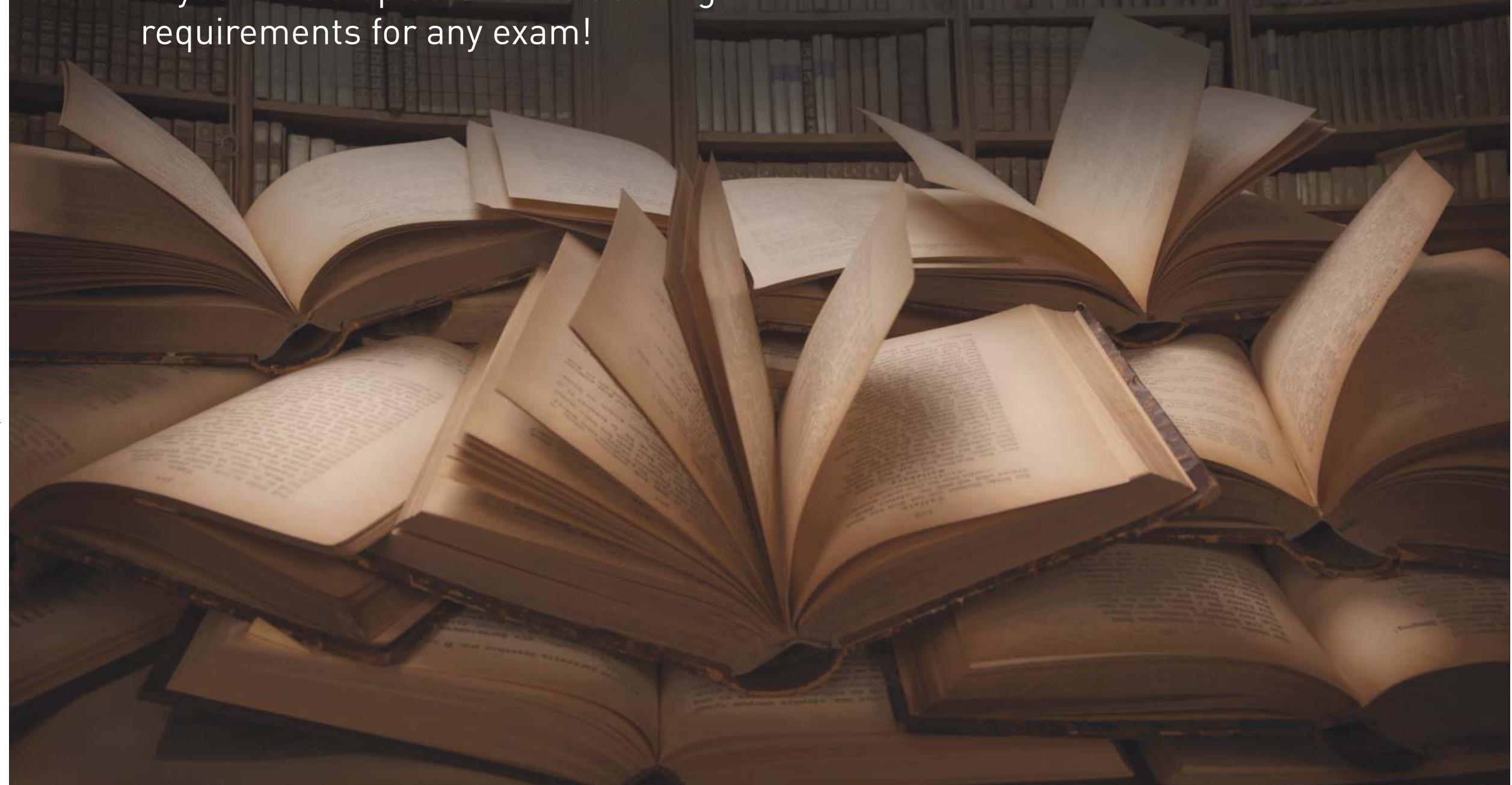




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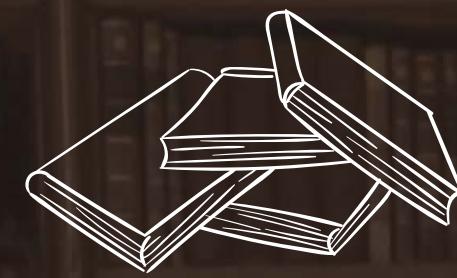
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NEARBY



No illegal phone tapping of MLAs: Gehlot govt.

