenda at home, as voting begins Saturday in several state-level elections, including West Bengal, which borders Bangladesh.

With an eye on galvanizing Hindu support in the key battleground state, Modi is set to visit a Hindu temple outside Dhaka that's sacred to the Matua community back in West Bengal. The Matua sect's vote is expected to determine the winner of at least seven seats in a close race for control of the state assembly.

In recent weeks, demonstrators have urged the Indian leader not to come to Bangladesh and chanted anti-India and anti-Modi slogans. Student protesters called Modi "the butcher of Gujarat." Others carried signs reading "Go Back Modi, Go Back India," and "Go Back Killer Modi."

Modi was chief minister in the western state of Gujarat in 2002 when Hindu-Muslim riots left more than 1,000 people dead. Allegations that authorities allowed and even encouraged the bloodshed have long followed Modi, who has repeatedly denied having any role. India's Supreme Court has said it found no evidence to prosecute him.

"This is one of the most memorable days of my life. I am grateful that Bangladesh has included me in this event. I am grateful that Bangladesh has invited India to take part in this function. It is a matter of our pride that we got the opportunity to honour Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with Gandhi Peace Prize," said Modi. He handed over the award, a citation, a plaque and a shawl to Sheikh Rehana in the presence of Prime Minister Hasina.

Hasina in her address thanked Prime Minister Modi and the Government of India for bestowing the prestigious honour on her father, who is also the Father of the Nation.

The Gandhi Peace Prize is an annual award instituted by the government of India since 1995, the 125th birth anniversary commemoration year of Mahatma Gandhi. The Gandhi Peace Prize 2020 was conferred on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Modi, who was wearing a "Mujib Jacket" as a tribute to Bangladesh's Father of the Nation, said that Bangabandhu's leadership and bravery had ensured that no power could enslave Bangladesh.

Maritime traffic jam grows outside blocked Suez Canal

ASSOCIATED PRESS
SUEZ, EGYPT, 26 MARCH

A maritime traffic jam grew to more than 200 vessels Friday outside the Suez Canal and some vessels began changing course as dredgers worked frantically to free a giant container ship that is stuck sideways in the waterway and disrupting global shipping.

One salvage expert said freeing the cargo ship, the Ever Given, could take up to a week in the best-case scenario and warned of possible structural problems on the vessel as it remains wedged.

The Suez Canal Authority said it welcomed international offers to help free the vessel, including one from the United States, although it did not say what kind of assis-

tance was offered.

The Ever Given, owned by the Japanese firm Shoei Kisen KK, got wedged Tuesday in a single-lane stretch of the canal, about 6 kilometers (3.7 miles) north of the southern entrance, near the city of Suez. The vessel remained grounded Friday morning, said Leth Agencies, which services the canal.

Tugboats and a specialized suction dredger were trying to dislodge it, as Egyptian authorities prohibited media access to the site.

In addition to the over 200 vessels waiting near the canal, more than 100 ships were en route to the waterway, according to the data firm Refinitiv.

Apparently anticipating long delays, the owners of the stuck vessel diverted a sis-

tership, the Ever Greet, to head around Africa instead, according to satellite data.

Others also are being diverted to avoid the canal. The liquid natural gas carrier Pan Americas changed course in the mid-Atlantic, now aiming south to go around the southern tip of Africa, according to satellite data from MarineTraffic.com. About 10 percent of world trade flows through the canal, which is particularly crucial for the transport of oil.

The closure also could affect oil and gas shipments to Europe from the Middle East.

Capt. Nicolas Sloane, a maritime salvage expert who led the high-profile effort to salvage the cruise ship Costa Concordia in 2012, said extracting the Ever Given is "quite a challenge".

CAPTURED MOMENT



A woman takes a selfie as she receives a dose of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, during a vaccination campaign in Barcelona, Spain on Friday.

China bans UK politicians to retaliate human rights sanctions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON, 26 MARCH

China has imposed sanctions on British politicians and organisations as a tit-for-tat retaliation over the UK government's sanctions against Chinese officials for alleged human rights violations against its Uyghur minorities in Xinjiang province.

Members of Parliament (MPs) including former Conservative Party leader Iain Duncan Smith and Foreign Affairs Committee chairman Tom Tugendhat, Pakistani-origin Nusrat Ghani, Tim Loughton and House of Lords peers Baroness Kennedy and Lord Alton all members of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China are named on the Chinese foreign ministry's ban.

