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### NEARBY

Campaign ends for fourth phase in West Bengal  
KOLKATA  
Campaign bells fell silent on Thursday evening for the fourth phase of election in West Bengal. Forty-four Assembly segments from five districts – two in north Bengal and three in south Bengal – will go to the polls on April 10.

ASSEMBLY POLLS ▶ PAGE 5

### Night curfew in Meerut, Ghaziabad, G.B. Nagar

GAZIABAD  
Taking into account the surge in COVID-19 cases, a night curfew – from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. – has been imposed in Gautam Buddha Nagar, Ghaziabad and Meerut in Uttar Pradesh from Thursday.

NORTH & WEST ▶ PAGE 5

### IAS SETU FREE INTERVIEW GUIDANCE FOR 10 CANDIDATES by Ex-Deputy Director LBSNAA C 9218400100, 9916616213

## SC refuses pleas to quash CBI probe against Anil Deshmukh

Bench upholds Bombay High Court order

### LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

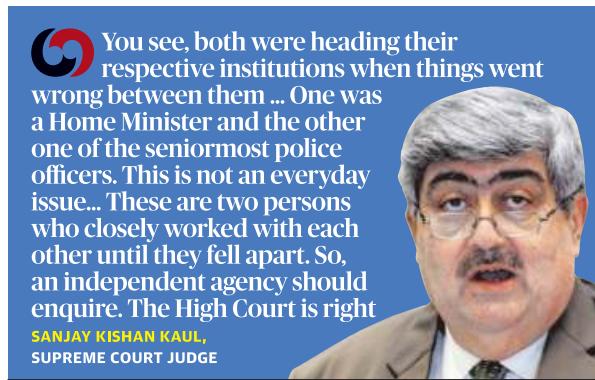
NEW DELHI  
The Supreme Court on Thursday delivered a blow to the Mahatma Gandhi (MVA) government in Maharashtra and former State Home Minister Anil Deshmukh by refusing their pleas to quash a CBI probe into allegations of corruption levelled by transferred Mumbai police chief Param Bir Singh against Mr. Deshmukh in a letter.

### 'Public confidence'

A Bench of Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Hemant Gupta upheld the Bombay High Court order for a CBI probe, saying the dramatic personae involved – Mr. Deshmukh and Mr. Singh – and the "seriousness of the allegations" required investigation by an independent agency. "It is a matter of public confidence," Justice Kaul said.

"You see, both were heading their respective institutions when things went wrong between them... One was a Home Minister and the other one of the seniormost police officers. This is not an everyday issue..." Justice Kaul observed.

Both the Maharashtra government and Mr. Deshmukh had appealed to the



You see, both were heading their respective institutions when things went wrong between them... One was a Home Minister and the other one of the seniormost police officers. This is not an everyday issue... These are two persons who closely worked with each other until they fell apart. So, an independent agency should enquire. The High Court is right," he told Maharashtra counsel, senior advocate A.M. Singhvi.

### Resignation given

Mr. Singhvi argued that Mr. Deshmukh had resigned within hours of the High Court order. The basis of the High Court order for a CBI probe was no longer there.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

two persons who closely worked with each other until they fell apart. So, an independent agency should enquire. The High Court is right," he told Maharashtra counsel, senior advocate A.M. Singhvi.

"Allegations are extremely serious and things have got curioser and curioser," Justice Kaul said.

"You see, both were heading their respective institutions when things went wrong between them... One was a Home Minister and the other one of the seniormost police officers. This is not an everyday issue..." Justice Kaul observed.

Both the Maharashtra government and Mr. Deshmukh had appealed to the

## Amid surge, PM stresses on the need to 'test, track & treat' more

At meeting with CMs, he rules out large lockdowns

### NISTULA HEBBAR BINDU SHAJAH PERAPPADAN

NEW DELHI

Amid growing concerns over vaccine shortage, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday told the Chief Ministers of the States that the surge of COVID-19 – crossing peak levels of the first wave – required a firm strategy of "Test, Track and Treat", while seeming to rule out any large scale lockdown.

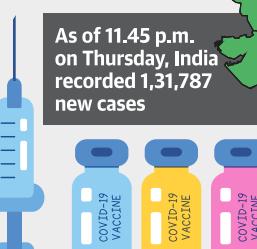
Intensive testing, testing 100% in well-defined micro containment zones, tracing at least 30 contacts of every positive case and ensuring that all eligible people were vaccinated was the strategy required, Mr. Modi said.

He was addressing Chief Ministers online as the country battles a massive second wave of COVID-19 infections. He stressed on the need to demarcate specific micro containment zones, almost

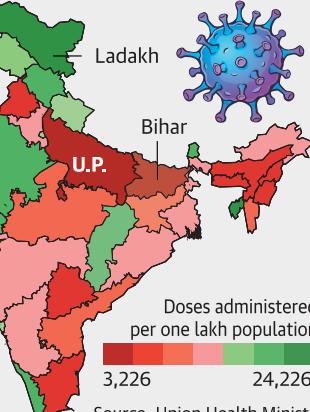
### State of vaccination

Ladakh has already administered over 24,000 doses per 1 lakh people, while Bihar and U.P. have given only around 3,200. The map depicts the number of doses administered per one lakh people

■ The country has administered over 9,01,98,673 doses in total as of 7 a.m. on Thursday (6,581 doses per 1 lakh population). There are over 4.3 crore doses in stock/nearing delivery to the States/U.T.s, according to the Union Health Minister



As of 11.45 p.m. on Thursday, India recorded 1,31,787 new cases



Source: Union Health Ministry

### Double mutant strain named

The "double mutant" virus that scientists had flagged last month as having a bearing on the spread of the pandemic in India, now has a formal scientific classification: B.1.617. ▶ PAGE 10

ruling out large scale lockdown in towns and cities.

"Many States have faced criticism due to a large num-

### New cases cross 1.15 lakh again

As of 10 p.m. on Thursday, India reported 1,18,993 COVID-19 cases and 698 deaths. Daily infections have crossed the one-lakh mark for the second consecutive day. ▶ PAGE 10

ber of cases, but I tell them not to bother; keep the testing rates high, trace as many contacts as possible, and test

### India sees 180 AEFI deaths

According to a presentation made to the National AEFI Committee on March 31, there have been 617 severe (including deaths) adverse events following immunisation. ▶ PAGE 10

100% in micro containment zones," he said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

## SC refuses to order release of Rohingya

### LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday refrained from ordering the release of Rohingya detained in Jammu. It, however, said they should not be deported without proper procedure.

A Bench, led by the Chief Justice of India, held that though rights to equality and due process of law enshrined in the Constitution are available to both citizens and foreigners, the right "not to be deported" is ancillary to citizenship.

On the request of the Chhattisgarh police, social activists Dharampal Saini, 91, Tellam Boraiah and seven journalists secured the release. The jawan, Rakeshwar Singh Minhas, is from the Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (Co-BRA) of the CRPF, a unit specially trained for opera-

### Maoists release CRPF commando after 5 days

He was abducted after Sukma encounter

### VIJAYA SINGH

NEW DELHI

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) commando who was abducted by Maoists after the April 3 encounter at Tarrem in Chhattisgarh's Sukma was released on Thursday.

On the request of the Chhattisgarh police, social activists Dharampal Saini, 91, Tellam Boraiah and seven journalists secured the release. The jawan, Rakeshwar Singh Minhas, is from the Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (Co-BRA) of the CRPF, a unit specially trained for opera-

tions in Left Wing Extremism (LWE)-affected areas.

Recalling the events leading to the release, Bijapur-based journalist Ganesh Mishra told *The Hindu* that he first received a WhatsApp call from a Maoist leader on April 5 confirming that Mr. Minhas was in their custody.

"The caller said they found Minhas in an unconscious state on April 3; they said he was safe. The next day they said he will be released in two days," Mr. Mishra said.

COMMANDO UNHURT ▶ PAGE 9

### Delhi reports 7,437 fresh cases, 24 deaths

+ STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The surge in COVID-19 cases continued in Delhi with 7,437 new cases and 24 deaths being reported over 24 hours – the highest in more than four months.

The total number of cases stood at 6,98,005, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Thursday. The last time more cases were reported was on November 19, when 7,546 people tested positive in a day.

Of the total cases, 6,63,667 have recovered.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 2

### ASI will survey mosque, orders court

### OMAR RASHID

LUCKNOW

A local court in Varanasi on Thursday directed the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to conduct a survey of the Gyanvapi Mosque, adjacent to the Kashi Vishwanath Temple, to find out whether it was a "superimposition, alteration or addition or if there is structural overlapping of any kind, with any other religious structure".

The Uttar Pradesh Sunni Central Waqf Board said it would challenge the order in the Allahabad High Court, terming it "unwarranted".

The court also directed the DG of the ASI to constitute a five-member committee of experts, two of whom should belong to the minority community. The panel would "trace as to whether any Hindu temple ever existed before the mosque in question was built or superimposed or added upon at the disputed site," said senior civil judge Ashutosh Tiwari, in his order seen by *The Hindu*.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

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RISE 06:02 SET 18:44
RISE 05:17 SET 17:16
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RISE 06:01 SET 18:45
RISE 05:47 SET 18:09

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Delhi City	35	19
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Palam	36	21

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37°C A pleasant morning and very warm day would prevail with occasional partly cloudy sky.

**Delhi Palam Tomorrow**  
38°C A comfortable morning with dust haze and hot day with mainly clear sky. Surface winds would be mainly light.

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# 'Natasha, Devangana were part of a larger conspiracy'

Police oppose their appeals in HC against trial court order

## STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

The police have told the Delhi High Court that former JNU students Natasha Narwal and Devangana Kalita, arrested in connection with the communal riots in north-east Delhi last year, were part of a larger conspiracy to threaten the unity, integrity and harmony of the country.

The Delhi police made the submissions while opposing the appeals filed by Ms. Narwal and Ms. Kalita challenging a trial court's order dismissing their bail pleas in an Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) case related to the riots.

The police stated that the two were well aware of the

acts being carried out during the riots and that it would lead to consequences which could be disastrous. The police said the accused agreed to be part of WhatsApp groups and were presumably aware of the acts of every conspirator and hence equally liable.

### Arrested last year

Both Ms. Narwal and Ms. Kalita were booked under the UAPA in a north-east Delhi riots case.

Ms. Narwal was arrested on May 23 along with Ms. Kalita in relation with an FIR registered on February 24 over the sit-in protest at Jakabrad Metro Station against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

The Crime Branch has lodged a separate FIR against both Ms. Narwal and Ms. Kalita in connection with the Delhi riots, with charges ranging from Section 147 (rioting), 353 (using criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty) and 307 (attempt to murder), 302 (murder), among others. The FIR also named relevant sections of the Arms Act and the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act.

On January 28, the trial court had dismissed their bail pleas saying the allegations against them were prima facie true and provisions of the anti-terror law have been rightly invoked in the present case.

## DU begins online admission process for foreign students

Forms available on university website

## STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

The online application process for foreign students to various courses in Delhi University began on Thursday. The last date for applications to undergraduate programmes is May 31 while that of postgraduate programmes is June 29.

A notification issued by the university read: 'Foreign Students' Registry [FSR] of University of Delhi is inviting applications from foreign nationals for its various programmes of study for the academic session 2021-22. FSR is the single window for all foreign nationals who wish to take ad-

mission in the University of Delhi.'

Aspirants will be able to apply for MBA and PhD courses in the Faculty of Management (FMS) till July 30. For the one-year Certificate, Diploma, Advanced Diploma or PG Diploma courses, applicants will be able to apply till August 22.

Those intending to apply to the School of Open Learning for bachelors and masters courses will be able to send in their applications till August 29, the university said.

The online application form for foreign nationals is available on the university's website.

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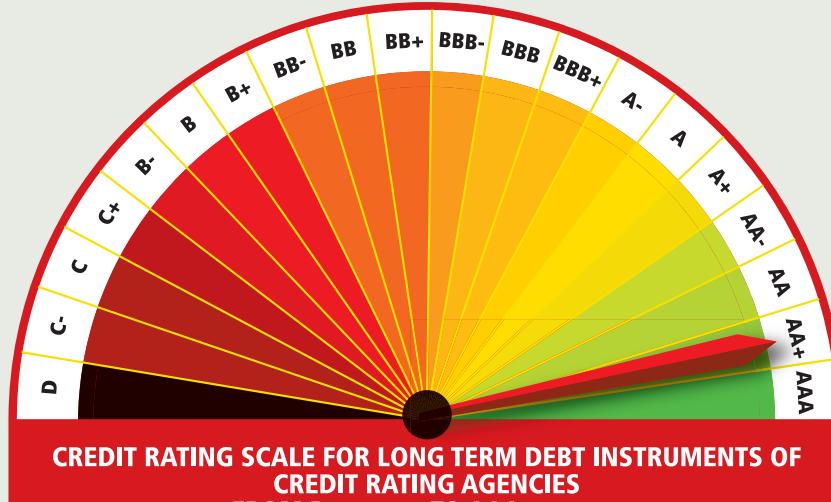
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Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing person but no clue has come to light so far. If anyone have any information about this missing person please inform the undersigned.

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## APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION



General public is hereby informed that an unidentified person **Named: Noor Islam, S/o Unknown, R/o Unknown, Age: 40-45 years, Height: 5'3", Face: Round, Complexion: Shallow, Built: Medium, Wearing: Green colour T-shirt & Black colour lower & blue colour Slipper in feet.**

bare footed has been found dead at kudeshiya ghat, near monestery market, Civil lines, Delhi on 27.03.2021. In this regard a case vide DD No. 19-A dated 27.03.2021 has been lodged at Police Station Civil Lines, Delhi.

Any person having any information or clue about this dead found person may kindly inform to the following:-

SHO :  
P.S. Civil Lines, Delhi  
North Distt., Delhi  
DP/1091/N/2021 Tel. No. 011-23810633, 23815444

## PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED

## See Section 82 Cr. P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused **Vikkey S/o Sh. Kartar Singh R/o H.No. T-431, Gali No. 15, Neemwala Chowk, Nabi Karim, Delhi has Committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case FIR No. 366/2013, u/s 379/411/34 IPC has been registered at P.S. Kashmere Gate, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said **Vikkey** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said **Vikkey** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).**

Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused **Vikkey** of FIR No. 366/2013, u/s 379/411/34 IPC at P.S. Kashmere Gate, Delhi is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before 27.09.2021.

By order  
Sh. Kapil Kumar, MM  
Room No. 32,  
Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi  
DP/1066/N/2021(Court Matter)

CM YK

## PUBLIC NOTICE

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
We are not consider CIBL issues

**Public Notice (Dissolution of Firm)**  
For and on behalf of my client Smt Krishna Bhardwaj W/o Sh Ram Kumar Bhardwaj R/o 76/50, Pt Parmanand Enclave, Alipur, Delhi, the General Public is hereby informed that the partnership firm under the name & style "JAI SHREE RAM DHARAM KANTA" having its principal place of business at 338, Sector-7, Phasel Manesar, Haryana has been dissolved with effect from today. Anybody dealing with the firm or any of its partner on behalf of the firm shall do so at his own costs, risks and expenses.  
Sd/- Rahul Sharma  
1320 Lawyers Chambers Block  
District Courts, Rohini, Delhi-110085

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[support@salvagemanagers.com](mailto:support@salvagemanagers.com)

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I. **PRIVANK** Kumar S/O Navab Singh R/O Vill. Post Shivali, Distt. Bulandshahr (U.P.) 203150 have changed my name to Abhay Raj Singh forever.

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**SEARCH FOR MISSING**

**Hifza Nabi**

Name : Hifza Nabi, Father's Name : Lt. Gulam Nabi, Age : 18 years, Height : 5'3", Face : Round, Complexion : Fair, Built : Strong, Wearing : Pink Printed Kurta and Black Colour Printed Lower and blue colour Slipper in feet.

If anyone having any clue/information, kindly inform the undersigned.

Website : <http://cbi.nic.in>  
e-mail : [cic@cbi.gov.in](mailto:cic@cbi.gov.in)  
Ph. : 011-23014046 (Direct)  
23015229 & 23015218 Extn.-210  
Fax: 011-23011334

SHO  
P.S., Kotwali, Delhi  
DP/402/N/2020 Ph. : 011-23977100, 8750870121

**SEARCH FOR MISSING**

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Fax: 011-23011334

SHO  
P.S., Kotwali, Delhi  
DP/402/N/2020 Ph. : 011-23977100, 8750870121

**SEARCH FOR MISSING**

**कार्यालय**  
धनबाद नगर निगम, धनबाद

**आदेश पत्र**

e-Procurement Tender Notice No. DMC/54/2019-20 दिनांक 26.09.2019 जिसका P.R. 218151 (Urban Development) 19-20#D जो कार्यालय के पत्रांक 2220(TC) दिनांक 26.09.2019 कार्य का नाम :- Construction of Five Storey Commercial Building at the place of Old Municipal Corporation Office at Bank More, Dhanbad, Jharkhand को अपरिहार्य कारणों से रद्द किया जाता है।

कार्यपालक अभियान, धनबाद  
धनबाद नगर निगम, धनबाद  
PR 245346 Urban Development (21-22)\_D

**PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED**

**See Section 82 Cr. P.C.**

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused **Vikkey S/o Sh. Kartar Singh R/o H.No. T-431, Gali No. 15, Neemwala Chowk, Nabi Karim, Delhi has Committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case FIR No. 366/2013, u/s 379/411/34 IPC has been registered at P.S. Kashmere Gate, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said **Vikkey** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said **Vikkey** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).**

Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused **Vikkey** of FIR No. 366/2013, u/s 379/411/34 IPC at P.S. Kashmere Gate, Delhi is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before 27.09.2021.

By order  
Sh. Kapil Kumar, MM  
Room No. 32,  
Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi  
DP/1066/N/2021(Court Matter)

CM YK

**PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON**

**See Section 82 Cr. P.C.**

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person namely **Bagha, S/o Otiya@Teja, R/o: C-Block, T-Hut, Raghuvir Nagar, Delhi** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case FIR No. 263/2019 U/s 308/34 IPC, registered at P.S. Paharganj, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest there upon issued that the said **Bagha** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said **Bagha** has absconded (or is concealing him self to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said **Bagha** accused of FIR No. 263/2019 U/s 308/34 IPC, P.S. Paharganj, Delhi is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before 29.05.2021.

By Order  
Sh. Chander Mohan  
Addl. Chief Metropolitan Magistrate-01,  
Central District, Room No. 366,  
3rd Floor, Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi  
DP/745/CD/2021

AM-1 स्टेट्स भारत अभियान  
एक कदम त्वचा की ओर

## Farmers being harassed in mandis, alleges Hooda

Haryana govt. failed to make arrangements for grain procurement'

ASHOK KUMAR  
GURUGRAM

Interacting with the farmers and labourers at the Karnal food grain market, former Chief Minister and Leader of the Opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda on Thursday accused the Haryana government of failing to make proper arrangements for procurement even though it had announced to start the process on April 1.

"In many places, farmers reaching the market with their crops are being harassed in the name of moisture, not registering on the web portal or on account of server being down. The government should co-operate with the farmers, and not do new experiments on them every day. The government should immediately stop making excuses and procure grains from farmers who are reaching the market with their crops," he said.

Talking to mediapersons at the grains market, Mr. Hooda opposed the government's deci-

sion to reduce the standard limit of moisture in wheat from 14% to 12%.  
**Ploy to deny MSP'**  
The government has decided to reduce the moisture content so that it does not have to pay Minimum Support Price to farmers, he alleged.

Not only this, earlier 0.75 % mixed quantity (rye, mustard, chaff, etc.)

## IN BRIEF



Karnataka RTC bus strike set to enter third day

BENGALURU  
The indefinite bus strike that has affected services across Karnataka is set to continue for the third day with neither the government nor the striking road transport unions backing down. Principal Secretary of Transport Anjum Parvez appealed to the employees, who are seeking the implementation of the Sixth Pay Commission, to return to work.

## Kerala Speaker fails to appear for questioning

KOCHI  
Kerala Speaker P. Sreeramakrishnan failed to turn up before the Customs on Thursday for interrogation. The Speaker reportedly communicated his inability to appear before the agency on health grounds. The Department had earlier served notice regarding the U.S. dollar smuggling case.

## Kerala HC declines to stay ban on online rummy

KOCHI  
The Kerala High Court on Thursday declined to stay a government notification bringing the online rummy game under the purview of the Kerala Gaming Act. The petition challenging the notification was filed by a company hosting online game platforms.

## IMD puts 3 districts in Kerala on yellow alert

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM  
The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has put Ernakulam, Idukki, and Wayanad districts in Kerala on yellow alert on April 12, given the possibility of isolated heavy rainfall in the three districts. Most of the other districts can expect light to moderate rainfall till April 12, as per the latest forecasts from the IMD.

# Kerala CM tests positive for COVID-19

Health Dept. opts for precautionary hospitalisation; A.P. cases cross 2,500; Karnataka adds 36 deaths

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan tested positive for COVID-19 on Thursday. Though he appeared to be asymptomatic, as a matter of caution, the Health Department advised that he be moved to the Kozhikode Medical College Hospital.