JAIPUR
The Congress government in Rajasthan on Wednesday said "no illegal tapping" of telephone conversations of any legislator was carried out during the political crisis in the State in July last year.

NORTH ▶ PAGE 5

BJP MP from Himachal Ram Swaroop found dead

NEW DELHI
BJP MP from Mandi in Himachal Pradesh Ram Swaroop Sharma, 62, was found dead at his official residence in New Delhi on Wednesday morning.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 10

After decline, Delhi cases breach 500 mark again

NEW DELHI
The Capital witnessed 536 new COVID-19 cases over 24 hours, the highest since January 1, taking the total number of cases to 6,45,025, said a government health bulletin. On January 1, 585 cases were reported in Delhi.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

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Quick, decisive steps required to curb 'second peak', says PM

Modi calls for 'test, track, treat' strategy as COVID-19 cases surge again in States

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Warning of another possible nationwide COVID-19 outbreak, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday urged the States and the Union Territories to work towards stopping the emerging "second peak" of infections immediately, and stressed the need for quick and decisive steps.

"The confidence which came from our achievements in the battle against coronavirus should not turn into negligence... we can incorporate our past experiences in our efforts against the spread of the virus," he said in a video-conference with the Chief Ministers on the COVID-19 situation.

Genome testing
Mr. Modi reiterated that the States and the Union Territories should follow up on sending samples for genome testing to track virus variants of concern. "All States and Union Territories have been tagged to 10 national labs under the INSACOG consortium with the National Centre for Disease Control as the nodal institute. The standard operating procedures issued by the Health Ministry for

The confidence which came from our achievements in the battle against coronavirus should not turn into negligence... we can incorporate our past experiences in our efforts against the spread of the virus

The whole country has opened up for travel and the number of people travelling has also increased. There has to be a robust mechanism for sharing information among States/UTs
NARENDRA MODI Prime Minister

surveillance of international travellers and their contacts must be implemented rigorously," he said.

He stressed the need to be serious about "test, track and treat", and said it was important to track every infected person's contacts in the shortest time and keep the RT-PCR test rate in the country above 70%.

Mr. Modi cautioned against wastage of vaccines, and asked the Chief Ministers to monitor the doses daily. "The States should work towards zero wastage of vaccines with a set target. There is a need to create more sessions to vaccinate more healthcare and frontline workers," he said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

COVID-19 cases rise for seventh day

With a rise in COVID-19 cases for the seventh day in a row, India on Wednesday recorded its highest daily tally this year at 28,903. Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said 70 districts across 17 States registered a 150% rise in cases in the past 15 days. He said, "India is currently reporting a nearly 43% increase in the week-on-week rise in new COVID-19 cases." ▶ PAGE 10

India known as first, reliable responder

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Wednesday said in the past few years, India had developed a reputation of being the first and reliable responder in the region, stating that the country had provided "Made in India" vaccines for COVID-19 to 72 countries. Medicines have been supplied to 150 nations, 82 of them as grants. ▶ PAGE 10

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Bengal CM promises basic income

Mamata releases Trinamool's manifesto with a slew of assurances for voters

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday released the Trinamool Congress manifesto for the 2021 Assembly election with promises of delivery of rations under the public distribution system at the doorstep and universal basic income for every family.

Under the income scheme, all the 1.6 crore families under the general category will get ₹500 a month and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes population ₹1,000 a month. The direct transfers will be in the name of the women head of the family. The other announcements include increasing the benefits of the State government's Krishak Bandhu scheme from ₹6,000 to ₹10,000 an acre a



New promises: Mamata Banerjee releasing her party's manifesto in Kolkata on Wednesday. ▶ PTI

year. Ms. Banerjee announced that the new facility under the "Khadya Sathi Scheme" will ensure monthly ration to 1.5 crore families at doorstep.

The Trinamool Congress chief also promised OBC status to Mahishyas and some

other caste groups such as Tamul, Saha and Tili. The Mahishyas comprise a significant population in Purba Medinipur, and the Chief Minister is contesting from Nandigram in the district. "I shall appoint a special task force to examine and propose OBC status to all the communities that are not recognised so, like Mahishyas, Tili, Tamul, Saha but were part of the recommended list of OBC communities in the Mandal Commission," the manifesto quoted the Chief Minister.