"The MPs and other British citizens sanctioned by China today are performing a vital role shining a light on the gross human rights violations being perpetrated against Uyghur Muslims," said UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

"Freedom to speak out in opposition to abuse is fundamental and I stand firmly with them," he said.

Four organisations—including the China Research Group of MPs and Essex Court Chambers, which published a legal opinion describing China's actions in Xinjiang as genocide—are also listed in the sanctions.

The other groups in the list are Conservative Party Human Rights Commission and the Uighur Tribunal.

The move comes days after Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab had announced sanctions against Chinese officials and organisation under the UK's Global Human Rights sanctions regime for systemic violations against Uyghur Muslims and other minorities.

"It speaks volumes that, while the UK joins the international community in sanctioning those responsible for

human rights abuses, the Chinese government sanctions its critics, said Raab in a statement on Friday.

If Beijing want to credibly rebut claims of human rights abuses in Xinjiang, it should allow the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights full access to verify the truth," he said.

The MPs, peers, lawyer Sir Geoffrey Nice QC, chair of the Uighur Tribunal which is investigating atrocities against the minority group, and academic Jo Smith Finley, whose research focuses on the Uyghurs are among those banned from entering China, Hong Kong and Macau, their property in China will be frozen and Chinese citizens and institutions will be prohibited from doing business with them.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith described his sanction as "a badge of honour".

In a Twitter statement, he said: "It's our duty to call out the Chinese Govt's human rights abuses in Hong Kong & the genocide of the Uyghurs."

"Those of us who live free lives under the rule of law must speak for those who have no voice."

An Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China spokesperson said: "The decision to sanction five of our British members is a flagrant assault on those parliamentarians' rights to conduct their duties."

"We will be making urgent representations to ministers and the House authorities to see that they're protected from danger or harm as a result of the communist party's bullying."

A Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said the UK's decision to impose sanctions "flagrantly breaches international law and basic norms governing international relations, grossly interferes in China's internal affairs, and severely undermines China-UK relations".

Beijing erasing H&M from internet

HONG KONG, 26 MARCH

H&M disappeared from the internet in China as the government raised pressure on shoe and clothing brands and announced sanctions Friday against British officials in a spiraling fight over complaints of abuses in the Xinjiang region.

H&M products were missing from major e-commerce platforms including Alibaba and JD.com following calls by social media for a boycott over the Swedish retailer's decision to stop buying cotton from Xinjiang.

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Yemen rebels hit, set ablaze fuel tank in south Saudi

ASSOCIATED PRESS
DUBAI, 26 MARCH

A fuel tank at an oil facility in Saudi Arabia caught fire after being struck in an attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels, officials said on Friday, an attack that came on the sixth anniversary of the kingdom's entry into Yemen's yearslong civil war.

The assault at Jizan in southwest Saudi Arabia near the border with Yemen came during what Saudi defense officials described as a barrage of eight bombs carrying drones launched by the Houthi rebels.

A Houthi military spokesman later claimed a series of attacks on several Saudi military sites and oil facilities, some acknowledged by the kingdom and others not.

The kingdom has faced an increasing number of such assaults and the tempo hasn't slowed since it offered a cease-fire deal to the Houthis on Monday.

The attack in Jizan, some

970 kilometres (600 miles) southwest of Riyadh on the Red Sea, struck a distribution facility just after 9 pm Thursday, the Saudi Energy Ministry said in a statement carried by the state-run Saudi Press Agency.

The attack resulted in a fire in one of the terminal's tanks, the statement said, without elaborating. The attack left no casualties. Saudi Arabia did not specifically identify the area struck. However, Jizan is home to a new refinery and port facilities for the energy giant Saudi Arabian Oil Co. The refinery, with a capacity of 4,000,000 barrels a day, sent its first shipment abroad last year. Jizan also is transliterated from Arabic as Jazan by Aramco.

Jizan and its new refinery long have been targeted by Yemen's Houthi rebels in their campaign against the kingdom. However, satellite pictures from Planet Labs Inc taken Friday morning and analyzed by The Associated Press did not immediately appear to show any damage at that facility.

In a televised speech, Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yehia Sarie claimed that the rebels targeted several Aramco sites in the cities of Jizan, Ras Tanura, Yanbu and Rabigh with 18 drones and eight ballistic missiles.