Two of Mr. Vijayan's family members, his daughter and son-in-law, too tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 ear-

## Virus threat

With the number of cases on the rise, the authorities have increased COVID-19 testing. The graph shows the spread of the pandemic in the southern States



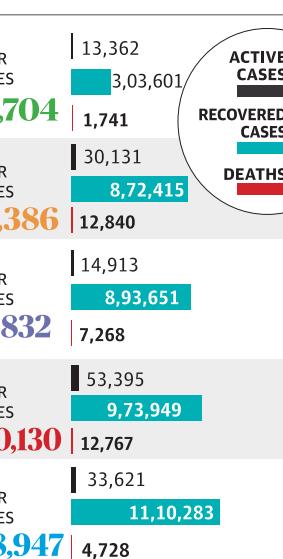
Getting tested: A woman giving swabs for the COVID-19 test at the ENT Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Thursday. ■ K.R. DEEPAK

and former Chief Minister Oommen Chandy also tested positive for SARS-CoV-2.

Kerala posted 4,353 fresh cases on Thursday, the big-

gest spike in recent days.

Andhra Pradesh crossed the 2,500-mark for infections, the highest in five months. It reported 2,558



\*Telangana numbers are as of 8 p.m. on Wednesday  
\*\*Karnataka has 19 non-COVID deaths | \*\*\*Kerala has a mismatch of 315 cases due to unaccounted deaths, missing persons

new infections and six more deaths on Thursday.

In Telangana, a total of 2,055 persons tested positive on April 7. There were seven

more deaths.

In the light of the rising cases of COVID-19, seven urban centres across Karnataka, including Bengaluru, will be under 10-day 'night corona curfew' between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. from April 10 to 20. The curfew will be in place in Bengaluru city, Mysuru, Kalaburagi, Tumakuru, Mangalore, Bidar, and Udupi-Manipal.

Bengaluru reported 4,422 cases, and the Health Department said it would test one lakh people a day.

After more than five months, the number of persons testing positive for COVID-19 in Tamil Nadu crossed the 4,000-mark on Thursday. A total of 4,276 persons contracted the infection and 19 persons succumbed to it.

(With inputs from Vijayawada, Hyderabad and Bengaluru bureaus)

## COVID-19

lier in the week.

Mr. Vijayan got the first dose of the vaccine in the first week of March. While vaccination might not prevent all infections, even one dose affords a certain level of protection against serious disease, health officials said.

Senior Congress leader

and former Chief Minister Oommen Chandy also tested positive for SARS-CoV-2.

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(With inputs from Vijayawada, Hyderabad and Bengaluru bureaus)

## Minor incidents mar MPTC, ZPTC polls in A.P.

Confusion, hot weather lead to a drop in voting

STAFF REPORTER  
VIJAYAWADA

People waiting in a queue to cast their votes at a school in Vijayawada on Thursday. ■ V. RAJU

The elections were held after a Division Bench of the Andhra Pradesh High Court struck down an earlier order by a single judge Bench staying the poll process.

Polling began at 7 a.m. and continued till 5 p.m., except in Agen-

cy areas where the polling concluded by 2 p.m.

The polling, which recorded an overall percentage of 60.91, was by and large peaceful except for minor inci-

dents. Confusion over the conduct of the elections till the last minute and a scorching sun led to a drop in voting percentage in some districts.

For the first time, the Te-

## 1 injured in stone throwing

STAFF REPORTER  
KAKINADA

One person was injured in a clash between the supporters of the YSRCP and the Jana Sena Party (JSP) at Pedapatnam Lankha under Nagaram police station limits in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh on Thursday.

The incident took place while polling was in pro-

gress for the MPTC and ZPTC elections.

"Trouble broke out when the YSRCP supporters tried to prevent distribution of cash among the voters allegedly by the JSP workers. One person received minor injuries in stone throwing," the police said.

Polling continued amid deployment of additional forces, the police said.

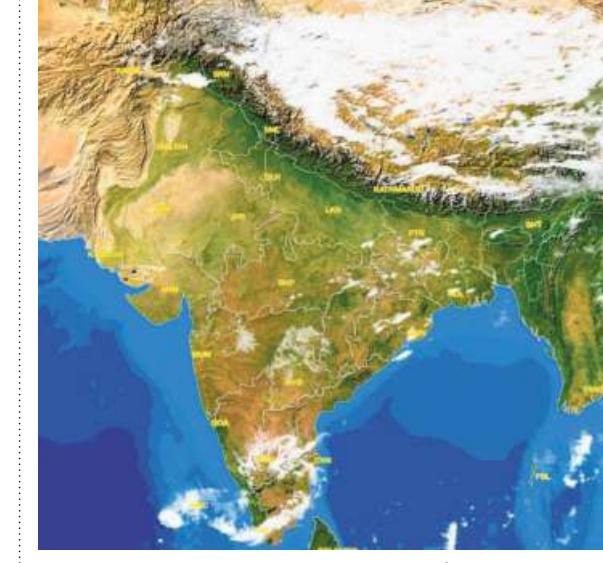
Lulu Desam Party (TDP) boycotted the parishad elections. The impact of the TDP's boycott could be seen at some places in the State.

Following a gaffe, the authorities conducted a re-

poll for 11 votes after voters found mismatch of the details of the candidates printed on the ballot papers at Saakuru Gunneppalli polling station in Amalapuram mandal in East Godavari district.

## WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB; MAP: METEOSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 14:30 hrs)

**Forecast for Friday:** Thunderstorm with lightning, hail and squall very likely at isolated places over Gangetic West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Jharkhand, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	... 33.8	24.0	22.8	Kozhikode	... 33.7	28.2	27.6
Ahmedabad	... 40.2	24.3	23.0	Kurnool	... 40.5	27.6	26.0
Aizawl	... 28.5	15.9	14.0	Lucknow	... 40.5	27.6	26.0
Allahabad	... 41.4	23.5	21.3	Madurai	... 38.0	25.0	24.0
Bengaluru	... 35.0	22.6	21.3	Mangaluru	... 35.7	27.2	25.0
Bhopal	... 39.5	25.5	23.0	Mumbai	... 32.6	26.0	24.0
Bhubaneswar	... 36.4	26.1	24.0	Mysuru	... 36.7	20.8	19.0
Chandigarh	3.2	34.7	18.0	New Delhi	... 35.7	21.5	20.0
Chennai	... 33.7	26.2	24.0	Patna	... 39.6	25.0	24.0
Coimbatore	... 36.3	23.8	21.5	Port Blair	... 32.4	23.8	22.0
Dehradun	... 33.0	18.8	17.0	Puducherry	... 34.2	23.8	22.0
Gangtok	... 21.8	13.9	12.0	Pune	... 34.2	20.1	19.0
Goa	... 34.9	26.9	24.0	Raipur	... 40.8	25.0	24.0
Guwahati	... 31.8	30.5	28.0	Ranchi	... 39.0	23.6	22.0
Hubballi	... 34.0	23.0	21.0	Shillong	... 24.1	11.5	10.0
Hyderabad	... 37.5	27.3	25.0	Shimla	... 21.4	10.5	9.0
Imphal	... 29.1	14.8	13.0	Srinagar	... 19.2	5.5	4.0
Jaipur	... 36.4	23.6	21.0	Thiruvananthapuram	... 34.2	25.2	24.0
Kochi	... 32.2	26.0	24.0	Tiruchi	... 38.2	25.3	24.0
Kohima	... 24.2	—	—	Vijayawada	... 37.0	25.2	24.0
Kolkata	... 35.7	27.8	25.0	Visakhapatnam	... 32.4	27.5	25.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

Yesterday

CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>x</sub>	CO	PM <sub>2.5</sub>	PM <sub>10</sub>	CODE
Ahmedabad	21	.71	.80	.78	.134	■
Bengaluru	.4	—	.32	.163	—	■
Chennai	4.05	.23	.44	.90	■	■
Delhi	15.35	.68	.215	.165	■	■
Hyderabad	4.70	.34	.113	.135	■	■
Kolkata	.8	.19	.101	.95	.121	■
Lucknow	21	.89	.42	.345	.322	■
Mumbai	41	.63	.23	.45	.159	■
Pune	—	.18	.31	.116	.106	■
Visakhapatnam	17	.40	.17	.69	.122	■

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI) Sulphur Dioxide: Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments



## Beyond zero sum

Rich countries must commit technology and funds to move to net zero carbon emissions

The visit of the U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, John Kerry, ahead of a leaders' summit convened by President Joe Biden later this month on the climate challenge, has prompted a review of India's long-term policy course. To the developed world, India presents a study in contrasts, with carbon dioxide emissions that rank in the top five globally, while millions of its citizens remain mired in energy poverty and underdevelopment. Ironically, to many smaller countries, including island nations hit by intense storms, lost farm productivity, droughts and heat waves linked to a changing climate, India contributes to the problem with its total annual emissions. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the clamour is growing for India to join many other big economies and commit itself to net zero emissions: to balance carbon emissions with their removal from the atmosphere, by a specific date. Evidently, Mr. Kerry sought to explore the possibility of raising national ambition, with the assurance that the U.S., pursuing major green technology initiatives in the post-Donald Trump era, would support such a road map. His meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been positive. It would, of course, reassure not just India but other emerging nations as well, if the climate diplomacy of the North under the Paris Agreement is underpinned by funding and technology transfer guarantees to reduce emissions. If climate change is the biggest crisis today, the solutions require the U.S., the U.K., Europe and others who occupied the bulk of the world's carbon budget to give up further emissions in favour of the developing world and fund the transition.

Even if India does not commit itself to a net zero deadline, and prefers to wait for the post-pandemic development pathways to become clear, it cannot afford to ignore the impact that its project decisions – such as deforestation – will have on the climate. At the peak of COVID-19 last year, the Centre saw it fit to press ahead with environmental clearances that would have a serious negative impact. It extended the deadline for coal plants to adopt strict pollution control, and proposed gross dilution of norms to assess environmental impact of projects. Fuel prices, at historic highs due to taxation, pay no specific environmental dividend, and the poorest are worst hit by its inflationary effects. What India should be doing in the run-up to the UN Convention on Climate Change in Glasgow, scheduled later this year, is to come up with a domestic climate plan that explains to the citizen how it will bring green development in this decade, specifying a target by sector for each year. This would align internal policies with the justifiable demand that rich countries uphold the principle enshrined in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, of common but differentiated responsibilities to build equity. Taxing luxury emissions, whether it is cars, air-conditioners, big properties or aviation, for specified green development outcomes, will send out a convincing message.

## Play time

IPL sets the stage for a young bunch of players eager for the spotlight

Since its launch in 2008, the Indian Premier League has largely remained a summer-fix, with its share of pulsating thrills and big money. But these are extraordinary times when a virus has extended its stifling grip across the globe for more than a year and while COVID-19 rages, through a second wave in India, the IPL is back with its 14th edition that will commence at Chennai's M.A. Chidambaram Stadium on Friday with defending champion Mumbai Indians taking on Royal Challengers Bangalore. The previous tournament, a much-delayed one due to the pandemic, had concluded at Dubai on November 10, last year. After a five-month gap, the latest version rolls in with its share of 60 matches in a schedule that stretches all the way to May 30. Meanwhile, the virus continues to influence logistics and with bio-bubbles being the norm, the matches will be initially played at empty venues. The other new development is the idea of neutral venues, a move necessitated by the need to reduce travel so that every squad stays in a specific city for at least a fortnight. With cities such as Hyderabad, Mohali and Jaipur missing out as hosts, it was felt that their respective home units – Sunrisers Hyderabad, Punjab Kings and Rajasthan Royals – needed a level playing field and that was achieved by propping up neutral venues for all rivals.

It is a thread that goes all the way to the play-offs and final, which would be held in Ahmedabad, a city that does not have an IPL outfit. If the immediate context is about playing sport in the times of the coronavirus, the larger goal for the players would be to also use this IPL as a stage to finesse their skills well in time for the Twenty20 World Cup in India during October-November this year. The current build-up that included hotel quarantines, gradual training and news about a few players and support staff testing positive for COVID-19, may not have been ideal but all the squads are keen to get on the turf and play even if excited fans and their acoustic-support would be missed. Besides its obvious stardust, the IPL is equally about an unsung player grabbing attention and winging his way into the national squad. T. Natarajan and Suryakumar Yadav, to name just two, have done that in recent times. And for the nostalgically inclined, it is also a space to watch the likes of M.S. Dhoni and AB de Villiers plying their wares. Neutral grounds that negate home-advantage and a virus in the air do make a strange mix but this is the new-normal for an event that has previously adjusted to three general elections and a couple of overseas deviations.

# Plough to plate, hand held by the Indian state

The distinct characteristics of India's agriculture require that a reformed state must ensure farmer, consumer welfare



MIHIR SHAH

For at least four decades now, economic policy making globally has dogmatically adhered to the notion that a progressively reduced role of the state would automatically deliver greater economic growth and welfare to the people. Since reform, by definition, is taken to mean only one thing, sector after sector is compulsively sought to be moved in this direction, even if overwhelming evidence, over many years from all over the world, indicates that it is the state that has played the leading role in provisioning the most critical aspects of life: water, sanitation, education, health, food and nutrition. There are very specific characteristics of agriculture, as also crucial elements of the socio-historical context, which imply that the Indian state must continue to intervene in multiple markets, and make critical investments, to ensure the welfare of both farmers and consumers.

### Specificities of agriculture

Due to a variety of limiting factors, from uncertainties of the weather to soil fertility and water availability, increasing returns to scale are very difficult to achieve in farming. This underscores the need for the right kind of public investment in agriculture. Again, economies of scale allow producers in industry to make profits by cutting unit costs, even as prices fall, while those who fail to make the cut, get eliminated from competition. But in agriculture, members of the family can be drafted to work on the family's farm, as also in other farm and non-farm work. This pheno-

menon is quite widespread in India today: of the nine crore rural families who draw their main income from unskilled manual labour, four crore are small and marginal farmers. Through overwork and self-exploitation, peasant farmers are able to cling on to their land.

A gain, production processes in agriculture cannot be organised in an assembly line; they need to begin at the appropriate phase of the climatic annual cycle. This means that all farmers harvest their crop at the very same time; 86% of India's farmers are 'small and marginal', too poor to afford warehousing facilities and are, therefore, compelled to bring their harvest to the market at around the same time. Since demand for food crops is typically price inelastic, during a bumper crop, while prices fall, the resulting rise in demand is not enough to salvage farmer incomes. Correspondingly, for poor consumers, unregulated markets for foodgrains mean that during a drought they either starve or get pauperised, being forced to buy very expensive commodities, conveniently hoarded up by traders.

### Balance of power

These traders double up as moneylenders and the operation of a deeply exploitative grid of interlocked markets afflicts most farmers. In the credit market, usurious interest rates (often as high as 60%-120% per annum) create a debt trap from which it is virtually impossible to escape. The repayments due are 'adjusted' through exploitative practices in the input, output, labour and land-lease markets. The moneylender combines the roles of input supplier, crop buyer, labour employer and land lessor. This interlocked grid works in tandem with the oppressive caste system, with the poorer, 'lower' caste farmers, facing a cumulative and cascading spiral of



expropriation. All the above reasons provide a strong case for state intervention in multiple agricultural markets.

### Diversify public procurement

The Food Corporation of India and the Agricultural Prices Commission (Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices, or CACP since 1985) were set up in 1965. The idea was that as farm output rises with the Green Revolution, farmers are assured that their surplus would be bought by the government at a price high enough to leave them a margin. The crops procured were then made available to consumers at subsidised rates through the Public Distribution System (PDS).

Thus, government intervention protected farmers during bumper crops and dipped into the buffer stock to protect consumers during droughts. This is how India got its much vaunted food security over the past several decades.

However, the Green Revolution also sowed the seeds of its own destruction. More than 300,000 farmers have committed suicide in the last 30 years, a phenomenon completely unprecedented in Indian history. There is growing evidence of a steady decline in water tables and water quality. The yield response to application of increasingly expensive chemical inputs is falling, which has meant higher costs of cultivation, without a corresponding rise in output. Around 90% of India's water is consumed in farming, and of this, 80% is

used up by rice, wheat and sugar-cane. Farmers continue to grow these water-intensive crops even in water-short regions primarily because of an assured market – for rice and wheat in the form of public procurement, which still covers only a very low proportion of India's crops, regions and farmers.

Thus, we need to greatly expand the basket of public procurement to include more crops, more regions and more farmers. If done right, this single reform would secure multiple win-wins: higher and more sustainable farmer incomes, greater water security and better consumer health. Procurement must be local and follow the logic of regional agro-ecology. Huge volumes of water could be saved if cropping patterns are diversified to include a variety of millets (rightly called 'nutri-cereals' now), pulses and oilseeds.

### Ensuring a steady market

To incentivise farmers to make this change, governments must include them in procurement operations. A useful benchmark could be 25% of the actual production of the commodity for that particular season (to be expanded up to 40%, if the commodity is part of the PDS), as proposed under the 2018 Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay SanraksHan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA) scheme.

The locally procured crops should then be incorporated into *anganwadi* supplementary nutrition and school mid-day meal programmes. This would mean a large and steady market for farmers, while also making a huge contribution to tackling India's twin syndrome of malnutrition and diabetes, since these crops have a much lower glycemic index, while providing higher content of dietary fibre, vitamins, minerals, protein and antioxidants. Public investment in specific infrastructure required for millets and pulses, es-

specially those grown through natural farming, would also help expand their cultivation.

India has a network of 2,477 *mandis* and 4,843 *sub-mandis* to safeguard farmers from exploitation by large retailers. This network needs to be greatly expanded as today, only 17% of farm produce passes through *mandis*. To provide farmers access within a radius of five kilometres, India needs 42,000 *mandis*, which are also in need of urgent reform. Rather than moving in the direction of weakening or dismantling *mandis*, we need to make their functioning more transparent and farmer-friendly.

### Rural India will be focal point

Ever since the Second Five Year Plan initiated in 1956, the central plank of Indian economic policy has been to get people off the land and move them into industry and urban areas. However, even after all these efforts, the United Nations estimates that in the year 2050, around 800 million people will continue to live in rural India. Given this unique Indian demographic transition, agriculture will need to be greatly strengthened, especially bearing in mind the complete nightmare our urban metropolises are, for current and future migrants. In a context characterised by grave and growing inequalities, as also a historically skewed balance of power, no reform can succeed that does not strengthen the weak and the excluded. Agriculture can only be reformed by radically enhanced state capacities and qualitatively better regulatory oversight, rather than by opening up spaces for more predatory action by those already entrenched in positions of overwhelming power in the economy.

Mihir Shah is Distinguished Professor, Shiv Nadar University

## Explaining Pakistan's flip-flop on trade with India

The shadow of politics still looms over trade, which runs contrary to Islamabad's statements on the need for better ties



D. SUBA CHANDRAN

Pakistan's double U-turn on resuming trade with India highlights the internal differences within Ministries, between business and political communities, and the emphasis on politics over economy and trade. It also signifies Pakistan cabinet's grandstanding, linking normalisation of ties with India to Jammu and Kashmir.

On March 31, Pakistan's new Finance Minister Hammad Azhar, announced Pakistan's Economic Coordination Committee (ECC)'s decision to import cotton, yarn, and 500,000 metric tons of sugar from India. The media dubbed it as a political breakthrough but the ECC's decision was not on bilateral trade; it was about importing only three items – cotton, yarn and sugar.

A day later, Pakistan's cabinet overruled the decision; the meeting was chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan and which included Shah Mohammad Qureshi (Foreign Affairs Minister), Fawad Chaudhry (Science and Technology Minister) and Shireen M. Mazari (Human Rights Minister). The Dawn quoted Mr. Qureshi as saying, "A perception was emerging that relations with India have moved towards normalization and trade has been opened... there was a unanimous opinion ...as long as India does not review the unilateral steps it took on August 5, 2019, normalising relations with India will not be possible."

Mr. Hammad Azhar, whose Mi-

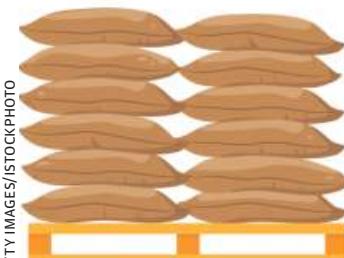
nistry proposed the idea, accepted the cabinet's decision as the working of "economic and political interface in a democracy", and it was left with the Prime Minister and the cabinet to "endorse, reject or modify" the ECC's proposals. However, Pakistan's textile industry has not taken the cabinet's decision kindly; for them, importing cotton yarn from India is an immediate need; else, it would impact their export potential.

Three takeaways can be identified from the above. The first relates to the ECC's decision to import only three items from India, namely cotton, yarn and sugar. It was based on Pakistan's immediate economic needs and not designed as a political confidence-building measure to normalise relations with India.

### Practical and economic

For the textile and sugar industries in Pakistan, importing from India is imperative, practical and is the most economic. According to the latest Pakistan Economic Survey, 2019-20 (<https://bit.ly/3ITXdiI>), though the agriculture sector witnessed a growth of 2.67% (with an increase in rice and maize production), cotton and sugarcane production declined by 6.9% and 0.4%, respectively. Sugar exports came down substantially last year, by over 50% in 2019-20, when compared to 2018-19. Yarn, cotton cloth, knitwear, bedwear and ready-made garments form the core of Pakistan's textile basket in the export sector. By February 2020, there was a steep decline in the textile sector due to disruptions in supply and domestic production. When compared to the last fiscal year (2019-20), there has been a 30% decline (2020-21) in cotton production.