Sarie also claimed the rebels launched another salvo of 12 drones and eight ballistic missiles at King Abdulaziz Air base in Dammam, as six drones also struck military sites in Asir and Najran provinces. The operation has successfully fulfilled its objectives, Sarie said. We affirm that we are ready to carry out a more severe and more cruel military operation in the coming period. The kingdom did not acknowledge a wave of attacks at the scale. Claims and counterclaims between the kingdom and the rebels have been common throughout the war.

Benchmark Brent crude

rose to over \$63 a barrel in early trading Friday after the attack. The war also has turned into a regional conflict, with the Saudis using US-made

weaponry in internationally criticized airstrikes killing civilians, and Iran being linked to weapons used by the Houthis to target the kingdom.

On Monday, Saudi Arabia offered a new cease-fire proposal to the Houthis. It made two concessions to the Houthis in the plan while not offering everything the rebels previously wanted.

The first involves reopening Sanaa International Airport, a vital link for Yemen to the outside world that hasn't seen regular commercial flights since 2015. Officials did not immediately identify what commercial routes they wanted to see resume.

The second would see taxes, customs and other fees generated by the Hodeida port while importing oil put into a joint account of Yemen's Central Bank. That account would be accessible to the Houthis and Yemen's recognised government to pay civil servants and fund other programmes, officials said.

security forces. Reports on social media of casualties caused by the security forces could not immediately be confirmed.

At about 4 a.m. Friday, unidentified people tossed firebombs at the headquarters of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party in Yangon, but nearby residents managed to put out the fire before it could cause any major damage.

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners described a typical deadly confrontation Thursday in Taunggyi, in Shan State in eastern Myanmar, when the junta used live ammunition, trying to create a combat zone of residential areas, resulting in four civilians shot and killed, one dead body was

dragged away, some other civilians were injured.

Moreover, junta forces raided houses and violently arrested youths and civilians, thereafter destroying motorcycles, cars and barricades.

They stormed streets unprovoked, shouted obscenities and vandalized property.

The Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) which was founded largely by medical workers, has drawn plaudits for its strategy, including a nomination for the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize by six social science professors at the University of Oslo in Norway.

Our nomination is a recognition of this anti-coup resistance that is working for peace and democracy through non-violent means, said their nomi-

nation letter.

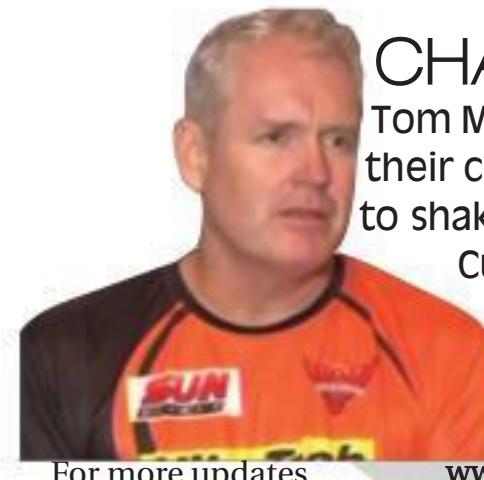
Speaking for the six, Professor Kristian Stokke told The Associated Press their hope is that the Peace Prize nomination will generate further international recognition and support for the movement and its peaceful aims and means.

A leading member of the CDM, who asked not to be identified out of fear for his safety, said the nomination reiterates the need for the junta ... to refrain from any type of violence and peacefully and immediately transfer the power to the democratically elected leaders of the nation.

Suu Kyi won the Nobel Peace Prize for 1991 for leading a nonviolent struggle against a previous military dictatorship.

Myanmar protest deaths top 300 as US, UK, impose sanctions

ASSOCIATED PRESS
YANGON,



CHANGING THE GAME

Tom Moody (photo, left) has asked Sri Lanka to end their culture of merely surviving in cricket, vowing to shake up the national team ahead of the World Cup. In his first public remarks since being hired last month by Sri Lanka Cricket to revive the team, the 55-year-old Australian said he was planning a major cultural shift.

For more updates

www.thestatesman.com

THUMBNAILS

Human rights: Norway's footballers, including Erling Haaland, marked the start of their quest to qualify for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar by protesting against the Gulf state's alleged ill-treatment of workers before kick-off in their opening match against Gibraltar.

Danish decision: At least 12,000 fans will attend European Championship matches in Copenhagen, the Danish government announced on Thursday. Culture minister Joy Mogensen said the Parken Stadium would be open at 30 per cent of its 38,000 capacity.