According to State Bank of Pa-



kistan's latest quarterly report (<https://bit.ly/3uMedDj>), the decline in cotton production is also due to fewer areas (the lowest since 1982) of cotton cultivation. By the end of 2020, there was a sharp decline (around 40%) in cotton production. Besides the decline in the area of cotton cultivation, there was also a decline in yield per acre. The ginning industry estimates that in 2021, it would receive less than half of what was projected. In 2019-20, Pakistan produced around nine billion bales; this year, the ginning industry estimates only around seven million bales. This would mean, Pakistan's cotton export would reduce, creating a domino effect on what goes into Pakistan's garment industry. Pakistan is the fifth-largest exporter of cotton globally, and the cotton-related products (raw and value-added) earn close to half of the country's foreign exchange.

### Another industry in crisis

The sugar industry in Pakistan is also in crisis. When compared to cotton, the sugar industry's problem stems from different issues – the availability for local consumption and the steep price increase. The sugar industry has prioritised exports over local distribution. Increased government subsidy and a few related administrative decisions resulted in the sugar indus-

try attempting to make a considerable profit by exporting it. By early 2019, the sugar prices started increasing, and in 2020, there was a crisis due to shortage and cost.

In February 2020, Mr. Imran Khan announced an investigation and constituted a commission of inquiry into Pakistan's sugar crisis, 2019-20. According to the report, sugarcane was purchased off-the-books by the sugar mills, and sugar sold off-the-books. The report also noticed market manipulation and hoarding resulting in increased sugar price within Pakistan. In short, the subsidies, cheap bank loans, a few administrative decisions, manipulation and greed, especially by the sugar mill owners, mean high cost paid by the consumers.

As a result, importing sugar from India would be cheaper for the consumer market in Pakistan. Clearly, the crises in cotton and sugar industries played a role in the ECC's decision to import cotton, yarn and sugar from India. It would not only be cheaper but also help Pakistan's exports. This is also imperative for Pakistan to earn foreign exchange.

### Politics first

The second takeaway from the two U-turns – is the supremacy of politics over trade and economy, even if the latter is beneficial to the importing country. For the cabinet, the interests of its own business community and its export potential have become secondary. However, Pakistan need not be singled out; this is a curse in South Asia, where politics play supreme over trade and economy. The meagre percentage of intra-South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) trade and the success (or the failure) of SAARC engaging in bilateral or re-

gional trade would underline the above. Trade is unlikely to triumph over politics in South Asia; especially in India-Pakistan relations. The third takeaway is the emphasis on Jammu and Kashmir by Pakistan to make any meaningful start in bilateral relations. This goes against what it has been telling the rest of the world that India should begin dialogue with Pakistan. Recently, both Pakistan's Prime Minister and the Chief of Army Staff, Qamar Javed Bajwa, were on record stating the need to build peace in the region. Gen. Bajwa even talked about "burying the past" and moving forward. There were also reports that Pakistan agreeing to re-establish the ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) was a part of this new strategy.

The latest statement by Pakistan's cabinet that unless India rescinds the decision of August 5, 2019 in Jammu and Kashmir, there would be no forward movement, goes against what Mr. Imran Khan and Gen. Bajwa have been stating in public. This position also hints at Pakistan's precondition (revoking the August 2019 decision on Jammu and Kashmir) to engage with India.

Pakistan has been saying that the onus is on India to normalise the process. Perhaps, it is New Delhi's turn to tell Islamabad that it is willing, but without any preconditions, and start with trade. It may even allow New Delhi to inform Pakistan's stakeholders about who is willing to trade and who is reluctant.

D. Suba Chandran is a professor and dean at the School of Conflict and Security Studies, National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bengaluru

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

### Election notes

The much awaited election for the Tamil Nadu Assembly is over. But what has stood out, and rather discouragingly, is the low voter turnout in Chennai, which straightforwardly compels us to ask ourselves whether the cultural capital is electorally also the least sensitive. In fact, the current elections mirror the 2016 Assembly elections, where the pattern is much similar. While it could be due to systemic issues in

some parts of the city, equally, it is the lack of responsibility and moral obligation on the part of the Chennaites, resulting in a poor polling percentage. And, the reason of the pandemic has only added to their lassitude. The attitude of 'one individual vote will not change the results of an entire election', and a reason cited by many preferring not to vote, is unfortunate. It is a pity that while Chennaites will turn in

large numbers at a stadium to watch a cricket match for hours, they do not have the same kind of pride and passion when it comes to exercising their democratic rights.

R. SIVAKUMAR,  
Chennai

■ The highlight of the run-up to the election this time in Tamil Nadu was the raids and searches suddenly conducted on the premises of companies and palatial bungalows of the high and

mighty. Thanks to television visuals, one was left bewildered.

What most of us want to know is what happens to the follow-up action, which does not see the light of day. The honest tax-payer is entitled to know the result even after the dust raised by the election frenzy has settled.

MANI NATARAJAN,  
Chennai

mighty", to use the own words of the writers as far as their Editorial page article, "Abortion is a woman's right to decide" (April 8), is concerned. Where does the human that is in the womb go for his or her rights? I expect people who are pitching for 'human' rights to begin by treating all humans equally, and not have an absolute right of a woman trump that of another human.

MATHEW AUGUSTINE,  
Kochi

■ While the larger picture of the article is well taken, I disagree. The idea of a woman's right over her own body seems not to end where the life of an unborn is hurt for anything less than the life of the woman. An act has to rise above such personalised thinking. Also, the act has to ensure that it does not open the floodgates to female foeticide.

DIVYADEEP SRIVASTAVA,  
New Delhi



# ASSEMBLY POLLS

DEHLI THE HINDU | FRIDAY, APRIL 9, 2021

59%

70%  
the average voter turnout in 2021 in Chennai district in Tamil Nadu's Assembly election

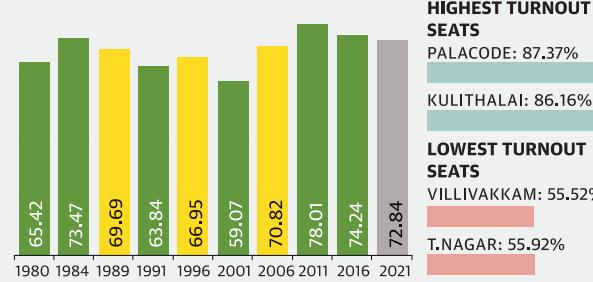
We condemn the insider-outsider debate by Mamata Banerjee. This is a sign of her desperation.

P7

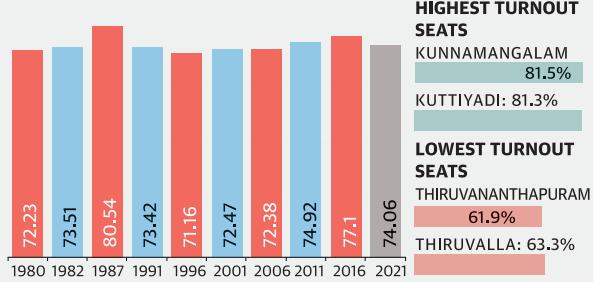
## Voter turnout lower in most seats compared to 2016

Compared to the 2016 Assembly election, turnout decreased in 90% of the 530 seats in the four States where voting for the 2021 State polls took place on Tuesday. Nearly 86% of seats in Tamil Nadu, 95% in Kerala, 90% in Assam, and all the seats in Puducherry recorded lower turnout than in 2016. Despite the fall in numbers, 80%-plus voter turnout was recorded in more than 60% of the seats in Assam and Puducherry. In Tamil Nadu and Kerala, on the other hand, only 17% and 6% of the seats recorded turnouts more than 80%. In Tamil Nadu, in 6% of the seats, mostly in urban areas, the turnout was less than 60%. **By Sumant Sen, Naren S., Vignesh Radhakrishnan**

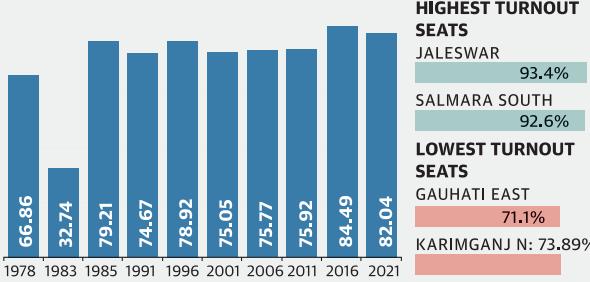
**TAMIL NADU** The chart shows the turnout (in %) in the past 10 elections in Tamil Nadu, coloured according to winning coalition. DMK+ ADMK+



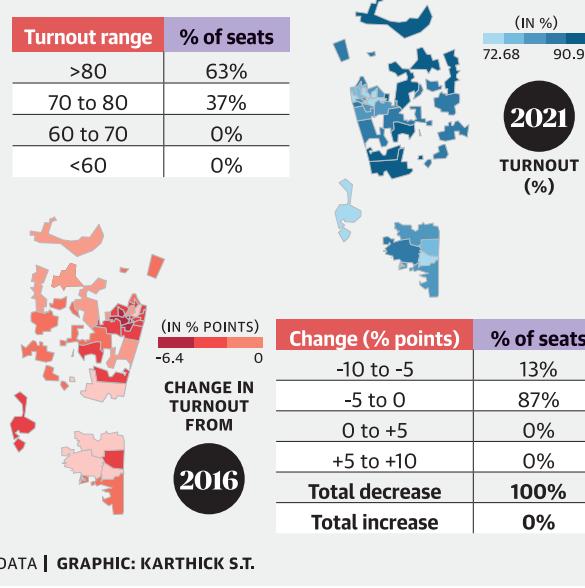
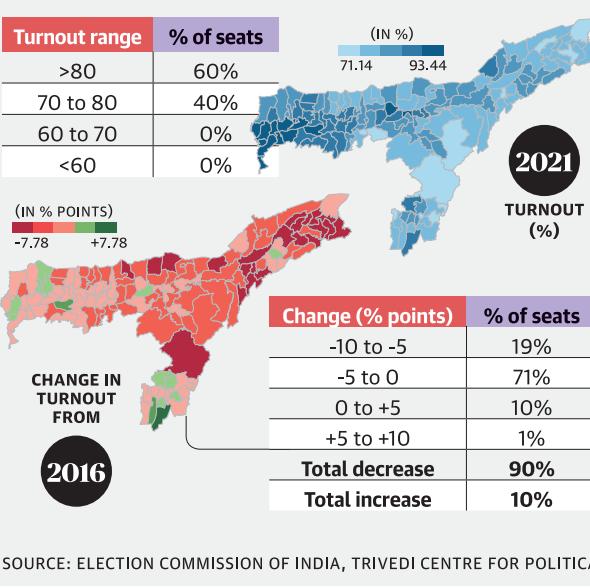
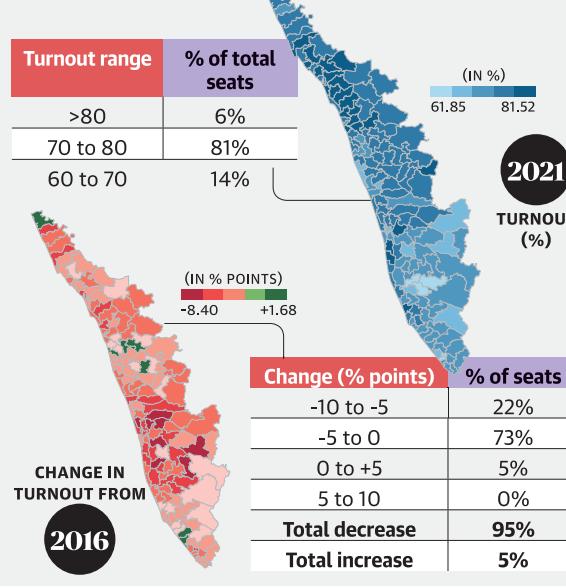
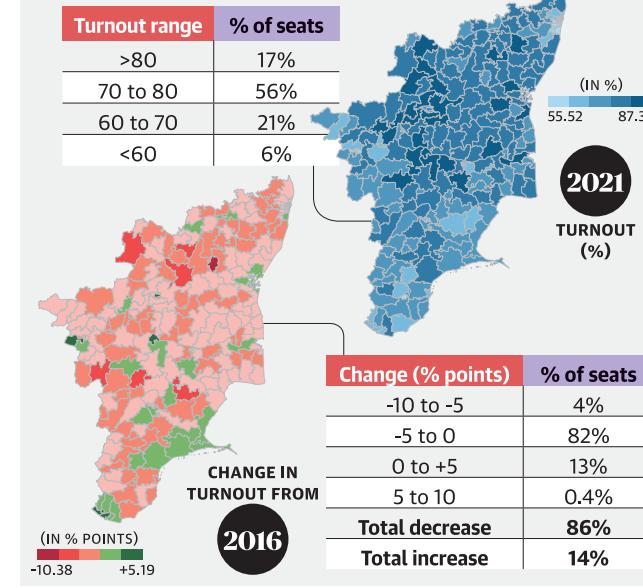
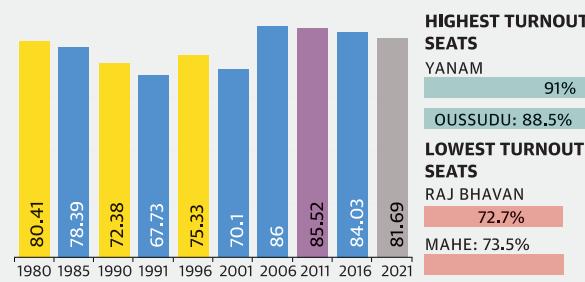
**KERALA** The chart shows the turnout (in %) in the past 10 elections in Kerala, coloured according to winning coalition. LDF UDF



**ASSAM** The chart shows the turnout (in %) in the past 10 elections in Assam. JALSWAR SALMARA SOUTH



**PUDUCHERRY** The chart shows the overall turnout (in %) in the past 10 elections in Puducherry, coloured according to winning coalition. DMK+ INC+ AIURC+



SOURCE: ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA, TRIVEDI CENTRE FOR POLITICAL DATA | GRAPHIC: KARTHIK S.T.

EC notice to  
Suvendu  
Adhikari

### ELECTION SCENE

## Campaign ends for fourth phase in Bengal

Trinamool Ministers, BJP MPs and senior leaders of Samyukt Morcha in fray for the April 10 polling

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Election Commission on Thursday sent a notice to the BJP candidate from Nandigram Suvendu Adhikari in connection with a "hate speech" complaint against him.

The EC said it received a complaint from CPI(ML) Politburo member Kavita Krishnan alleging that Mr. Adhikari had delivered a hate speech in Nandigram on March 29.

**BJP will form anti-Romeo squads: U.P. CM**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

KOLKATA

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Thursday that 'anti-Romeo squads' will be formed in West Bengal if the BJP is voted to power. Bengal is not a safe place for women under the Trinamool Congress government, Mr. Adityanath said at rallies in Hooghly and Howrah. He said if the BJP is voted to power, it will stress on women's education and put an end to "hooliganism".

### Contestants

Among those contesting in the fourth phase are senior Trinamool Congress leader and Education Minister Partha Chatterjee from Behala Purba and Public Works Department and Sports and Youth Affairs Minister Aroop Biswas from Tollygunj in South 24 Parganas. Minister for North Bengal Development Rabindranath Ghosh is in the fray from Natabari in Cooch Behar and Minister

for Agriculture Marketing Arup Roy is contesting from Domjur in Howrah.

### Singur seat

The other Trinamool MLAs who are in the fray as BJP candidates include Prabir Ghosh from Uttarpara in Hooghly, Baishali Dalmiya in Bally, and Mihir Goswami from Natabari in Cooch Behar. In the Singur Assembly seat in Hooghly, which has witnessed a lot of political activity in the past two decades on the issues of land acquisition, return of land and the promise of industry,

former Trinamool MLA Rabindranath Bhattacharya is contesting on BJP ticket.

For Samyukt Morcha, the key candidates include Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly Abdul Mannan, contesting from Champdani in Hooghly district; leader of the Left Legislative Party Subjan Chakraborty, who is in the fray from Jadavpur; and CPI(M) Polit Bureau member Mohammed Salim, contesting from Chanditala in Hooghly. Naushad Siddique, the brother of Indian Secular Front founder and Furfura MP Jaya Bachchan,

**Mamata dares EC to file complaints against PM**

He is dividing the electorate, she says

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA

A day after the Election Commission (EC) issued notice to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for violating the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), she responded saying there was no point in issuing notices against her as her reply would remain the same.

She also wondered how many notices the EC had issued against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"The Prime Minister is mocking me regularly, almost on a daily basis. Do you like it," Ms. Banerjee asked the crowd. The Chief Minister added that she spoke the way she could and asked why that should result in mockery. Earlier the Trinamool Congress leadership had raised objections to the Prime Minister's taunt, addressing the Chief Minister as "Didi, O Didi".

The Chief Minister said that in politics everyone should maintain "lakshman rekha (no-go areas)".

Mr. Banerjee also accused the BJP of trying to forcibly occupy the State with the help of central agencies. She urged the people to file police complaints against central forces if they indulge in excesses during elections.

### Violation of Model Code

"How many notices have you issued against Narendra Modi; every day he is engaged in a Hindu-Muslim debate," she said.

In the notice issued to



Last mile: West Bengal Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury during a roadshow in support of party candidate Riju Ghosal at Santipur in Nadia. ■ PTI

## The big picture



Show of support: BJP leader Mithun Chakraborty during a roadshow with party candidate Babul Supriyo, ahead of the fourth phase of the West Bengal Assembly poll, in Kolkata on Thursday. ■ PTI

## In Tollygunge, a battle of heavyweights

Babul Supriyo and Aroop Biswas are set to clash in the hub of the Bengali film industry

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

KOLKATA

The high-profile Tollygunge seat, considered a hub of the Bengali film industry, is all set for a clash between Union Minister Babul Supriyo of the BJP and West Bengal Public Works Department Minister Aroop Biswas of the Trinamool Congress. The CPI(M) has fielded a fresh face, actor Debdutt Ghosh, in the constituency which will go to the polls in the fourth phase on April 10.

### 'Syndicate raj'

With the Trinamool and the BJP locked in a bitter battle for power, the film industry has now been polarised on political lines. Both the parties have fielded several high-profile actors. But control over the industry is incomplete without victory in Tollygunge in posh south Kolkata and home to Hindus, Sikhs, the upper-middle class, refugees



Trinamool candidate Aroop Biswas in Kolkata. ■ PTI

and Hindi-speaking people.

Mr. Supriyo, who is also a well-known singer, is confident of upsetting his rival, Mr. Biswas, who has a long association with the film industry. A syndicate raj has been established in the film industry by the Trinamool and the Biswas brothers [Aroop and Swarup]. This has to end," he said. The Union Minister alleged that the studio area – the neighbourhood of New Theatres studio, Technician's Studio and the NTI studio – has witnessed "unprecedented

coercion" by the brothers who have forced technicians and artists to either follow their dictats or go without a job for over a decade now.

"We will end this dictatorship," Mr. Supriyo said. The BJP leader also said that the "syndicate raj and cut money culture prevalent in the construction sector" in Tollygunge must stop. In West Bengal, the term 'syndicate' refers to a business run by persons allegedly enjoying political patronage, who force promoters and contractors to buy construc-

### 'New heights'

Mr. Biswas contended that the TMC has worked for the film industry's development and has taken it to new heights in the last 10 years. "The BJP and Bengali culture are the anti-thesis of each other. Both can never go together," he said. Rubbishing Mr. Supriyo's allegations, Mr. Biswas said, "The government only comes in when there is a crisis in the film industry and various bodies seek its intervention." He claimed that unlike the CPI (M) regime, there had been no interference in businesses and entrepreneurial activities in the past 10 years.

Mr. Ghosh said although the Trinamool has established a "reign of terror in the industry", choosing the BJP would be "harakiri (suicidal)" as the parties are two sides of the same coin.

FROM PAGE ONE

## PM stresses on need for more 'test, track & treat'

"These zones cannot be large undefined areas. If cases arise in a block of flats that tower can be a micro containment zone, the entire complex cannot be a containment zone," Mr. Modi added. Mr. Modi admitted that the long battle against COVID19 may have led to "COVID fatigue" among people and local administration, but that it needed to be gotten over and urged that governors of States and civil society members, people of influence be roped in to emphasise COVID appropriate behaviour again.

Mr. Modi also suggested that a "Teek Utsav" (Vaccination Festival) be organised between April 11 (birth anniversary of social reformer Mahatma Jyotiba Phule) and April 14 (birth anniversary Dr. Bhimrao

Ambedkar) as a way of ensuring maximum vaccinations of those eligible.

"A set out festival like this can be used to motivate many people to get themselves vaccinated," he said.

Addressing the issue of shortage of vaccines raised by several States, the Prime Minister again urged that strict testing and raising the share of testing by RTPCR to 70% of all tests be undertaken, stating that "vaccination will be a long process which will go on side-by-side."

"I urge the youth, instead of waiting for the vaccine, to not just follow COVID-19 appropriate behaviour, but also urge others and help those with less digital literacy and in the eligible category to be vaccinated," he said.

## SC turns down release of Rohingya in Jammu

"The rights guaranteed under Articles 14 (equality) and 21 (due process of law) are available to all persons who may or may not be citizens." But the right not to be deported is ancillary to the right to reside or settle in any part of India under Article 19 (1)(e)," the court said.

But the right not to be deported, is ancillary or concomitant to the right to reside or settle in any part of the territory of India guaranteed under Article 19(1)(e)," the court observed. Article 19 (1) (e) of the Constitution guarantees to every citizen of India, the right "to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India".

In its six-page order, the court said it was "not possible" to agree with the plea of Mohammad Salimullah, a member of the Rohingya community represented by advocates Prashant Bhushan and Cheryl d'Souza, to "release the detained Rohingya refugees immediately and direct the Union Territory government and the Ministry of Home Affairs to expeditiously grant refugee identification cards through the FRRO for the Rohingya in the informal camps".

But the Supreme Court order refrained from passing any remarks about the "present state of affairs in Myanmar". "We cannot comment upon something happening in another country," the court said.

## SC refuses pleas to quash probe against Deshmukh

"But he was the Home Minister when the High Court passed the order. It was after that, he resigned. He was clinging to his office," Justice Gupta reacted.

"But should I [Mr. Deshmukh] not have been heard first before the High Court passed the order for CBI probe?" senior advocate Kapil Sibal, for Mr. Deshmukh, asked.

"Why should a suspect be heard before registration of an FIR?" Justice Gupta responded.

Mr. Sibal replied that the allegations in the letter were hearsay and not admissible as evidence.

"Mr. Sibal, that is why the court has ordered a preliminary enquiry, to find out whether there is evidence at



Anil Deshmukh

## Varanasi court orders survey of mosque

The court said the committee would be entitled to enter every portion of the religious structure situated at the disputed site but shall first resort to only Ground Penetrating Radar or Geo-Radiology System or both to satisfy itself whether any excavation or extraction work is needed at any portion of the religious structure.

If excavation or extraction is to be done at any portion of the structure, it should be first done by trial trench method vertically and that too on a very small scale, the court said.

The order came on a peti-

tion demanding restoration of the land on which the Gyanvapi Mosque stands to the Hindus, claiming that Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb had pulled down parts of the old Kashi Vishwanath Temple to build the mosque.

Said Yasin, joint secretary of the Anjuma Intejamia Masjid, caretaker of the masjid, was disappointed with the order. "We had hoped that after the Babri Masjid case, now there would be peace. But it seems like the courts and those in power do not want that," he told *The Hindu*.

The order came on a peti-

## India silent on back-channel dialogue

Two Pakistani news websites say the current round of negotiations goes as far back as 2018

**SUHASINI HAIDAR**  
NEW DELHI

The Indian and Pakistani High Commissions in Islamabad and Delhi, respectively, are an "effective channel of communication", the External Affairs Ministry said on said, sidestepping a slew of media reports on a "back-channel dialogue" between the two countries on a number of initiatives. Earlier in the day, two Pakistani news websites reported that the current round of negotiations date back to 2018, and among the issues discussed by Indian and Pakistani officials was the possibility of Prime Minister Narendra Modi attending a SAARC summit in Pakistan in October 2021.

"Our respective High Commissions exist and are functioning. That is a very effective channel of communication. Regarding speculation about SAARC summit, I have nothing to share with

you at the moment," Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi told presspersons when asked about the reports by a number of Indian and international news media outlets quoting unnamed senior government officials that have suggested that the back-channel dialogue is being overseen by National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Bajwa, and that they have been facilitated by other countries such as the UAE.

At a press conference on Wednesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who visited Islamabad after talks in New Delhi, "welcomed the recent steps taken by India and Pakistan to normalise bilateral ties", further fuelling reports about the existence of a rapprochement process.

The latest report carried by Pakistan's *Dawn* newspaper said the country's U-turn last week on approving



Peace patrol: BSF and Pakistani Rangers personnel stand face-to-face along the border in Jammu last week. ■ PTI

imports of cotton and sugar from India, and then putting off the decision after opposition within the Cabinet, was an "avoidable" mistake due to "haste" in announcing the decision too early, without preparing all stakeholders. The report said the Pakistan government had hoped for a period of prolonged tensions in 2019, and was restarted some months ago in 2020.

Modi to J&K as signs that India was willing to soften some of its moves made on August 5, 2019. According to the "insiders" quoted, Indian and Pakistani officials had met at a number of "secret locations" in a dialogue that began in 2018, broke off for a period of prolonged tensions in 2019, and was restarted some months ago in 2020.

"Indian officials raised the

issue of what they call 'cross-border terrorism'. Pakistani officials assured them that Islamabad was strictly following a policy of not allowing non-state actors to engage in any armed activity," the *Dawn* news report added about the talks where the issue of terrorism and Kashmir were reportedly discussed.

In a separate report published on Thursday, a Pakistani website, *Global Village Space*, said more confidence-building measures had been proposed through the alleged back-channel dialogue, adding this was the "first time that Pakistani government sources have confirmed the existence of back-channel engagement with the Modi government".

The Indian External Affairs Ministry did not respond to the specific details in either report, and has maintained silence over previous reports citing the dialogue.

Russia ties not dependent on others: MEA

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

Two days after the visit of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, India on Thursday reiterated that the "time-tested ties" with Moscow were not dependent on third parties. India's comments were prompted over reports that suggested growing military ties between Russia and Pakistan.

"The visit of the Russian Foreign Minister was a good opportunity to renew our special and privileged partnership. A broad range of issues were discussed. India's close, time-tested and strategic relations with Russia stand on their own merit and are not influenced by relations with other countries," said Arindam Bagchi, official spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs in response to a question.

## Middleman supplied documents to Dassault: report

Sushen Gupta obtained Excel sheet created by Indian team for calculating purchase price, says Mediapart

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

Arms dealer Sushen Gupta, charged with the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the AgustaWestland VVIP chopper deal, supplied classified documents to Dassault Aviation on the Indian negotiating team when talks were gridlocked over benchmark pricing in the €7.87-billion Rafale deal, according to French media outlet Mediapart.

According to information gained by Mediapart, one of those "other defence deals" in the ED investigation which was not identified in the chargesheet, is the Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) signed in 2016 for 36 Rafale jets. In the official chargesheet dated May 20, 2019 against Mr. Gupta, the ED wrote that he had gained "sensitive data which should have only been in possession

of the Ministry of Defence". It also said "since kickbacks from the other defence deals are not a subject matter of the present investigation" about the AgustaWestland scandal, "separate investigations would be undertaken regarding the other deals", according to the report.

The report said according to information gained by Mediapart, one of those "other defence deals" in the ED investigation, which was not identified in the chargesheet, is the Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) signed in 2016 for 36 Rafale jets.

Referring to the CAG audit of the deal which found that the final cost of the Rafale jets was 17% less than the initial MMRC tender offer and the Supreme Court ruling in 2019 that there were insufficient grounds for opening an investigation into the matter, the report said, "But that de-

cision was made without the information gathered in the AgustaWestland probe by the Enforcement Directorate." After "benchmark" calculations, the Indian negotiators concluded, in a confidential report dated August 2015, that the overall purchase price for the jets, including their weaponry, should be €5.06 bn, the re-

port said, while in January 2016, Dassault proposed €10.7 bn excluding the missile equipment.

The talks got gridlocked over this as per the report and Mr. Gupta, obtained documents which included the minutes of meetings by the Indian Negotiating Team (INT), the arguments they had prepared to present to the French, and detailed

notes on the calculations of the costs and the methodology employed. Mr. Gupta even obtained an Excel sheet created by one member of the INT, the report said.

The report also referred to a series of investigative reports by the *The Hindu* which showed how the anti-corruption clauses were removed from the deal and also the INT was sidestepped and the Prime Minister's Office directly negotiated the deal.

In March 2017, one of the Gupta family's Indian companies, Defsys Solutions, in-

voiced Dassault for 1 million euros for the production of 50 replica models of the Rafale jet as stated in the part one of the three part Media-part series.

Defsys Solutions also be-

came, as announced in a statement released by Dassault, one of the subcontrac-



Making news: India is likely to get nine more Rafale fighter aircraft next month. ■ AFP/DASSAULT AVIATION

## Fertilizer company hikes prices

Amid backlash, IFFCO blames it on sharp rise in raw material costs globally

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

India's largest fertilizer maker IFFCO Limited (Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited) has effected a sharp hike in fertilizer prices, with as much as a 58.33% hike in the price of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP), and its CEO staved off criticism by seeking to delink the allegations of corruption against former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh.

The statements of a complainant in the matter, Jayshree Patil, and Assistant Commissioner of Police Sanjay Patil have also been recorded, while Deputy Commissioner of Police Bhujbal has been asked to join the probe," said an agency official.

**HC directive**  
The preliminary enquiry is being conducted on the directions of the Bombay High Court.

Mr. Deshmukh had resigned after the High Court ordered the initial CBI probe. In their applications, the former Mumbai police chief had alleged that some police officers had been told to collect ₹100 crore every month from the bars and restaurants in Mumbai.

Mr. Vaze is also being probed by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) with respect to a bomb scare in Mumbai and the alleged murder of one automobile parts dealer, Manohar Hiran.

He was earlier arrested by the NIA in the bomb scare case. The NIA later also took over the alleged murder case from the Mumbai police.

anyone," IFFCO managing director & CEO U.S. Awasthi said.

The new prices are to kick in from April 1, as per the memo revising maximum retail prices of different products sent out by the co-operative firm's marketing services department on April 7.

The development assumes significance, coming after the end of voting in four Assembly elections. A section of farmers is protesting the government's new agricultural laws even as high fuel prices are feeding into high retail inflation.

Apart from the over 58% hike in DAP, the new retail prices for different formulations of NPKs (Nitrogen, Phosphorus, Potash and Sulphur) fertilizers were raised to nearly 46% to



The existing fertilizer stocks will be sold at old rates, said IFFCO.

51.9%. Responding to the backlash on social media, Mr. Awasthi wrote a series of tweets on Thursday afternoon to defend the move. "We at #IFFCO, take strong objection to tweets, news linking any political party or Govt for an increase in price of complex fertilizers. They

are decontrolled. No linkage to any political party or government," he said.

**Unprecedented:** CPI(M)

Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader Sitaram Yechury called for a withdrawal of what he termed an "unprecedented fertilizer price hike". "This one & a half times hike is yet another of those that never happened in the last 70 years! Destroys not only our agriculture & farmers but crores of lives with consequent rise in food prices... Obstinate refusing to repeat agric laws, in India's interest, as demanded by lakhs of our annadatas for over 4 months, BJP govt, by this hike, insults over 350 martyrs in this struggle. Intensify people's resistance. Withdraw this hike," he tweeted.

"Tax collections by the Centre has made the experience of filling fuel in one's car no less than an exam, then why doesn't the PM discuss it? Kharcha pe bhi Ho Charcha! [A discussion should also be held on expenses]," he tweeted.

With petrol prices crossing ₹100 a litre, the Congress has been targeting the Centre for imposing high taxes on petroleum products.

**Need to document social service by Sikhs, says PM**

'Let new generation imbibe lessons'

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said there was need for research and documentation about the social service aspect of Sikhism, while addressing a meeting of the high-level committee for the commemoration of the 400th birth anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur.

Addressing the meeting via video conferencing, Mr. Modi spoke of the need to make the younger generation understand the lessons of Guru Tegh Bahadur. "He said that the organisation of

activities should be such that not only the life and teachings of Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, but of the entire Guru tradition is propagated world over. Hailing the social service done by Sikh community and gurdwaras all over the world, the Prime Minister said that proper research and documentation on this aspect of the Sikh tradition should be done," a government statement said.

The meeting was attended by former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, among others.

The farmer also represents Guru Teg Bahadur'

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge, at a meeting of the committee chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to organise the 400th birth anniversary of the ninth Sikh Guru Tegh Bahadur, raised the issue of the farmers' protests and requested him to end the stalemate.

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Home Minister Amit Shah, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, among others.

largest participation of the farmers of Punjab. The Prime Minister had said he was at a distance of a phone call. But that distance is not yet over. I urge the Prime Minister to take the initiative to find a solution by paying immediate attention to the demands of the farmers," Mr. Kharge was quoted as saying in a statement released by the Congress.

He also noted that the celebration should not be viewed from a religious point of view and publicity should be given to the fact that Guru Tegh Bahadur made the supreme sacrifice for religious freedom.

## Find solution to farmers' protests, Kharge urges Modi

among those who attended Thursday's virtual meeting.

"I would also like to make a request. The farmers' movement has been going on for 133 days. The farmer of the country also represents the Guru and has the



Mallikarjun Kharge

# SC meeting on vacancies inconclusive

The top court, whose judicial strength now stands at 29, will see four retirements in 2021

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL

NEW DELHI

A meeting of the five-member Supreme Court Collegium led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde on names to fill the five judicial vacancies in the court ended on an inconclusive note on Thursday.

This may be one of the last meetings of the Bobde collegium before he retires on April 23. Though Chief Justice Bobde steered the top court through an unprecedented time, chances are high that he may retire without a successful judicial appointment to the Supreme Court during his tenure as top judge.

Last year, the court successfully used the virtual medium to hear cases and functioned without missing a day of work through the pandemic and lockdown months.

The Thursday meeting



This may be one of the last meetings of the Bobde collegium before he retires.

ended with the collegium deferring its decisions for a later date.

#### Another meeting

It is to be seen if Chief Justice Bobde would call another meeting in the few days left before his retirement, or, in the alternative, pass the baton to his successor and Chief Justice of India-designate, Justice N.V. Ramana, who takes over on April 24.

Normally, the incumbent

Chief Justice does not involve with the collegium work during his final days in office and after the presidential appointment of his successor is notified. The time is used to effect a smooth transition.

Justices Rohinton F. Nariman, U.U. Lalit and A.M. Khanwilkar are the other members of the collegium.

Several past meetings of the Bobde collegium in the past weeks, even before the CJI's recommendation of Justice Ramana as the 48th Chief Justice, were inconclusive as the judges could not reach a consensus on the names.

The collegium has been discussing diverse opinions from within on issues such as proportionate representation from various High Courts and seniority among High Court judges before finalising the names to recommend to the government for appointment.

Proportionate representation and seniority, though only conventions and not constitutional or legal mandates, carry weight during the appointment process.

The last appointments to the Supreme Court were of Justices Krishna Murari, S. Ravindra Bhat, V. Ramasubramanian and Hrishikesh Roy in September 2019. The past several months have seen the Supreme Court function under a series of challenges posed by the pandemic, even as its judicial strength has come down to 29 with the recent retirement of Justice Indu Malhotra.

#### Oldest vacancy

The oldest vacancy of the lot of current five in the Supreme Court was that of Justice Ranjan Gogoi, who retired on November 17, 2019.

The year 2021 would further see four retirements

in the top court, starting with Chief Justice Bobde, Justices Ashok Bhushan, Rohinton Nariman and Naveen Sinha. The latter two retire a few days apart in August.

#### Several HC judges

The names of several High Court judges are in the zone of consideration.

Information published by the Law Ministry on March 1 show that the senior-most among the current Chief Justices of the 25 High Courts,

as per their initial appointment in 2003 and 2004, are Chief Justices A.S. Oka (Karnataka), Akil Abdulhamid Kureshi (Tripura), D.N. Patel (Delhi), Govind Mathur (Allahabad), Vikram Nath (Gujarat) and T.B. Radhakrishnan (Calcutta). The name of Justice B.V. Nagarathna from the Karnataka High Court is also under consideration for the vacancy left by Justice Indu Malhotra.

# 'No ad hoc judges in place of regular recommendations'

Supreme Court Collegium should be kept in the loop: Bench

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday agreed that a plan to appoint retired judges on an ad hoc basis to reduce pendency in the High Courts should not become an excuse to stop or further delay the appointment process of regular judges.

As on April 1, the High Courts have a total vacancy of 411 regular judges against the sanctioned judicial strength of 1,080. The working strength in the High Courts is 669.

For one, the Chief Justices of the High Courts should opt for ad hoc judges only if their efforts to fill the judicial vacancies in their respective High Courts have hit a wall, even as pendency has reached the red zone.

"Ad hoc judges should not



CJI Sharad A. Bobde

be appointed in lieu of regular recommendations," Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde, heading a Special Bench of Justices S.K. Kaul and Surya Kant, noted.

"Yes, there should not be a move for the appointment of ad hoc judges unless a Chief Justice has made the recommendations for all the existing vacancies in his or her High Court," senior ad-

vocate Vikas Singh submitted. "That is why we want the Supreme Court Collegium to be kept in the loop about the ad hoc judges' appointments," the CJI said.

"The procedure should explain when a Chief Justice can initiate the appointment of an ad hoc judge; what should be the threshold of pendency for such appointments; for how long should such ad hoc judges continue; what should be their allowances, etc.," Chief Justice Bobde remarked.

The Bench asked senior members of the Bar appearing for various High Courts, Additional Solicitor-General R.S. Suri and senior advocates Arvind Datar and R. Basant, among other Bar leaders, to convene a meeting and prepare a draft plan on the procedure.

## Govt. to hold competition again for 'iconic structure'

First round of entries failed the cut'

DAMINI NATH

NEW DELHI

The Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry will launch a "restructured" second round of its design competition for the "iconic structure" to commemorate 75 years of Independence, after the first round entries failed to make the cut, a top Ministry official said on Thursday.

The Ministry's Central Public Works Department (CPWD) had launched the competition in November 2020 and the results were to be announced by the end of December. However, the deadline has been pushed several times since. The

structure, which can be a tower or sculpture, will be built at the proposed New India Garden on the banks of the Yamuna as a national extension of the Central Vista, according to the CPWD's plan.

Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry Secretary Durga Shankar Mishra told *The Hindu* that 126 entries had been received for the competition, which was open to Indian citizens and organisations. While there were some good entries, the project was "more ambitious".

He said a restructured competition would be announced by May-end or June.

## Commando freed in the presence of villagers

Activists, journalists in team that negotiated the release of CRPF man abducted in Chhattisgarh

VIJAYA SINGH

NEW DELHI

Bijapur-based journalist Ganesh Mishra, who was part of the team of journalists and activists who negotiated the release of Rakeshwar Singh Minhas of the Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) unit of the CRPF on Thursday, said the Maoist leaders said they did not harm the commando as he was found in an unconscious state and it would have been against "battle ethics".

Recalling the process that led to the release of the abducted commando, Mr. Mishra said he got a call on April 5. "They demanded that a team of mediators be appointed on behalf of the go-

vernment. I then contacted the police," he said.

He added that the police roped in Dharampal Saini, who was awarded the Padma Shri in 1995 for educating tri-

bal girls, and Tellam Booraiah, a leader of the Gondwana community, to speak to the Maoists.

A senior woman cadre of the Maoists, the area com-

mander of the Pamed area, led the talks with Mr. Saini and Ms. Booraiah, Mr. Mishra said.

Mr. Mishra said they were asked to reach a village at the Bijapur-Sukma border, over 400 km from Raipur.

"We left Bijapur at 5 a.m. on Thursday on motorcycles and reached the location at 9 a.m. After waiting for more than five hours, 60-70 Maoists arrived with the commando. His hands were tied. The two mediators spoke to the Maoists for an hour and the commando was released in the presence of the villagers. The woman leader told us that the commando was being released on humanitarian grounds

## India and China to hold 11th round of talks on LAC today

It will take forward second phase of disengagement in eastern Ladakh

DINAKAR PERI

ANANTH KRISHNAN

NEW DELHI

India and China are scheduled to hold the 11th round of Corps Commander talks on Friday to discuss the second phase of disengagement in Eastern Ladakh.

The talks will be held at Chushul and are scheduled to begin at 10.30 a.m., a defence source said on Thursday.

There could be some movement on the issue of disengagement from Patrolling Points (PP) at Gogra and Hot Springs during the talks, a second source said.

In February, the two sides reached an agreement and completed the first phase of disengagement on the north and south

banks of Pangong Tso. Within 48 hours, the 10th round of talks were held to take forward the process, during which they agreed to push for a mutually acceptable solution of the remaining issues in a "steady and orderly" manner to jointly maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas.

However, no agreement has so far been reached on the second phase of disengagement.

With disengagement now complete at Pangong Tso, the focus of the talks will be to work out a phased disengagement plan for the other friction areas in Eastern Ladakh. These include Gogra, Hot Springs, Depsang and Demchok. Partial disengagement has already been undertaken by both sides

from Gogra and Hot Springs last July, before tensions flared up on the south bank of Pangong Tso.

Responding to questions on the talks, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said in Beijing that India and China were in communication for holding the 11th round of talks and there was no delay in the meeting.

"I want to stress that the merits of the situation at the India-China border are very clear and the responsibility does not rest with the Chinese side. We hope the Indian side will work with China to follow through the important consensus of our two leaders, abide by relevant agreements and treaties to de-escalate the tension at the border," Mr. Zhao said.