Barty wins: Because of cancelled flights, it took Ash Barty 45 hours to travel from her native Australia to Florida for a tennis tournament but she rallied and overcame a match point to win her opening match against qualifier Kristina Kučová, 6-3, 4-6, 7-5 on Thursday.

Olympic football: The USA will play Honduras, whom they had lost 0-2 to, for a berth in the Olympic men's soccer tournament in a double-header opener on Sunday night at Guadalajara, and hosts Mexico will play Canada for a spot at the Tokyo Games.

Women's Cup: Navi Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Bhubaneswar were on Friday finalised as the three venues for the 2022 Women's Asian Cup football tournament to be hosted by India, which holds the continental tournament from 20 January to 6 February next year.

Odegaard speculation: Arsenal have no chance of signing Real Madrid loanee Martin Odegaard, 22, on a permanent deal, with the Spanish giants still seeing the Norway attacking midfielder as a key part of their long-term plans, the ***Marca*** has said.

Stokes, Bairstow blow away India to level ODI series

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PUNE, 26 MARCH

India were left shell-shocked by Jonny Bairstow (124) and Ben Stokes' (99) relentless assault as world champions England chased down a mammoth 337-run target in the second ODI with utmost ease to level the three-match series 1-1 here on Friday.

England did not throw it away like the opening game and capitalised on a flying start provided by Bairstow (124 off 112)

and Jason Roy (55 off 52) to gun down the target in just 43.3 overs with six wickets in hand.

Stokes (99 off 62) played a breathtaking knock and missed out on a deserving hundred after a blazing 165-run stand with Bairstow. A mind-boggling 87 runs were scored between the 31st and 35th over. Stokes and Bairstow shared 17 sixes between them.

"We were bitterly disappointed in the first game with the way we played in the chase, but it was pretty clear that we

were going out with the same intent as we always do," Stokes said after the game.

"Great chase, really happy that we managed to get over the line easily especially when India set a challenging total," he added.

The third and final game is scheduled here on Sunday.

India amassed 336 for six courtesy KL Rahul (108 off 114) and Rishabh Pant (77 off just 40) after England won the toss and opted to field again.

After Roy's dismissal, Stokes hit sixes for fun, 10 in total, to make the seemingly daunting task a rather comfortable one for the visitors.

Bairstow, who struck his 11th ODI hundred, too was not far behind with seven sixes and 11 fours.

Barring pacers Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Prasidh Krishna, the Indian bowlers had no answer to the onslaught of Stokes and Bairstow, who produced a display of sensational hitting.

The duo was brutal against the Indian spin combination of Kuldeep Yadav (0/84 in 10 overs) and Krunal Pandya (0/72 in 6), who conceded as many as 14

sixes.

Like the previous game, England self-destructed by losing three quick wickets in the middle overs, including the set Stokes and Bairstow.

But debutant Liam Livingstone (27 not out off 21) and Dawid Malan (16 not out off 23) held their nerve to take the team home safely. It was England's fifth highest chase in ODI cricket.

Earlier, Rahual, who anchored the innings, hit seven fours and two sixes in his 114-ball knock while Pant plundered seven sixes and three boundaries to help the hosts go well past the

SCOREBOARD

INDIA INNINGS		ENGLAND INNINGS	
R Sharma c Rahid b SM Curran	25	J Roy run out (Sharma c+Pant)	55
S Dhawan c Stokes b Topley	4	J Bairstow c Kohli b Krishna	124
V Kohli c +Butler b Rashid	66	B Stokes c +Pant b Kumar	99
KL Rahul c Topley b TK Curran	108	D Malan - not out	16
R Pant c Roy b TK Curran	77	J Buttler (c) b Prasidh Krishna	0
H Pandya c Roy b Topley	35	L Livingstone not out	27
K Pandya not out	12	Extras: (b 4, lb 2, nb 2, w 8)	16
S Thakur not out	0	TOTAL: (43.3 Ov, RR: 7.74)	336/6
Extras: (lb 2, w 7)	9	BOWLING: S Curran 7.0,47.1	
TOTAL: (50 Ov, RR: 6.72)	336/6	R Topley 8.0,50.2 T Curran 10.0,83.0	
		2 B Stokes 5.0,42.0 M Ali 10.0,47.0	

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KL Rahul c Topley b TK Curran	108	D Malan - not out	16
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KL Rahul c Topley b TK Curran	108	D Malan - not out	16
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