## Biden will restore credibility on climate change, says U.S. envoy

Kerry promises to fulfil commitments towards developing countries

SUHASINI HAIDAR

NEW DELHI

The Trump administration damaged the U.S.'s credibility on climate change issues, which the Biden administration is trying to restore now, said U.S. special envoy John Kerry here on Thursday. He promised to fulfil Washington's earlier commitments towards developing countries, including a \$3 billion contribution to the Green Climate Fund.

The issue about U.S. commitments had been raised by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman during a meeting with Mr. Kerry this week, as the U.S. envoy pushed for more ambitious targets on cutting emissions.

"Former President Trump shot America's credibility in the head and turned his back on science," Mr. Kerry said in response to a question from *The Hindu* at a media roundtable at the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and U.S. special envoy John Kerry in New Delhi. ■REUTERS

end of his visit, referring to the U.S. decision to pull out of the Paris agreement (UNFCCC) on climate change in 2017.

"The United States comes back to the table understanding this obligation, understanding what we need to do. We come back with humility. We come back knowing that for the last four years we've disappointed people," he added.

but pointed out that many U.S. states and cities had stayed the course on climate change mitigation despite Mr. Trump's pull-out from the agreement. During his visit, where he met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Mr. Kerry said he stressed the need to bring forward the commitments for carbon emission cuts from the earlier timeline of 2050 to the next decade, where he said "decisive actions" will be taken.

"Prime Minister Modi and special envoy Kerry agreed to collaborate on a 2030 agenda with a focus on a clean and green agenda through enhancing the availability of climate finance, building resilient infrastructure, energy storage and green hydrogen," said Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Arindam Bagchi, when asked about the meetings and whether India had given any specific commitments on emissions.

## NATIONAL AGRI-FOOD BIOTECHNOLOGY INSTITUTE (NABI)

(Dept. of Biotechnology, Govt. of India)

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NMDC Iron & Steel Plant, Nagarnar, invites sealed tenders in two bid system with last date & time for submission of offers as 07.05.2021 by 02.30 PM for the following:

1) Name of work: Civil & Electrical Erection work for Installation of ABT Meter 220 KV MRS at NISP Nagarnar Tender No & Date: NISP/CONTRACTS/M&C/159/ABT Meter/2021/204 Dated 09.04.2021

2) Name of work: Construction of Electrical Panel Room For CISF Colony, NISP, Village Dhanpanji, Jagdalpur Distt Bastar, C.G. Tender No & Date: NISP/CONTRACTS/M&C/210/ELECT. PANEL ROOM/2021/205 Dated 09.04.2021

Tender documents can be downloaded from websites [www.nmdc.co.in](http://www.nmdc.co.in) or [www.eprocure.gov.in](http://www.eprocure.gov.in) in tender section. HOD (Materials & Contracts)

हर एक काम देश का नाम

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# 'Double mutant' strain named B.1.617

Except for lab trials, studies are yet to be conducted on how vaccine efficacy is influenced by variants

JACOB KOSHY  
NEW DELHI

The "double mutant" virus that scientists had flagged last month as having a bearing on the spread of the pandemic in India, has a formal scientific classification: B.1.617.

The variant is common in India – how much in every State is unclear though – and has a couple of defining mutations, E484Q and L425R, that enable it to become more infectious and evade antibodies.

Though these mutations have individually been found in several other coronavirus variants, the presence of both mutations together were first found in some coronavirus genomes from India.

Certain variants of the coronavirus, for instance, B.1.1.7 and B.1.351 – have been termed the "United Kingdom" and "South Africa" variant, respectively, because they have mutations associated with large spikes in these countries or reduce the efficacy of vaccines and



**Genome study:** The B.1.617 strain of the novel coronavirus was first detected on December 7, 2020. ■ AP

are termed "variants of concern (VOC)".

According to a note from the INSACOG, the consortium of laboratories that is sequencing a sample of genomes from COVID-19 patients in India, B.1.617 was first detected on December 7, 2020. Though now present in at least eight countries, nearly 70% of the genome sequences that have the mutations characterising B.1.617

Maharashtra but we have to also see the role of the variant (from further genome studies) in say West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh where there are massive crowds from elections and the Kumbh Mela [respectively]," said Shahid Jameel, virologist and Director, Trivedi School of Biosciences, Ashoka University.

An explainer note by the INSACOG on the significance of the mutations says that it has as many as 15 "lineage defining mutations". Other than the two mutations, there is a third significant mutation, P614R. All three concerning mutations are on the spike protein, the operative part of the coronavirus that binds to receptor cells of the body.

**Resistant to T cells**  
L425R, some studies show, could even make the coronavirus resistant to T cells, a class of cells necessary to target and destroy virus-infected cells.

India has not yet conducted studies on how vaccine ef-

ficacy is influenced by variants, except for limited laboratory trials, but international studies have shown reduced efficacy of vaccines – particularly those by Pfizer, Moderna and Novavax – to certain variants. However, the vaccines continue to be significantly protective in spite of this.

So far, only three global VOCs have been identified: the U.K. variant, the South African and the Brazilian (P.1) lineage. Of the 10,787 samples from international passengers, 771 instances of these VOCs have been identified in 18 States of the country, according to a statement from the Health Ministry in March.

A scientist associated with the INSACOG said vaccine makers should now be accounting for the variations in the spike protein in designing future vaccine.

"That's the real purpose of genomic analysis. To design appropriate vaccines but so far there are hardly such studies out of India," the scientist pointed out.

# With 1.31 lakh new infections, highest single-day spike seen

As many as 802 deaths linked to COVID-19 reported

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI

With 1,31,787 new COVID-19 cases reported as of 11.45 p.m. on Thursday, India registered the highest single-day spike in infections since the beginning of the pandemic. As many as 802 deaths were also recorded on the day.

The figures do not include cases and deaths from the Union Territory of Ladakh. The data is sourced from covid19india.org, an independent aggregator of daily COVI-19 figures.

Daily infections in India crossed the one lakh mark for the third consecutive day on Thursday. The rise in cases in the past three days was primarily due to a high number of tests being conducted recently. Wednesday marked the third consecutive day with more than 12 lakh daily tests.

The country has so far reported a total of 1,30,57,863 cases and 1,67,694 deaths.



**Fighting the virus:** A campaign in Mumbai to boost awareness on the use of sanitisers and masks. ■ EMMANUEL YOGINI

Maharashtra reported 56,286 infections (accounting for nearly 43% of the new cases) on Thursday, followed by Chhattisgarh with 10,652 new infections and Uttar Pradesh with 8,474 new cases.

Maharashtra also recorded the maximum casualties (376) on Thursday. Chhattisgarh followed with 72 new deaths, while Punjab registered 56 new casualties. As of 8 p.m. on Thursday, 34.73 lakh vaccine doses were administered, taking the total to 9,40,96,689 shots.

The number of daily vaccinations recovered from the low figures recorded during the last few days of March and peaked at 42 lakh doses on April 2. However, since then, the pace of vaccination has considerably dropped again.

## Centre has pledged support, says Pawar

NCP chief tries to calm tensions

STAFF REPORTER  
PUNE

Amid the Centre-State stand-off over the availability of vaccines in Maharashtra, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) president Sharad Pawar said on Thursday that the Centre had promised to help the State, the worst-hit in terms of soaring COVID-19 cases and fatalities.

In a live address on Facebook, Mr. Pawar, whose NCP is in alliance with the Shiv Sena and the Congress in the Uddhav Thackeray-led 'Maha Vikas Aghadi' (MVA) government, said he spoke to Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Wednesday and that the latter had said he would help Maharashtra combat the pandemic.

The situation in the State was alarming, Mr. Pawar said as he defended the stringent restrictions imposed by the State government. The rapid spread of the virus and the dramatic daily case spikes had left the government with no option, he said.

The situation in Maharashtra is grim. Health workers in the State are doing their best to control the spread of the infection. But to preserve the health and save lives, stern measures are imperative and the State government is taking them. Everybody's cooperation here is of the utmost import-



Sharad Pawar

tance," said the NCP chief.

The Centre, too, was in favour of tightening restrictions to break the virus chain, he said. There was apprehension among labourers, farmers and traders that the new curbs would affect them severely, but people could not ignore reality. "Hence, I appeal to all stakeholders, including the Opposition, to cooperate with the government. To protect the lives of citizens, some stringent measures are imperative," Mr. Pawar said.

Mr. Pawar's attempt at mending fences with the Centre comes a day after State Health Minister Rajesh Tope urged the Centre to expedite the delivery of vaccine doses, warning that Maharashtra had barely three days' stock left.

In response, Mr. Harsh Vardhan had come down heavily on the Maharashtra government, accusing it of trying to cover its "failure" to contain the pandemic.

## 180 AEFI deaths reported in India

Data presented before committee on adverse events following immunisation

R. PRASAD  
CHENNAI

According to a presentation made to the National AEFI Committee during a meeting held on March 31, there have been 617 severe and serious (including deaths) adverse events following immunisation (AEFI). As on March 29, a total of 180 deaths (29.2%) have been reported following vaccination across the country. Complete documentation is available only for 236 (38.3%) cases.

In all, 492 severe and serious AEFI have been classified by the AEFI Secretariat of the Immunisation Technical Support Unit (ITSU) at the Health Ministry. Classification has been completed for 124 deaths, 305 serious events that required hospitalisation, and 63 severe events that did not require hospitalisation.

The classification by the AEFI Secretariat was on the basis of case reporting forms (CRF) and case investigation forms (CIF) submitted at the district level. In the meeting, individual AEFI cases were presented and brought up for discussion by experts in the AEFI causality assessment committee.

Of the 124 deaths, more than 63 deaths (nearly 51%) have been categorised as being caused due to acute coronary syndrome (a range of conditions associated with sudden, reduced blood flow to the heart) or heart attack. Another 11 deaths (12%) of deaths are due to stroke.

In response, Mr. Harsh Vardhan had come down heavily on the Maharashtra government, accusing it of trying to cover its "failure" to contain the pandemic.



**Keeping track:** A total of 617 serious AEFI cases were reported to the panel at a meeting on March 31. ■ AFP

As on March 17, the details of the causality assessment of only 13 AEFI including 10 deaths have already been made public by the national AEFI committee. The vaccine was not found to have caused death in any of the 10 vaccinated people.

However, in many cases post mortems have not been conducted. For example, in at least six out of 10 cases where the National AEFI Committee has completed causality assessment, no post mortem has been done, says Malini Aisola, a public health researcher based in Delhi.

### Not evenly distributed

Virologist Dr. Jacob John, formerly of CMC Vellore, says that if deaths are not associated with vaccination, then they would be nearly evenly distributed across weeks post vaccination. Similarly, deaths due to stroke are 13 in the first week but only one death in two-four weeks after vaccination. There have been nine "sudden deaths"

have been 11 deaths in 8-28 days (0.5 deaths per day) post-vaccination.

If deaths are seen on a weekly basis, there have been 111 deaths in the first week (nearly 16 deaths per day) but in the next three weeks, there have been only 11 deaths (0.5 deaths per day).

"If the deaths are unrelated to vaccination, then deaths should be evenly distributed across weeks after vaccination. There are an extraordinary number of deaths in the first week but in the next two-four weeks there are only about four deaths per week," says Dr. John.

There have been 59 deaths due to sudden, reduced blood flow to the heart (acute coronary syndrome) or heart attack in the first week but only four in the second-four weeks after vaccination. Similarly, deaths due to stroke are 13 in the first week but only one death in two-four weeks after vaccination. There have been nine "sudden deaths"

during the first week but only one death in two-four weeks after vaccination.

In the case of AEFI requiring hospitalisation, there have been 291 AEFI needing hospitalisation in the first week compared with only 13 in two-four weeks after vaccination. "The number of hospitalisations in the first week stands out strikingly different," Dr. John says.

Weakness in one, two or all four limbs (mono/para/quadruparesis) seen in 17 people hospitalised is similar to transverse myelitis seen during the trial in the U.K., says Dr. John. About 15 cases of seizure in the first week and no such cases in the two-four weeks after vaccination is abnormal, he says. "There is something going on in the central nervous system. Also, 17 cases of mono/para/quadruparesis in four weeks needs thorough investigation," he says.

According to him, 59 cases of severe AEFI not requiring hospitalisation in the first week and four such cases in two-four weeks may be a signal.

"Since Covishield is the same vaccine as AstraZeneca, updated warnings related to these rare conditions, information for vaccine recipients and the public about when to seek medical attention, and information for health providers about how to identify and treat such occurrences needs to be done for the vaccine," says Ms. Aisola.



**Second shot:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi has urged all those eligible to get vaccinated soon. ■ AFP/PIB

## PM gets second dose of Covaxin at AIIMS

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday took the second dose of COVID-19 vaccine at the All India Institute Of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi. He received the first dose of Bharat Biotech's Covaxin on March 1.

In a tweet, the Prime Minister shared a picture of himself taking the second

dose of the vaccine and said: "Got my second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at AIIMS. Vaccination is among the few ways we have, to defeat the virus. If you are eligible for the vaccine, get your shot soon. Register on CoWin.gov.in."

The two nurses who administered the vaccine were P. Niveda from Puducherry and Nisha Sharma from Punjab.

## Chidambaram speaks up for Maharashtra

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

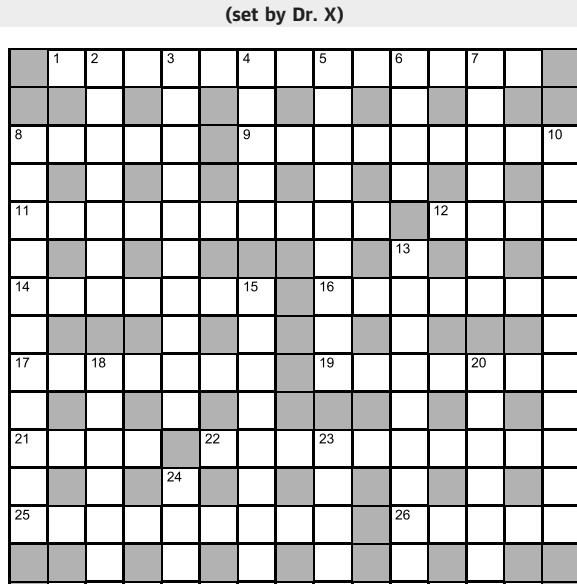
Maharashtra ignoring hard facts. Maharashtra has vaccinated 80% of healthcare workers. Nearly 20 States are behind Maharashtra," Mr. Chidambaram said.

He said the State has vaccinated 73% of frontline workers, a record only five States have improved on.

## TH CROSSWORD + 13217

(set by Dr. X)

Never go off the grid.  
We are digital now. Come solve online.  
@ <https://rgo.page.link/jjpTn>



- 14 Rants when one breaks deals (7)
- 16 Poetic movement in essence largely blocked by Islamic leader (7)
- 17 Stylish and smart British actress (7)
- 19 Good meat left for male pig (7)
- 21 Tough image, right for Conservative (4)
- 22 Husband gets rowdy after knocking back pegs, it's clear (3-7)
- 25 Rate fixed by more reliable financial officer (9)
- 26 Queen enters swimming pool in the lowest deck (5)
- 27 Continue having sex with hot steno slyly in an extramarital relationship (1,3,2,3,4)
- DOWN
- 2 One carrying handgun in street enters slum and runs (7)
- 3 Pot, joint along with alcoholic drink for pompous official (10)
- 4 Gullible one taken in by rogue loses thousand (5)
- 5 Securing better British code-breaker (9)
- 6 Cheerful fellow consumed brownie (4)
- 7 Dumplings in grand do served up, most elegant (7)
- 8 Characters outside hospital start to holler and fight, giving little consideration (5,6)
- 10 Ability to entertain Spanish maiden who's tipsy (11)
- 13 Resolution of labour issue, largely beneficial (10)
- 15 Ancient Jewish council had sinner stoned (9)
- 18 Saw show on Rhythm & Blues (7)
- 20 Dishevelled drunkard turning up outside university escorted (7)
- 23 Found in Testament or a Hebrew sacred scroll (5)
- 24 Sound made to attract attention by some cops sternly (4)

### ACROSS

- 1 What meat seller might give customer to continually alter plans? (4,3,6)
- 8 Gangster cuts lad in parlour (5)
- 9 Tyrannical, sinful monarch crushed (9)
- 11 Oust a rogue turning monstrous (10)
- 12 Degenerate chooses to steal ring (4)

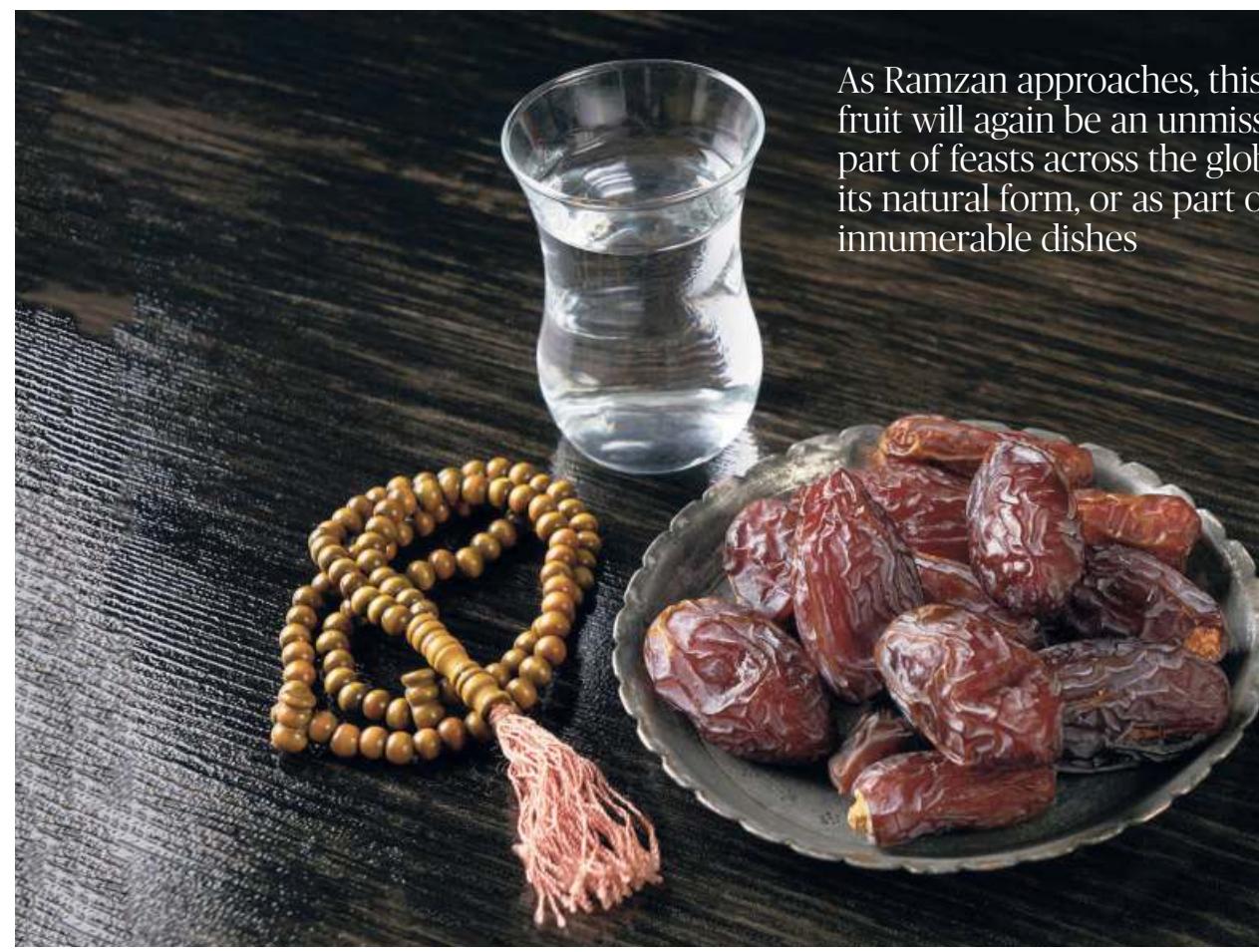
## SUDOKU

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8	5		7				4
4	2		6	8	7	5	
1			5	3	2		
8						3	8

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★

Solution to puzzle 13216

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NAHLA NAINAR

In Muslim homes, the weeks leading up to Ramzan are filled with great expectation – not just of spiritual succour, but also of some culinary expeditions.

This year, Ramzan is expected to begin in mid-April, after the sighting of the crescent moon. The ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, it prescribes dawn-to-dusk fasting. And this fasting is naturally accompanied by feasting, in various degrees of richness. The Ramzan spread has to have a little of everything – warm soups, cold sherbets, fried snacks, grilled meats, gravies and rice dishes – but it is the date, the small fruit of the *Phoenix dactylifera* L. palm, that crowns the table globally, especially during *iftar* (breaking of the fast).

Eating dates after the *magrib* (evening) call to prayer during Ramzan is considered to signify the commencement of the *iftar*. They are also eaten by many Muslims as part of the pre-dawn *suhour* meal.

"The sugar in dates keeps your energy levels

## A date with dates

high, and its high fibre content also makes you feel full for a longer time, which is why it is commonly eaten during both *iftar* and *suhour*. But more than the science, Muslims cherish the date because of its associations with Prophet Muhammad's tra-

ditions," says Delhi-based celebrity chef and writer Sadaf Hussain, who has chronicled Islamic recipes and the stories behind them from across India in his 2019 book *Daastan-e-Dastarkhan: Stories and Recipes from Muslim Kitchens* (Hachette).

In India, where processed dates are becoming more common on shop shelves as contemporary syrups and jams, heritage dishes from the erstwhile princely states use the fruit in both chutneys and pickles. Chef Hussain's take on this old recipe uses plums, *jamun* fruit and date pulp, spiced with chillies and *chaat masala* to create a piquant chutney.

"Last year I tweaked the recipe for a Kashmiri Ramzan beverage called *babriyol*, which is usually made with *sabja* (basil) seeds, milk, sugar, saffron and coconut shavings. I replaced sugar and blended the milk with dates, which made it into a nice thick shake. Such smoothies can easily be substituted for the sugary bottled fruit cordials that we commonly have for *iftar*," says Hussain, who has also made cheesecake with date pulp.

To make date paste at home, simply deseed the fruit and blend the pulp in a mixer, or knead manually with a small amount of water.

This year, Hussain is in talks for a pop-up restaurant on an all-vegetarian Ramzan menu platter-to-

### Palestinian date cookies

#### INGREDIENTS

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 tsp cardamom powder (1 tsp for filling; 1/2 tsp for dough)
- 1 tbsp anise seeds for filling; 3 tsp anise seeds (for dough)
- 3/4 cup vegetable oil
- 3 tsp sugar
- 1 tsp instant yeast
- 1/2 cup water
- 500 gm date paste
- 1 tbsp ghee or olive oil
- 1 tbsp cinnamon powder

#### METHOD

Prepare the filling by kneading date paste, ghee, with anise seeds and cinnamon and cardamom powders. If date paste is stiff, you can warm it in the microwave or on the stove top. Divide the filling into walnut-sized balls, roll each into a rope and set aside. To prepare the dough, add flour, cardamom and anise seeds in a bowl and pour in oil. Rub it with your fingertips until it resembles wet sand. Dissolve the sugar and yeast in the water and add this in slowly, while kneading gently, till the dough comes together.

There is no need to rest the dough, so divide it into egg-sized balls, and roll each into a rope. Flatten the dough and make sure to roll it out really thin to ensure a crisp crust. Place the date filling on top of the dough so that it is at least 1 cm shorter, and seal around the filling by pinching dough edges.

Form the dough into a loop. Bake in the centre of a very hot oven till the bottoms are golden; then turn on the broiler till the tops are similarly browned. Recipe by Sawsan Abu Farha

**High fibre treat** Dates are an integral part of Ramzan cuisine worldwide. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

In Arab countries, where dates are a major agricultural crop, both religious tradition and culinary affiliation make them a very commonly used ingredient throughout the year. "Dates in the Levant are an integral part of the cuisine especially when it comes to baked goods. If you walk into any bakery in the morning, you are sure to find freshly baked date-filled bread rings. They are a popular breakfast item that many people pick

flour dough with date paste. Long-handled wooden moulds are used to imprint pretty designs on the *maamoul* tops, and then baked in a medium oven.

"*Maamoul* is the ultimate cookie to make for Eid al Fitr (the festival that marks the end of Ramzan). We greet our guests on Eid morning with fresh coffee, a bowl full of dates and lots of *maamoul* and *ka'ak* (ring cookies)," says Sawsan.

Interestingly, *maamoul* is also made for Easter by Arab Christians, and the Purim festival by Jews, showing the biscuit's sweet ties with the region's history.

#### Ready to snack

Date paste finds its way into other delicacies also, like *tamer-bisimsim*, where it is rolled in roasted sesame seeds and served as a quick snack, in Arabian Gulf countries. Pitted dates are also used as a casing for nuts like almonds and walnuts, and served plain, or dipped in chocolate ganache.

What many may not know is that the Ramzan diet has instructions not only for fasting, but also for the feasting, adds Sawsan. She writes, "We are told to start the *iftar* with some dates. After this, one is encouraged to go pray before eating the main meal, because this short break gives the body time to metabolise the dates and water that have been consumed and to start the body's digestive processes, which have been resting all day. It's like allowing your car to warm up before driving it."

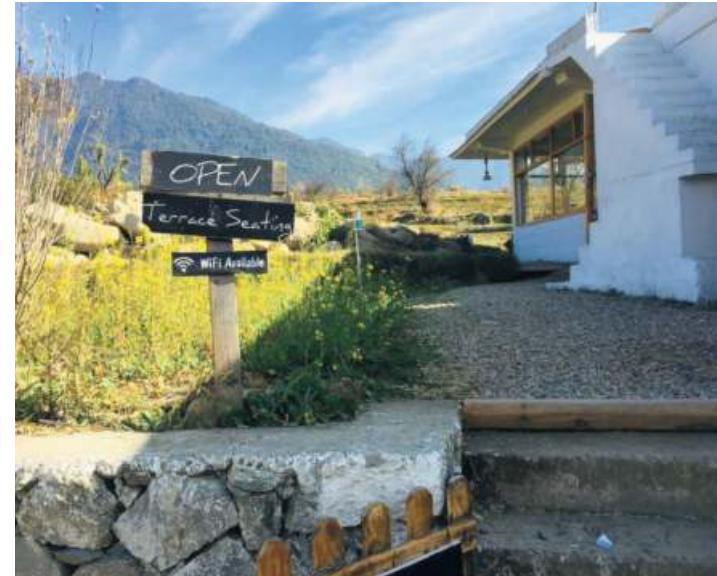
up on their way to school or work," writes Sawsan Abu Farha, a food writer based in Jordan, who blogs as Chef in Disguise, in an email interview.

The weeks before Ramzan are a time for Arab families to stock up on dates to enjoy them as is or to use them in various recipes during the holy month.

Among the most popular of these is the cookie called *maamoul*, made by filling balls of a soft and buttery semolina and



Bir, the village in Himachal known for its paragliding, now has an authentic South Indian café just off the landing ground



## A shot of hot, Himalayan rasam

SUNALINI MATHEW

Dotted along the entry to Bir are signboards that say "AVVA's café, flavours of southern India". Considering that this is a village in Kangra in Himachal Pradesh, with a population of Tibetan refugees and local folk, this is a bit of a surprise.

Situated close to the landing ground – Bir is known for its paragliding – the café itself is even more of a surprise. Its Japanese-inspired interiors: White walls, loose stones on the floor, locally-made wooden tables and chairs, rope, and tin lamps are the not the sort you would expect in a place serving *puliyogare*.

Two large glass windows frame the snow-capped Dhauladars, mist circling them, and the barley



fields just outside. The building has one of the few terraces in the area not used for a plastic water tank. On its two levels, people sit and sing, read, work, as the cool wind blows.

Suraj Dikonda, whose idea it was to start the café, had worked in advertising. "One of my projects was with a Japanese real estate firm, so I was exposed to that design sensibility and minimalism," he says.

Sometime around 2017, he made the trip to Bir, from Delhi, where he was working. "I loved that it was very laidback, non-commercial. There were just four or five cafes here and not more than 10 places to stay. Also, people came here for the paragliding and for Nature, not for *charas*."

At 26, he began to think of setting up a café here. So he spoke to his parents in Pune, suggesting that they move to Bir and set it up, as he continued working at his full-time job. Anil and Sunanda Dikonda, who speak Hindu and Telugu, had been to Himachal just once, many decades ago. "It took him eight months to convince us," says Anil, who has run a few businesses through his life. Sunanda has always been a homemaker, cooking and feeding people. Hence the name of the cafe: Avva means mother in Telugu.

They finally consented, and in 2018, the family took a loan, leased the land, and built a structure. Suraj would come in every two weeks. "On the first day, we gave out food for free, just to introduce people to the food," says Suraj. What surprised them were the monks who visited, thankful that a South Indian food place had opened. "They had visited a monastery in Mysore, and eaten these things there," says Anil, who is now 63. For those who did not understand what an *idli* or *dosa* were, they constructed a little card with pic-

tures of the basic dishes.

Sunanda, who is 48, and originally from Chengal in Nizamabad, Telangana, says she has figured out how to ferment the batter in the cold: "It takes 48 hours in winter and 24 hours in summer," she says.

The most popular dish is Avva's special *dosa*, which has three pastes spread thin on the inner portion: a Chettinad, *podi*, and a chilli garlic mix. All spices and chutneys are freshly ground daily, and the couple still goes together to buy vegetables. When the family initially arrived in Bir, the local vegetable vendors did not stock coconut, but on special request they began to. There are still things like *appalam*, coffee, and tamarind that they need to bring in from Delhi's INA market that caters to the large South Indian population there.

Every visit begins with a black *chana* 'starter' and a *rasam* shot. The local Himachali people find the food too spicy; most of the cafe's patrons are tourists. In fact, after the lockdown, for which they were shut for four months, Suraj says they have never seen a more crowded December. With a daily footfall of 100-150 that goes up to 300 over the weekend, they have seating for about 70 people, spread out across an inside space, a terrace and a backyard.

Anil says Avva's is the only pure vegetarian restaurant in Bir. "Once a lady came in asking if we made eggs. I said no. She asked if we could at least do them boiled, and I repeated that we were pure veg. She went out and called about 20 people in. She had been testing us," he says, laughing.

Last year, Suraj's sister Priyanka moved to Bir, to help with the café.

In December 2020, Suraj quit his job and moved to Bir to be with his family permanently, wondering whether they would like to do a franchise. They decided against it, because the reason to start the café was for the family to come together, and for Suraj himself to get off the hamster wheel.

### HORS D'OEUVRES



#### Cool down with cold brew

Just in time for summer, Starbucks has announced a Cold Brew Fest to give coffee aficionados a fun way to cool down. The ongoing promotion ends on April 11, and is open for customers at the coffee chain's 222 stores across India. Cold brew is made by leaching the flavour of ground coffee beans soaked in water that is at room temperature, for extended periods of time, a process that gives a less acidic and more intense caffeine kick to the beverage. As part of its promotion, Starbucks is offering select variants at reduced prices of ₹250 for the cold brew range and ₹300 for the nitro cold brew range (including taxes). Coffee lovers can try out brew and nitro cold brew options like black, vegan, Vietnamese, vanilla sweet cream, with ginger ale, with tonic water, and with salted foam. They even has a 1 litre variant, with 50% off on the second bottle.



#### In a soup over sauce sachets

American eateries have been hit by yet another pandemic-induced shortage: ketchup sachets. Once given gratis with every takeout order, the little packets of tomato sauce have reportedly become a rare commodity at restaurants in the US. According to a report by *Wall Street Journal*, retail tomato sauce sales were up 15% in 2020 and Kraft Heinz, the company that produces most of the sauce served in American restaurants, has been scrambling to meet the soaring demand since the lockdown hit the hospitality sector. The same report states that sauce packet prices have gone up by 13% since January last year, with their market share growing at the expense of tabletop bottles, according to the restaurant business platform IQ. Many restaurant managers are reportedly trying to make do by pouring out bulk-bought sauce into individual cups. A Heinz representative was quoted saying the company now a target of over 12 billion sachets a year. Some fast food majors were forced to switch suppliers.

Hold the alcohol!  
Bartenders across the country chat about how the re-emerging bar culture sees bigger demand for more innovative, premium mocktails



# Free the TIPPLE

DIVYA KALA BHAVANI

Eager to just step out, people find that the significance of a bar has evolved for them over the past year. For a growing number of Indians; it is not so much about swigging a few beers or throwing back a few shots, but more about enjoying the change of scenery and revelling in a non-alcoholic drink.

Unfortunately, the 'virgin' tag in the drinks space has so far come with a green light for compromise. Most virgin mojitos just have dollops of sugar syrup, while some virgin cucumber gimlets comprise lime juice with chunks of cucumber at best.

Thankfully, consumers are now empowered more than ever to ask for a 'premiumisation' of



mocktails: that is to say, ones without sugar rush-inducing ingredients and stacks of ice. In response, bartenders have risen to this challenge and admit that non-alcoholic beverages have shot in

to prominence. Though Yangduo Lama first opened his famous Delhi bar Sidecar in August 2018, they did not have a liquor license until December of that year. So the place

kicked off with a mocktail menu, which seemed risky.

However, looking back at those first few months, he says innovating on mocktails was liberating rather than restricting, and he and his team of trusted bartenders loved the process so much that they retained that mocktails menu to this day.

"We get people coming in during the day for those mocktails," he explains. "One of our popular ones is made of *bel* or wood apple – such a fantastic fruit in so much abundance – and we opened up that conversation around the *bel*'s versatility. This is mind, the demand for mocktails is also based on the typical growth mindset in that people always want something more."

Other much-loved mocktails at Sidecar include a velvet spice (a concoction of black grapes, redberry puree and lime, with a dash of chilli) and walk on the street (grapefruit, turmeric shrub with orange and mint soda).

Mumbai-based flair bartender and TEDx speaker Ami Shroff points out that for people who drink alcohol, there are many choices in terms of the base, a whiskey, a cognac or even a beer

– and then for each base, there are countless possibilities. However, in the mocktail space, options are limited to mainly juices and aerated waters. This inequality has been long predominant at bars and restaurants across the

## GOING MAINSTREAM

Big conglomerates have launched mocktail lines too. In 2019, Coca Cola foresaw the trend and launched their Bar None range, featuring sangria, bellini spritz, dry aged cider and ginger mule flavoured mocktails.

More recently, in February, Pepsi launched Neon Zebra canned mocktails in margarita, strawberry daiquiri, mojito and whiskey sour variants.

country, and she is glad it is changing. "Cocktails obviously have a bigger price bracket and get more attention, so that explains the heavier focus on them at some places," she states. Interestingly, Ami points out

that many of India's bartenders receive training from liquor brand ambassadors, so their repertoire primarily comes with boozy elements. "There is not much focus on how flavours would work without alcohol. The same goes for a lot of bartending schools. Automatically, the bartenders are just attuned to fixing cocktails," she reflects. "The good thing is, as the experience across customers is evolving, so will that of the bartenders."

Ami predicts that bars will have more training sessions, specifically around flavour combinations in the non-alcoholic space.

"When a drink does not have such a component, the profile changes significantly. So bartenders will have to look into the good and bad of flavour compensation a lot more." As an example, she says Bloody Mary can easily be made non-alcoholic by enhancing the tomato flavours without offering the customer too much acidity.

The growing mocktail mania has seen Yangduo working with different companies such as Jimmy's Cocktails, making ready-to-make mixes in a mocktail format. "In the next few months, people

can look forward to more such companies releasing these non-alcoholic packages," he puts forth. "These companies would also be making sure that one can add alcohol if they like to the same mix, to help people be more experimental at home which has been much of the 'new normal' post-pandemic."

These companies, including &Stirred, Tea Trunk and Mixtale, appeal not just to big metro cities, but also to smaller towns where there are few opportunities to try a good mocktail or a cocktail.

**'Of flavour and soul'**  
A juggler and flair bartender, Ami is no stranger to the theatre of the bar, but insists that the success of a drink comes down to its flavour and soul.

Will this shift in consciousness affect how a restaurant or bar's supply chain operates? Ideally, it should not. There is a misconception that making a mocktail is a no-brainer. But clearly, that is not the case, considering how so many mocktails have been a let-down for such a long time. Both Ami and Yangduo say the same knowledge of techniques, flavour combinations and presentation to make a cocktail should be used to craft a mocktail.

Owing to premiumisation, India's drinking crowd is more ingredient-conscious now; going far beyond ordering a drink just by the name but understanding and often predicting how a combination of elements would taste together in a single sip. "People are asking bartenders when a juice within a drink was made, if it is freshly-squeezed or packaged. The communication between the customer and bartender has changed," specifies Yangduo.

Producer-turned-director Naveen Chathapuram discusses his latest neo-Western thriller *The Last Victim* starring Ron Perlman and Ali Larter

DIVYA KALA BHAVANI

It is no secret that Ron Perlman looks scary, whether in his bright red *Hellboy* suit or his leather chops for *Sons Of Anarchy* or in a sheriff's uniform for the upcoming *The Last Victim*. But director Naveen Chathapuram assures that Perlman was the one on set cracking jokes with his trademark wry humour. "He would say, 'I'm not going to stand on that marker' and then he would crack a smile and all of us would start laughing. This was a great tension-easer," laughs Chathapuram over a video call with *Metroplus*.

*The Last Victim* is a neo-Western thriller set in the American southwest, following Sheriff Hickey (Perlman) trying



ing to solve the worst case he has seen in his small town, likely caused by a violent local gang led by a fearsome criminal.

Kerala-born Chathapuram has always been fascinated by neo-Western thrillers, as he watched these films growing up. He learned that the success of this genre is the filmmaker's smart treatment of a good script and mindful casting, while retaining the core.

The filmmaker had his own grit around this project; it was actually conceptualised more than 15 years ago. But the location for which they had planned burned down from a forest fire. So the team had to shelve the project. Chathapuram, however, did not give up. "It was to be my second film as a producer too, so we all naturally put everything into it. But looking back, I know I had to trust in



**Take two** Director Naveen Chathapuram; with actors Ron Perlman, Dakota Daulby and Camille Marie Legg on the set of *The Last Victim*

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

such stunning landscapes but it was a culture shock for me," he recalls. "We explored some border-towns that had populations of 30 people and some communities where the nearest neighbour was 15 miles away, and there would be just a couple and maybe their dog on this 100-acre property. I got to see how dialogues extended in such settings of isolation, and I always wanted to explore this. So for *The Last Victim*, I loved exploring this as a thriller."

Bringing on Ali Larter, Ralph Ineson, Penikett and Perlman as well as a spread of young talent such as Dakota Daulby and Tom Stevens was exciting for Chathapuram because they truly believed in the vision of *The Last Victim*. "Ron, from the get-go, plays a sheriff who is against his 'type', but at the same time, he can embody the sheriff in his sleep. There were so many relatively new cast and crew on this project but he made

everyone so comfortable. Camille Legg who plays a deputy said she was nervous to act with Ron but Ron assured her by being just another actor," he explains.

## Working with Thor

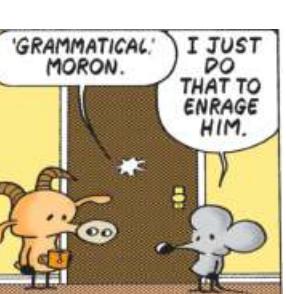
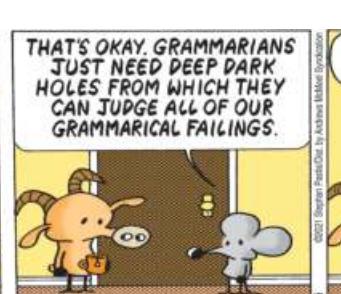
Not many know this but *Thor* actor Chris Hemsworth has credited Chathapuram for his Hollywood break, starring in 2010 action-thriller *Ca\$h*. Any plans of another collaboration? "Last I saw him was on the sets of *Avengers*," laughs Chathapuram fondly, "and we stay in touch occasionally. But we are two people who are drawn to good stories and if we happen to work on something together again, that would be the ultimate reason. I have never seen anyone so hardworking; yes, he works a lot but he is extremely humble and I remember when he used to live in his manager's guesthouse. He always aspires for good storytelling, and he has succeeded in that, and I am truly happy for him."

The release of *The Last Victim* is yet to be finalised but Chathapuram is open to OTTs, theatrical release or day-and-date (OTT and theatre combined), as long as people connect with the story.

## POOCH CAFE



## PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



## HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



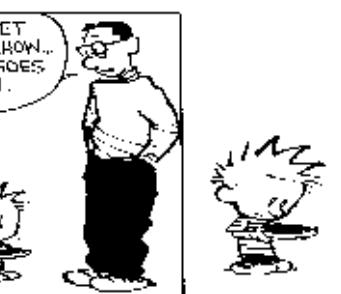
## PEANUTS



## TIGER



## CALVIN AND HOBBES



# Biden govt. restores aid to Palestinians

It includes \$75 mn in economic aid for the West Bank & Gaza, \$10 mn for peacebuilding programmes

SRI RAM LAKSHMAN  
WASHINGTON

In a significant reversal to the Trump administration's policy towards the Palestine, the U.S. State Department on Wednesday announced the restoration of at least \$235 million in financial assistance to the Palestinians. The administration had already announced \$15 million in coronavirus relief to the Palestinians in March.

#### Economic assistance

Wednesday's announcement includes \$75 million in economic assistance to the West Bank and Gaza, \$10 million towards 'peacebuilding' programmes of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and \$150 million in humanitarian assistance to the UN Relief and



**Significant step:** The aid will provide \$150 million in assistance to the UN Relief and Works Agency. ■ AFP

Works Agency (UNRWA).

The UNRWA funds, the State Department said, would include educational assistance for at least 5,000 Palestinian chil-

dren living in West Asia.

The Trump administration had almost ended all funding to the organisation in 2018.

Mr. Trump's policies to

wards West Asia – which included the relocation of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem – were criticised for being heavily tilted towards Israel.

"The United States is committed to advancing prosperity, security, and freedom for both Israelis and Palestinians in tangible ways in the immediate term, which is important in its own right, but also as a means to advance towards a negotiated two-state solution," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement released on Wednesday.

#### New political path'

The UN welcomed the move, hoping it would attract more funds to the body.

"We hope that others will now follow suit. There were a number of countries that

had greatly reduced or halted contributions to UNRWA," Stéphane Dujarric, spokesperson for the Secretary General said on Wednesday.

Welcoming the move, the Prime Minister of the Palestine Authority, Mohammed Shtayeh, called for "a new political path that meets the rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people based on international law and UN resolutions" in a tweet.

Israel, which has accused UNRWA of anti-Semitism, objected to the funding plans. "Israel's position is that the organisation in its current form perpetuates the conflict and does not contribute to its resolution," the Israeli Foreign Ministry said as per the Associated Press.

# U.S. commits to withdrawal of combat troops from Iraq

But the two sides have not set a timeline for the same

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
WASHINGTON

The U.S. on Wednesday committed to move remaining forces from Iraq, although the two sides did not set a timeline in what would be the second withdrawal since the 2003 invasion.

The first "strategic dialogue" with Iraq under U.S.

President Joe Biden's administration comes as Iranian-linked Shiite paramilitary groups fire rockets nearly daily at bases with foreign troops in hopes of forcing a U.S. exit. The two nations agreed in a videoconference led by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein that Ira-



This would be the second withdrawal of troops since the 2003 invasion.

qi forces were ready to take on more responsibility.

"The parties confirmed that the mission of U.S. and coalition forces has now transitioned to one focused on training and advisory tasks, thereby allowing for the redeployment of any remaining combat forces from Iraq, with the timing to be

established in upcoming technical talks," a joint statement said.

Iraq's national security advisor, Qassem al-Araji, promised efforts to protect foreign forces and confirmed that the United States would move ahead with a pull-out. "The American side promised to withdraw an important number of its troops from Iraq," he said.

The Pentagon said the timeline would be worked out in the technical talks. "We've all been working to an eventual redeployment... when there's no need for American support on the ground," said Pentagon spokesman John Kirby.

# All options open on South China Sea'

Amid row over Chinese boats, the Philippines says it may leverage global ties

AGENCE-FRANCE PRESSE  
MANILA

The Philippines defence department said on Thursday it was keeping its options open as a diplomatic row with Beijing grows over hundreds of Chinese vessels in the contested South China Sea.

Tensions over the resource-rich waters have spiked in recent weeks after over 200 Chinese boats were detected at Whitsun Reef in the Spratly Islands, where China and the Philippines have rival claims. China, which claims almost the entirety of the sea, has refused repeated appeals by the Philippines to withdraw the vessels, which Manila says unlawfully entered its exclusive economic zone.



**Growing tensions:** Chinese vessels anchored at Whitsun Reef in the South China Sea on March 31. ■ AFP

While President Rodrigo Duterte has appeared reluctant to confront China on the issue, one of his top aides warned on Monday that the boats could ignite "unwanted hostilities". "As the situation evolves, we keep all our

options open in managing the situation, including leveraging our partnerships with other nations such as the United States," Philippine defence department spokesman Arsenio Andolong said on Thursday.

Mr. Andolong's comments came after the United States reminded China of Washington's treaty obligations to the Philippines in the event of an attack in the waters. "An armed attack against the Philippines' armed forces, public vessels or aircraft in the Pacific, including in the South China Sea, will trigger our obligations under the U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty," State Department spokesman Ned Price told mediapersons on Wednesday.

"We share the concerns of our Philippine allies regarding the continued reported massing of PRC [People's Republic of China] maritime militia near the Whitsun Reef," Mr. Price said.

# No U.S. decision yet on Afghan pull-out

The May 1 deadline for the withdrawal of 2,500 troops seems likely to lapse

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON

Without coming right out and saying it, President Joe Biden seems ready to let lapse a May 1 deadline for completing a withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. Orderly withdrawals take time, and Mr. Biden is running out of it.

Mr. Biden has inched so close to the deadline that his indecision amounts almost to a decision to put off, at least for some months, a pullout of the remaining 2,500 troops and continue supporting the Afghan military at the risk of a Taliban backlash. Removing all the troops and their equipment in the next three weeks – along with coalition partners that



cannot get out on their own – would be difficult logistically, as Mr. Biden himself suggested in late March.

"It's going to be hard to meet the May 1 deadline," he said. "Just in terms of tactical reasons, it's hard to get those troops out ... And if we leave, we're going to do so in a safe and orderly way."

James Stavridis, a retired Navy admiral who served as

NATO's top commander from 2009 to 2013, says it would be unwise at this point to get out quickly.

"Sometimes not making a decision becomes a decision, which seems the case with the May 1 deadline," Mr. Stavridis said on Wednesday.

"The most prudent course of action feels like a six-month extension and an attempt to get the Taliban truly meeting their promises – essentially permitting a legitimate 'conditions-based' withdrawal in the fall."

There are crosscurrents of pressure on Mr. Biden. On one hand, he has argued for years, including during his time as Vice-President when President Barack Obama ordered a huge buildup of U.S.

forces, that Afghanistan is better handled as a smaller-scale counterterrorism mission. Countering Russia and China has since emerged as a higher priority.

On the other hand, current and former military officers have argued that leaving now, with the Taliban in a position of relative strength and the Afghan government in a fragile state, would risk losing what has been gained in 20 years of fighting.

Mr. Biden had said during the 2020 campaign that if elected, he might keep a counterterrorism force in Afghanistan but also would "end the war responsibly" to ensure U.S. forces never have to return.

# U.K. to set up £43 million fund for migrants from Hong Kong

It will offer help in accessing housing, jobs and education

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
HONG KONG

**C**The move delivers on the U.K.'s commitment to the people of Hong Kong who chose to retain their ties to the U.K. by taking up BN(O) status in 1997

BRITISH CONSULATE-GENERAL

by taking up BN(O) status in 1997," the Consulate-General said in a statement, referring to the year Hong Kong was handed over to China.

"It provides them with a pathway to live in the U.K. should they choose to do so," the consulate said.

#### Law granted asylum

Meanwhile, one prominent opposition figure, Nathan Law, was granted refugee status in the U.K.

"The fact that I am wanted under the National Security Law shows that I am exposed to severe political persecution and am unlikely to return to Hong Kong without risk," Mr. Law said on Twitter.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian lashed out at the British decision, calling Mr. Law a criminal suspect wanted by the Hong Kong police.

# Can't recognise Myanmar envoy: U.K.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
LONDON

Britain confirmed on Thursday that it could no longer recognise Myanmar's ambassador in London after the ruling junta issued formal notification that he had been withdrawn for supporting the deposed government.

U.K. sources said the government, in line with diplomatic policy, had to accede to the junta's decision regarding Kyaw Zwar Minn, after he was locked out of the embassy on Wednesday. Diplomats loyal to the Myanmar military authorities appeared to have seized control of the embassy, leaving the ambassador out in the street and forcing him to sleep in his car overnight.

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab had earlier condemned "bullying" by Myanmar's junta and reiterated calls for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi.

# Northern Ireland leaders condemn 'completely unacceptable' unrest

Dozens of police officers have been injured in attacks

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BELFAST

Northern Ireland's all-party executive came together on Thursday to condemn days of violent unrest stemming from the restive British territory's pro-U.K. community.

"Destruction, violence and the threat of violence are completely unacceptable and unjustifiable, no matter what concerns may

exist in communities," the executive, made up of unionist, nationalist and centrist parties, said in a statement.

Nightly attacks have left dozens of police officers injured, along with a driver whose bus was fire-bombed late on Wednesday.

Northern Ireland's legislative assembly interrupted its Easter break to hold an

emergency debate after the unrest.

"While our political positions are very different on many issues, we are all united in our support for law and order and we collectively state our support for policing and for the police officers who have been putting themselves in harm's way to protect others," the statement said.

# Biden to unveil gun control measures

Rules to be tightened for buyers

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Joe Biden, in his first major gun control measures since taking office, will announce executive actions on Thursday aimed at addressing what the White House calls a "gun violence public health epidemic".

Mr. Biden is also nominating David Chipman, a former federal agent and adviser at the gun control group Giffords, to be director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

Mr. Biden is tightening rules for buyers of

# Moon's party loses two key mayoral polls

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
SEOUL

South Korea's conservative opposition won in elections for the mayors of the country's two biggest cities, in a bad sign for Moon Jae-in's Democratic Party a year before the next presidential poll.

In Seoul, Oh Se-hoon of the conservative People Power Party defeated his Democratic opponent by 57.5% to 39.2%, winning all the 25 districts of the city. Mr. Oh pledged to "embrace the many citizens of Seoul who are in pain".

The conservatives' margin of victory in Busan was even higher, at 62.7% to 34.4%.

	DEHLI JAL BOARD: GOVT. OF NCT OF DELHI OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (C) DR-JX JAGRITI SPS, NEAR KARKAR DOOMA CROSSING, SHAHDARA, DELHI-110092 STOP CORONA: Wear mask, Follow Physical Distance. Maintain Hand Hygiene	
Press NIT No. 01(2020-21) for the work "Providing Consultancy services for rejuvenation of Shahdara Link Drain and Ghazipur Drain" published in News paper on 17.03.2021 due for opening on 15.04.2021 is withdrawn due to some technical reason. Inconvenience regretted.	ISSUED BY P.R.O. (WATER) Advt. No. J.S.V. 28 (2021-22)	(R.G. Saraswat) Executive Engineer (C) DR-JX

	KERALA MEDICAL SERVICES CORPORATION LTD (DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE, GOVT. OF KERALA) Head Office : Thycaud, Thiruvananthapuram-14, (Telephone No. 0471-2945600, FAX No. 0471-2945647), E-mail : edrugs@kmscl.kerala.gov.in, website : www.kmscl.kerala.gov.in, CIN No. U24233KL2007SGC021616 Date : 08.04.2021
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#### RE-TENDER NOTICE

Online bids are invited from manufacturers/direct importers / loan licensees on behalf of Department of Health, Govt of Kerala for the procurement Drugs for the year 2020-21.

1. KMSCL/ED/IFA/RT/2021/005 dtd. 08/04/2021

The last date and time of online uploading of tenders will be 05.05.2021, 5.00 pm. The date and time of opening of Technical bid will be 11.05.2021 11.00 am. Tenders shall be downloaded and submitted online through the e-tender portal [www.etenders.kerala.gov.in](http://www.etenders.kerala.gov.in).

(Sd/-) MANAGING DIRECTOR (Tender Inviting Authority)

	Office of the Executive Engineer (Project-West) Division, Joint Commissioner (West) Office Premises. 2nd Floor, Sampige Road, Sheshadripuram, Bengaluru-560020 No: EE(P-W)/PR/18/2021-22 Date : 07.04.2021
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#### CORRIGENDUM

Ref: 1) EE(P-W)/TEND/01/2021-22, Dt 05.04.2021 (Through e-Procurement system)  
Tender Notification called vide this Office Tender No. EE (P-W)/TEND/01/2021-22, Dt: 05.04.2021, BBMP for the work of Providing Installation of Fire Hydrant System in KR Market Ward No. 139 is as below. Payment of EMD for this Work is exempted as per GOK Order No. 675 dated 12/2020, ಡಾರ್ಕೆಸ್‌ಲೈಂಪ್ (ಡಾರ್ಕೆಸ್‌ಲೈಂಪ್) Tender Documents may be downloaded from

08.04.2021. Further details may be obtained from the above office during office hours or website <https://eproc.karnataka.gov.in>. All other terms and conditions remain unchanged to the Original Tender Notification.

Sd/- Executive Engineer, Project (West) Division

STAY PROTECTED FROM COVID-19, NO CARELESSNESS UNTIL THERE IS A CURE.

Wear Mask | Follow Physical Distancing | Maintain Hand Hygiene

6 Feet

## MARKET WATCH

	08-04-2021	% CHANGE
Sensex	49,746	0.17
US Dollar	74.58	-0.15
Gold	45,975	0.45
Brent oil	62.92	0.69

## NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	823.00	8.25
Asian Paints	2650.65	22.05
Axis Bank	681.60	-6.65
Bajaj Auto	3649.80	-30.40
Bajaj Finserv	9654.80	115.20
Bharti Airtel	5029.50	-47.60
BPCL	430.55	2.35
Britannia Ind	3816.75	8.20
Cipla	842.00	1.15
Coal India	131.65	0.40
Divis Lab	3715.15	16.20
Dr Reddys Lab	4689.05	-3.60
Eicher Motors	2553.00	14.80
Gasim Ind	1447.80	10.40
HCL Tech	1037.50	0.30
HDPC	2502.55	19.85
HDPC Bank	1432.80	-14.40
HDPC Life	701.45	1.60
Hero MotoCorp	2928.00	-13.60
Hindalco	365.20	13.00
Hind Unilever	2409.90	4.65
ICICI Bank	576.70	-0.95
IndusInd Bank	934.90	-10.65
Infosys	1439.85	9.65
Indian Oil Corp	92.95	0.25
ITC	213.25	-0.55
JSW Steel	614.10	51.80
Kotak Bank	1783.25	-8.75
L&T	1419.15	15.00
M&M	795.15	-1.15
Maruti Suzuki	6826.85	-38.15
Nestle India Ltd.	17689.90	280.05
NTPC	105.00	-0.45
ONGC	103.60	-1.05
PowerGrid Corp	209.00	-1.55
Reliance Ind	2005.35	-2.50
SBI Life	908.50	-10.00
State Bank	355.60	-2.95
Shree Cement	31582.65	1352.00
Sun Pharma	614.25	-6.80
Tata Consumer Products Ltd.	670.70	4.95
Tata Motors	331.95	6.15
Tata Steel	918.40	43.55
TCS	3317.35	45.95
Tech Mahindra	1020.00	26.60
Titan	1571.30	57.20
UltraTech Cement	6971.25	211.20
UPL	651.60	-2.85
Wipro	442.10	-1.40

## EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	74.39	74.71
Euro	88.48	88.86
British Pound	102.45	102.89
Japanese Yen (100)	68.22	68.51
Chinese Yuan	11.36	11.41
Swiss Franc	80.30	80.65
Singapore Dollar	55.52	55.77
Canadian Dollar	59.10	59.36
Malaysian Ringgit	17.96	18.06

Source: Indian Bank

## IN BRIEF



## Amazon moves SC for stay in Future-RIL case

New Delhi  
Amazon has moved the Supreme Court challenging the Delhi High Court's division bench order that had vacated a stay on Future Group's ₹24,713-crore asset sale to RIL. Amazon sought a stay on the March 22 order till the final outcome of its earlier plea on the deal. PTI

## Coal's share in power mix hits 9-quarter high

Chennai  
Coal's share in India's electricity generation rose to the highest level in at least 9 quarters in the first three months of 2021, data from government showed. Renewable energy's share had risen in 2020 when power demand was reduced due to lockdowns. REUTERS

# MF assets rose 30% in FY21, equities saw inflows in March

But investors pulled out ₹52,528 crore from debt mutual funds last month

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The Average Assets Under Management (AAUMs) of the Mutual Fund (MF) industry in FY21 touched a historic high of ₹32.17 lakh crore as on March 31, rising 30% over the previous year's ₹24.70 lakh crore, as per annual data released by the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI).

After eight months of consecutive outflows, equity mutual funds witnessed a net inflow of ₹9,115 crore in March amid a correction in the stock market.

Barring multi-cap and value fund categories, all the equity schemes saw inflow last month. However, inves-



**Widening reach:** Mutual Fund assets from beyond the Top 30 cities rose 54% to ₹5.35 lakh cr. in FY21. ■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

tors pulled out ₹52,528 crore from debt mutual funds last month, after investing ₹1,735 crore in February, owing to advance tax payments and other year-end commit-

ments. "Mutual Funds continue to be the preferred investment vehicle to build long-term, goal-based wealth creation, as is reflected from the number of unique invest-

tors across Mutual Fund schemes increasing in the last one year, by 10% to 2.28 crore as on March 31, 2021," said N.S. Venkatesh, Chief Executive, AMFI.

Another highlight during the pandemic-hit 2020-21 has been the rising acceptance for mutual funds from tier 2 and tier 3 locations, with Mutual Fund AUM from beyond the Top 30 cities rising 54% to ₹5.35,373 crore as on March 31, he said.

Meanwhile, SBI Mutual Fund, a joint venture between State Bank of India and France's Amundi, said it had become the first fund house in India to cross ₹5 lakh crore in AAUM.

(With PTI inputs)

## RBI's first purchase under G-SAP 1.0 set for April 15

Eyes securities worth ₹25,000 crore

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

A day after announcing the introduction of the G-sec Acquisition Programme (G-SAP 1.0), the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Thursday announced the Open Market Purchase of Government of India Securities under the programme.

"The Reserve Bank will conduct open market purchase of government securities of ₹1 lakh crore under the G-sec Acquisition Programme (G-SAP 1.0) in Q1 2021-22 with a view to enabling a stable and orderly evolution of the yield curve. The first purchase of government securities for an aggregate amount of



₹25,000 crore under G-SAP 1.0 will be conducted on April 15, 2021," the RBI said in a circular. The central bank will purchase five types of government securities via a multi-security auction using multiple price methods. The dates of maturity vary from November 2, 2023 to March 16, 2035.

## Ambani to appeal against SEBI penalty

## PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani will appeal against the fine imposed by market regulator SEBI over alleged irregularities in a two-decade-old share issue in the company, the firm said.

RIL had issued debentures with convertible warrants in 1994 and allotted equity shares against the warrants in 2000.

The promoter and promoter group have informed RIL that there has been no violation of Regulation 11(1) of the SEBI Take-over Regulations and an appeal will be preferred to the Securities Appellate Tribunal, RIL said.

## IRDAI tightens AIF investment norms

It seeks quarterly compliance report

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD

Insurance regulator IRDAI has introduced additional guidelines on insurers' investment in Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs), including one mandating them to report compliance on a quarterly basis.

A circular said the norms would replace a provision, in a 2017 Master Circular on Investment, that stipulates "no investment is permitted in AIFs, which are of fund of funds and leverage funds."

Thursday's circular said "no investment is permitted in AIFs which undertake leverage or borrowing other than to meet day-to-day operational requirements and

## Rupee slides to a near 5-month low

## PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

The rupee weakened further by 11 paise against the U.S. currency to close at its weakest level in almost five months on Thursday amid fears that a rapid resurgence of COVID-19 cases in the country could disrupt economic recovery.

Logging its fourth straight session of loss, the currency settled at 74.58 to the U.S. dollar.

On Wednesday, the rupee nosedived 105 paise to mark its biggest single-session drop in more than 20 months.

Meanwhile, SBI Mutual Fund, a joint venture between State Bank of India and France's Amundi, said it had become the first fund house in India to cross ₹5 lakh crore in AAUM.

(With PTI inputs)

## Cars, SUVs buck retail auto sales drop

Tractors also retain traction in March

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Retail sales of passenger vehicles maintained growth in March with more than 2.79 lakh units sold, data released by the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA) showed. The figure was not strictly comparable with the year-earlier period, when sales were halted by the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown.

Notwithstanding the lower base, overall vehicle sales slumped 28.6% to about 16.49 lakh units. Two-wheelers sales shrank by more than a third to about 11.95 lakh units, while three-wheeler deliveries halved to 38,034 units. Retail sales of commercial vehicles contracted 42% from a year earlier to 67,372 units in March.

Tractor sales, however, continued to grow, rising 29.2% to 69,082 units. FADA noted that April was usually a high sales period due to festivals like Ugadi, Gudi Padwa, Baisakhi and Poila Boishakh, besides being a wedding season. Any lockdown at this point would severely hamper the momentum gained by the auto industry, it warned.

"Increase of COVID-19 and fear among consumers has started keeping them away from making high ticket purchases," the industry group said. "This coupled with semiconductor shortage will continue to hamper not only PV, but also two-wheelers as ABS shortage is currently ringing alarm bells," it added.

The industry body said that since Maharashtra contributed 10-11% of the auto retail, the current lockdown would have a 'catastrophic effect' on sales this month. "FADA maintains extreme caution for the month of April as COVID-19 rises to newer highs," it said.



had pushed about 32 million Indians out of the middle class. This had badly hit the two-wheeler segment, which saw the steepest decline in the last few months. "This coupled with high fuel prices and price increase acted as a double whammy," Mr. Gulati said.

"This not only created havoc in the minds of entry-level customers, but also kept them away from visiting showrooms," he added.

FADA noted that April was usually a high sales period due to festivals like Ugadi, Gudi Padwa, Baisakhi and Poila Boishakh, besides being a wedding season.

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"FADA maintains extreme caution for the month of April as COVID-19 rises to newer highs," it said.

## Tesla scouts for showroom space in India

## REUTERS

NEW DELHI

Tesla Inc is scouting for locations to open showrooms in three Indian cities and has hired an executive to lead its lobbying and business efforts ahead of its planned entry into the country, sources familiar with the discussions told Reuters.

The automaker is looking for commercial properties in New Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru, three sources said. Separately, Tesla has recruited Manuj Khurana, a former executive of Invest India, to lead its policy and business development in the country, two other sources said.

"Closing @riteshagar's thread from yesterday - Today NCLAT has admitted our plea and ordered a stay on the formation of a committee of creditors in proceedings under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code against its subsidiary OYO Hotels and Homes Pvt. Ltd. (OHHPL)."

Earlier, the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) had admitted a petition for initiating insolvency proceedings against OHHPL for recovery of ₹16 lakh, an order that the hospitality firm challenged before the appellate tribunal on Wednesday.

# Star-studded, bio-bubble sheathed IPL caravan returns to India

A second straight season behind closed doors, BCCI will hope COVID-19 doesn't hamper plans; focus will be on CSK's recovery, Kohli's helming of RCB and mighty MI

## IPL 2021

K.C. VIJAYA KUMAR

The last time high-profile cricket was ushered into Chennai's M.A. Chidambaram Stadium while the Bay of Bengal whispered to the nearby shores, there was aplause from the stands and an Indian triumph over England was witnessed. That second Test, which concluded on February 16, now looks far due to the latest coronavirus-influenced circumstances.

Much has changed over the last few months and when the Indian Premier League gears up for its 14th

season with the first match pitting reigning champion Mumbai Indians against Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) here on Friday, fans have been kept away as a strict bio-bubble is in place.

The Yellow-Den, as the venue is fondly referred to by the Chennai Super Kings' (CSK) followers, has turned neutral as all IPL games this year will lack the home-flavour.

M.S. Dhoni will be missed in these parts while he and his fellow-CSK players ply their wares in cities ranging from Mumbai to Kolkata. While Mumbai Indians has scaled new heights and has

five titles in its kitty, CSK suddenly hit a trough and finished seventh in the last edition in the United Arab Emirates. A steep fall for an outfit that won the trophy thrice!

### Reconfigured unit

What Dhoni and his reconfigured unit do will be watched and, in a converse way, RCB too will draw attention, especially as its skipper Virat Kohli has had success leading India while inexplicably faltering when it comes to the IPL after promising much.

Skippers are as good or bad as their teams but they

are also supposed to propel their men forward.

Rohit Sharma, the Mumbai Indians' leader, is sitting pretty right now, having guided his troops regularly to the high-table. After winning the last two editions, a hat-trick beckons and that will inflate the pressure.

Meanwhile, Sunrisers Hyderabad headlined by David Warner and also featuring Kane Williamson, the uber-cool cricketer, has enough fire and ice.

### Pant, the toast

Among the others, Delhi Capitals, a franchise known to constantly alter personnel

besides tweaking its nomenclature once, will deflect some limelight to its captain answering to the name of Rishabh Pant.

The wicket-keeper batsman has become the toast of international cricket after his exploits in Australia and in the home series against England.

Punjab Kings, which bundles together K.L. Rahul and Twenty20's eternal gun-for-hire Chris Gayle, is capable of punching above its weight,

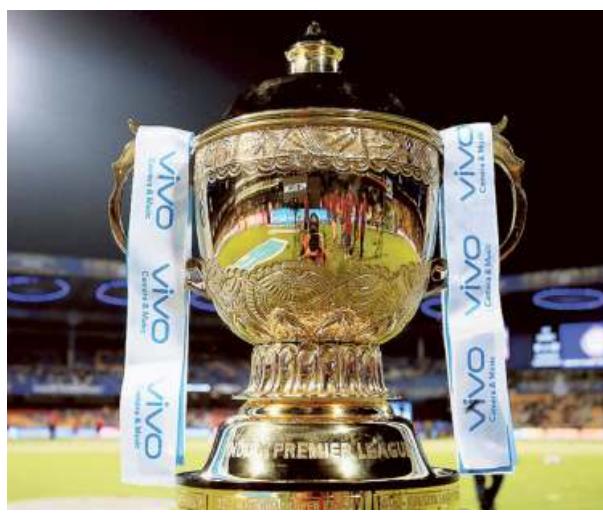
while the Eoin Morgan-led Kolkata Knight Riders, also featuring Andre Russell, has a history of two titles. At the other end of the

spectrum, Rajasthan Royals, IPL's inaugural champion in 2008, took a punt on Sanju Samson and appointed him as its leader and has the incandescent Ben Stokes with its stable.

### No home advantage

The latest IPL staged at neutral grounds while bowlers rue the lack of a slender home-advantage should throw up surprises.

The organisers, though, will fervently hope that the virus doesn't scupper their best-laid plans as the league aims for a gripping summit clash at Ahmedabad on May 30.



**The cup of glory:** Whose turn will it be, come May 30?

• SPORTZPIX/IPL

## Rajasthan Royals

CHAMPION 2008



League Stage: FIRST

Matches played 14

W 11	L 3
------	-----

First Match lost to Delhi Daredevils by 9 wickets

Semifinal bt Delhi Daredevils by 105 runs

Final bt CSK by 3 wickets



## Chennai Super Kings

CHAMPION 2010



League Stage: THIRD

Matches played 14

W 7	L 7
-----	-----

First Match lost to Deccan Chargers by 31 runs

Semifinal bt Deccan Chargers by 38 runs

Final bt MI by 22 runs



## Chennai Super Kings

CHAMPION 2011



League Stage: SECOND

Matches played 14

W 9	L 5
-----	-----

First Match bt KKR by two runs

Qualifier 1 bt RCB by six wickets

Final bt RCB by 58 runs



## Chennai Super Kings

CHAMPION 2018



League Stage: SECOND

Matches played 14

W 9	L 5
-----	-----

First Match bt MI by one wicket

Qualifier 1 bt SRH by two wickets

Final bt SRH by eight wickets



# The dug out story

As the eight teams get ready to take guard in the 14th edition of the IPL, a look at the winners' club and the architects of the success stories.

## Kolkata Knight Riders

CHAMPION 2012



## Kolkata Knight Riders

CHAMPION 2014



League Stage: SECOND

Matches played 14

W 9	L 5
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First Match bt MI by 41 runs

Qualifier 1 bt Kings XI Punjab by 28 runs

Final bt Kings XI Punjab by three wickets



## Mumbai Indians

CHAMPION 2013



League Stage: SECOND

Matches played 16

W 11	L 5
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First Match lost to RCB by two runs

Qualifier 1 lost to CSK by 48 runs

Qualifier 2 bt RR by four wickets



\*Mitchell Johnson also took 24 wickets (17 inns)

## Mumbai Indians

CHAMPION 2015



League Stage: SECOND

Matches played 14

W 8	L 6
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First Match lost to KKR by seven wickets

Qualifier 1 bt CSK by 25 runs

Final bt CSK by 41 runs



## Mumbai Indians

CHAMPION 2020



League Stage: FIRST

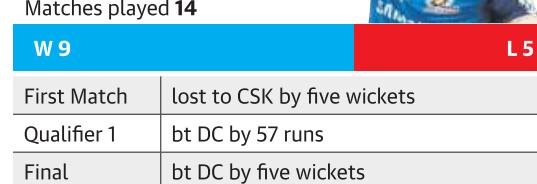
Matches played 14

W 9	L 5
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First Match lost to CSK by five wickets

Qualifier 1 bt DC by 57 runs

Final bt DC by five wickets



Surgery over, Shreyas vows quick return

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA MUMBAI

India batsman Shreyas Iyer, on Thursday, said he had undergone a successful surgery for a shoulder injury and vowed to return to action at the earliest.

Shreyas hurt his shoulder during the ODI series against England last month, ruling him out of the IPL. "Surgery was a success and with a lion-hearted determination, I'll be back in no time. Thank you for your wishes," tweeted Shreyas along with a picture.

The 26-year-old suffered the injury during the first ODI at Pune on March 23 when he dived to stop a shot from Jonny Bairstow off pacer Shardul Thakur.



There's nothing quite like playing in Chinnaswamy in front of your home crowd. Obviously the fans are going to miss watching us play.

VIRAT KOHLI

**D. DINAKAR CHENNAI**  
It's Virat Kohli vs Rohit Sharma.  
Two different kinds of captains and leaders. One whose body language bristles with aggression. The other who is more laid-back but street smart.  
In other words, gun-slinger versus smooth operator.  
The IPL lung opener between defending champion Mumbai Indians and Royal Challengers Bangalore could prove intriguing.

**Dew factor**  
The surface for the day-night game at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium on Thursday should provide good carry in the first half but could assist the spinners later on. Dew could be a big factor.

For RCB much hinges on

the opening pair of Kohli

## TV PICKS

**IPL:** Star Sports 1, 2 & SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.  
**Premier League:** SS Select 2 (SD & HD), 12.30 a.m. (Saturday)  
**Augusta Masters:** SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 12.30 a.m. (Saturday).

## IN BRIEF



Woods was speeding at time of crash

LOS ANGELES  
Tiger Woods was going nearly 90 mph – twice the posted speed limit – on a downhill stretch of road when he lost control of an SUV outside Los Angeles and crashed in a wreck that left the golf superstar seriously injured, authorities said on Wednesday. Sheriff Alex Villanueva blamed the Feb. 23 crash solely on excessive speed and Woods' loss of control behind the wheel. AP

## Purav &amp; Weissborn lose in quarterfinals

SPLIT (CROATIA)  
Purav Raja, seeded fourth with Tristan-Samuel Weissborn of Austria, lost 6-3, 3-6, 10-8 to the Czech pair of Zdenek Kolar and Lukas Rosol in the doubles quarterfinals of the €44,820 Challenger tennis tournament on Thursday. In the ITF event in Egypt, top seed Sashank Mukund sailed into the last eight with a 6-2, 6-1 victory over Simone Roncalli of Italy. The results: €44,820.

## Challenger, Split: Doubles, quarterfinals: Zdenek Kolar &amp; Lukas Rosol (Cze) bt Tristan-Samuel Weissborn (Aut) &amp; Purav Raja 6-3, 3-6, [10-8].

## \$15,000 ITF men, Sharm El Sheikh: Pre-quarterfinals: Sasikumar Mukund bt Simone Roncalli (Ita) 6-2, 6-1.



Neymar banned for two games after red card

PARIS  
Neymar has been suspended for Paris Saint-Germain's next two Ligue 1 matches after being sent off in its loss to title rival Lille last weekend, the French league (LFP) said on Wednesday. He was given two yellow cards, the second for a late push on Tiago Djalo, who was also dismissed. AP

## Hulkenberg joins Aston Martin as supersub

PARIS  
Nico Hulkenberg has signed on as reserve and development driver with Formula One outfit Aston Martin, the team said on Thursday. The 33-year-old has never won a GP but proved himself a valuable asset when standing in for COVID-19 casualties last season. AP



Suarez injury blow for Atletico

MADRID  
Atletico Madrid forward Luis Suarez, the club's leading scorer this season, hurt his left leg in training on Wednesday, potentially dealing a critical blow to its LaLiga title hopes. Suarez left Wednesday morning's training session after feeling discomfort, and tests later revealed the Uruguayan had suffered a muscle injury to his left leg, the club said. AP

## India women lose to Belarus

## PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

TASHKENT  
The Indian women's football team lost 2-1 to Belarus in its second international friendly here on Thursday.

While both the sides played out an even first half, Belarus took the lead through a Nastassia Shuppo penalty in the 66th, before Hanna Pilipenka doubled the lead with a 78th-minute strike. Sangita Basfore pulled one back deep into added time.

## Vishnu qualifies for Olympics

Varun-Ganapathy combine also makes the grade for Tokyo

## SAILING

SPORTS BUREAU  
MUSSANAH (OMAN)

The pair of Varun Thakkar and K.C. Ganapathy, along with Vishnu Saravanan, qualified for Tokyo Olympics in the 49er and laser standard classes respectively from the Asian Olympic sailing qualifiers that concluded here on Thursday.

Vishnu did exceedingly well by finishing first in the final medal race and second overall behind Singapore's Ryan Lo Jun Han.

The Varun-Ganapathy duo, which had to finish in the top six in the medal race to make the grade, did so by finishing fourth and first overall.

Meanwhile, Nethra Kumandan officially qualified for Tokyo by finishing sixth in the final race to end up second overall and first among Asians in the laser radial class. Emma Charlotte Savelon of the Netherlands took the overall honours.

## Ramya misses out

Ramya Saravanan, too, had a chance to make it to Tokyo had she finished behind



We made it! The delighted quartet of Varun Thakkar, Nethra Kumandan, Vishnu Saravanan and K.C. Ganapathy ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Nethra in overall standings. Placed overnight third overall and second among Asians in the laser radial class. Emma Charlotte Savelon of the Netherlands took the overall honours.

## Ramya misses out

Ramya Saravanan, too, had a chance to make it to Tokyo had she finished behind

for all the people who supported us. It was a shaky [final] race, but we did it. Now the work starts," said Varun and Ganapathy.

Vishnu, who had to finish first in the medal race to make the grade, said "I was nervous and emotional before and after the race. Dur-

ing the race, I was telling myself 'Vishnu, be in the present'. It feels great to be part of history."

The event, called the Mus-sanah Open, offered two Asian qualification spots each in the laser radial and laser standard classes and one in the other classes.

## Sachin Tendulkar leaves hospital

To recuperate in home isolation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI

Sachin Tendulkar, who went into hospitalisation as a precautionary measure after testing positive for COVID-19, was on Thursday discharged and is recuperating in home isolation here.

Tendulkar, who will turn 48 this month, posted a statement on Twitter: "I have just come home from the hospital and will remain isolated while continuing to rest and recuperate. I would like to thank everyone for all the good wishes and prayers. Really appreciate it."

Tendulkar also thanked the medical staff: "I remain ever grateful to all the medical staff who took such good care of me & have



Sachin Tendulkar. ■ AFP

been working tirelessly for over a year in such difficult circumstances."

Tendulkar was hospitalised on April 2 as a precautionary measure after testing positive for the dreaded virus on March 27.

However all his family members tested negative.

## Bhuvneshwar in line for ICC monthly award

Punam and Rajeshwari among women nominees

## CRICKET

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
DUBAI

India seamer Bhuvneshwar Kumar is among cricketers nominated for the ICC Player-of-the-Month award for March following his standout performances in the limited-overs matches against England.

The ICC on Thursday announced the nominees to recognise the best performances from both male and female cricketers across all forms of international cricket.

Besides Bhuvneshwar, the others in the men's category are ace leg-spinner Rashid Khan of Afghanistan and Zimbabwe's Sean Williams.

The nominees among the women are India's Rajeshwari Gayakwad and Punam Raut, and South Africa's Lize Lee.

Last month, Bhuvnesh-



Bhuvneshwar Kumar. ■ AP

war played three ODIs against England taking six wickets and maintaining an economy rate of 4.65.

He also played five T20Is where he took four wickets and had an economy rate of 6.38.

He was the standout bowler on either side in the white-ball series between India and England.

Rashid took 11 wickets as his team won the second Test against Zimbabwe and followed up with six in a 3-0

T20I victory for his side.

For Zimbabwe, Williams played two Tests against Afghanistan where he scored 264 runs and took two wickets. He also played three T20Is wherein he scored 45 runs at a strike rate of 128.57.

In women's cricket, Rajeshwari played five ODIs against South Africa and was India's leading wicket-taker in the white-ball series.

She took eight wickets and had an economy rate of 3.56 in the ODIs and in the three T20Is she took four



Punam Raut. ■ FILE PHOTO

wickets with an economy rate of 4.75.

Punam played five ODIs against South Africa where she scored 263 runs at 87.66 with a strike rate of 71.66. She was India's top run-scoring in the ODI series with a century and two half-centuries.

From the South African camp, Lizelle played four ODIs returning a century and two half-centuries to move to the top of the ICC batting rankings.

## Harendra to coach US men's team

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
COLORADO SPRINGS (USA)

Former India hockey coach Harendra Singh, who trained both the national men's and women's teams at different stages of his accomplished career, has been appointed as the new head coach of the US men's team.

Harendra, who was bestowed the Dronacharya in 2012, served as the chief coach of the senior India men's hockey team from 2017-18. Before that, he was also in charge of the Indian women's team for some time.

"Thank you for this exciting opportunity to coach the U.S. men's national team," said Harendra.

## Three new faces in Kiwi Test squad

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
WELLINGTON

New Zealand named a squad of 20 players on Thursday for its tour of England including three uncapped players, but with a question mark over the talismanic Kane Williamson and Trent Boult.

The newcomers to the New Zealand squad are 21-year-old all-rounder Rachin Ravindra, swing bowler Jacob Duffy and in-form batsman Devon Conway.

**The squad:** Kane Williamson (Capt.), Tom Blundell, Trent Boult, Doug Bracewell, Devon Conway, Colin de Grandhomme, Jacob Duffy, Matt Henry, Kyle Jamieson, Tom Latham, Daryl Mitchell, Henry Nicholls, Ajaz Patel, Rachin Ravindra, Mitchell Santner, Tim Southee, Ross Taylor, Neil Wagner, B.J. Watling and Will Young.

## Weightlifters raring to get into action after a long lay-off

Asian championships get underway in Tashkent on April 16

## Y.B. SARANGI

## KOLKATA

After spending more than a year without a competition, the Indian weightlifters are ready to test themselves in the Asian championships to be held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, from April 16 to 25.

The Pattaya World championships in September 2019 was the last international outing for the Indians. The National championships in Kolkata in February 2020 was the last competition for them before the pandemic disrupted the calendar.

**Primary target**  
With the Olympics around the corner, the primary tar-

get for the Indians is to secure quota places in the Tokyo Games.

Former world champion S. Mirabai Chanu (women's 49kg) and Jeremy Lalrinnunga (men's 67kg) are the leading Indians who are capable of winning Olympic quota places. According to chief National coach Vijay Sharma, Mirabai, who is ranked fourth in the world, will qualify by competing in the Asian championships (a gold-level Olympic qualifying event) and fulfilling the requirement of taking part in six designated events in the prescribed time frame.

Jeremy, who has a personal best of 306kg in an inter-



Back again! Mirabai will be eager to prove her mettle after getting treated for her lower back pain. ■ FILE PHOTO: RAJEEV BHATT

national event and is ranked 22nd, has a good chance of qualifying, said Sharma.

All eyes will be on Mirabai, who will be eager to prove her mettle after getting treated for her lower back pain in the USA. Mira-

bai, who set a new National mark with an aggregate of 203kg in the National championships in Kolkata, will look forward to at least matching her best performance.

"Mira has been lifting with confidence after her treatment in the USA and that makes us optimistic

VIJAY SHARMA  
Coach

201kg in an international event.

The assistance of psychologists should benefit Mirabai and Jeremy while going into a top competition after a long COVID-induced break.

Other lifters, including two-time Commonwealth Games gold medallist S. Sathish Kumar (81kg), will be keen to get back into competition mode in the continental meet.

## Suns pip Jazz in clash of top two teams

## NBA

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
LOS ANGELES

Devin Booker scored 35 points as Phoenix Suns edged Utah Jazz 117-113 in overtime on Wednesday in a Western Conference showdown between the two best teams in the NBA.

The Suns not only won their seventh straight game, but the nail-biting victory gives them an important psychological edge over the Jazz as the 72-game NBA season nears the final stretch. Donovan Mitchell scored a

game-high 41 points for Jazz. Mitchell forced the overtime with a three-pointer.

Elsewhere, Kevin Durant scored 17 points in his timely return from injury absence as Brooklyn Nets clobbered New Orleans Pelicans 139-111 in New York.

**The results:** Hawks 113 lost to Grizzlies 131; Celtics 101 bt Knicks 99; Nets 139 bt Pelicans 111; Suns 117 bt Utah 113 (OT). Nuggets 106 bt Spurs 96; Rockets 102 bt Mavericks 93; Thunder 102 lost to Hornets 113.

Pacers 141 bt Timberwolves 137; Magic 116 lost to Wizards 131.

## Abhijeet, Ziya star in Sahgal Club's victory

An 84-ball 113 by Abhijeet Sharma and four wickets by Ziya-ul-Haq saw Sahgal Cricket Club thrash Ravi Brothers CC by 161 runs to enter the quarterfinals of the 31st All India Hitkari Om Nath Sood Memorial tournament.

**Easy for Airliner Academy**  
Three wickets by Tejas Singh and 62 runs by Vinayak saw Airliner Academy beat Core Capital Cricket by 62 runs in the 4th Ace Under-13 Summer tournament.

**SS Sports posts win**  
Deepak Khatri's 46 and Parvesh Dahiya's 38 helped SS Sports Club beat Sports Cube Academy by five

wickets in the 4th RK Kapoor T20 tournament.

**The scores:** SCA 166/4 in 20 overs (Deepak Chandra 67, Rahul Dagar 64) lost to SSS 170/5 in 17.3 overs (Deepak Khatri 46, Parvesh Dahiya 38, Vinayak 30).

**Airliner Academy**

Three wickets by Tejas Singh and 62 runs by Vinayak saw Airliner Academy beat Core Capital Cricket by 62 runs in the 4th Ace Under-13 Summer tournament.

**The scores:** Airliner Academy 246 in 39.5 overs (Vinayak 62, Sarthak Jain 39) bt CCC 184/9 in 40 overs (Tejas Singh 3/40).

**Rohan scalps five**

Sahil Wilson and Harsh

Kumar scored half-centuries and Rohan Parchanda picked up a five-for as Telefunken Club beat WCL Academy by 56 runs in the 15th RC Sharma memorial Under-17 tournament.

**The scores:** Telefunken Club 278