Student credit card
It also announced a new student credit card scheme with a limit of ₹10 lakh at only 4% interest. At the launch of the manifesto, Ms. Banerjee told journalists that her government had delivered

10% of what was promised and several schemes like Kanyashree got international recognition.

Asked what will be the party's slogan, she said it would be "Khela Hobe Jeta Hobe" (Game will be played and it will be won). She refuted the BJP's allegations that she was trying to get "sympathy votes" by campaigning on a wheelchair. She said if what the BJP is alleging is true, then the versions of so many doctors and medical reports are all false. "I am still in a lot of pain... The BJP is a high-loaded virus. I am saying this politically. I am not going to play the dirty game," she said.

The CM backed Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal over the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill.

Centre stage



Capital crisis: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal waves at supporters as AAP leaders look on during a protest against the Government of NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021, at Jantar Mantar on Wednesday. ▶ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR (REPORT ON PAGE 2)

Who will police the police, asks Haryana court

Judge acquits washerman in bicycle theft case, says 'botched-up probe' has shaken court's conscience

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

A court in Pehowa in Haryana's Kurukshetra acquitted a washerman in a four-year-old bicycle theft case saying "this matter has shaken the conscience of this court".

The order further said that the case had forced the court to conclude that a police officer manipulated the entire police system and investigating authorities to settle personal vengeance against an innocent person.

In a 37-page order passed last month, Judicial Magistrate First Class Amitendra Singh observed that it was an exemplary case of an "absolu-

lute ill-motivated" and "botched-up investigation", where some police officers misused their powers to harass an innocent person for the simple reason that he dared to file a complaint against one of their colleagues and succeeded in getting the officer punished by a court of law.

Take stringent action
"This leads this court to a certain question, who will police the police and what will happen if the protectors of society and law themselves behave in a manner which cannot be termed less than illegal?" observed the

What will happen if the protectors of society and law themselves behave in a manner which cannot be termed less than illegal?
AMITENDRA SINGH
Judicial Magistrate First Class

court. It recommended stringent action against the erring policemen as well as ASI Naresh within three months after conducting departmental enquiry.

The case pertains to the theft of a bicycle belonging to Home Guard Surender Kumar from Pehowa court com-

plex on February 24, 2017. The accused, Krishan Kumar, in his statement, pleaded innocence saying he was being implicated due to "personal enmity" and to "create pressure on him to withdraw a complaint against ASI Naresh". Mr. Kumar told the court that Nagender beat him up and broke his tooth on November 19, 2010 when he demanded ₹50 from him for washing and ironing his clothes.

He moved a local court and the ASI was convicted on charges of causing hurt and criminal intimidation. The ASI got several fake cases of theft and possession of drugs

and illicit liquor registered against Mr. Kumar, but he was acquitted in all of them.

In the present case, the judge remarked that the Investigation Officer, also the prosecution witness, "did not know how to conduct an investigation, or has purposely and intentionally done the investigation in such lackadaisical/callous manner, for the reasons best known to him".

Defence counsel Sudesh Kumari welcomed the court's decision saying it would rein in policemen from implicating innocent persons and committing atrocities on them.

Param Bir Singh removed as Mumbai Police Commissioner

API Vaze, held in bomb scare case, considered his close aide

STAFF REPORTER
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government on Wednesday transferred Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh, in what could be seen as the fallout of the ongoing inquiry by the National Investigation Agency into the bomb scare outside industrialist Mukesh Ambani's house and the subsequent arrest of Mumbai police officer Sachin Vaze.

He has been replaced by senior IPS officer Hemant Naik, who holds the additional charge of State Director-General of Police. Mr. Vaze, held in bomb scare case, considered his close aide

Singh will be the new DG, Home Guards. Rajneesh Seth has been given additional charge as DGP, Maharashtra, while Sanjay Pandey will head the Maharashtra State Security Corporation.

Late-night decision
The decision to transfer Mr. Singh was taken in a late-night meeting held by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray with Home Minister Anil Deshmukh and officials from the Home Department on Tuesday. NCP president Sharad Pawar had met Mr. Thackeray on Monday.

The Opposition BJP said it was natural for the city police chief to be changed after the arrest of one of its officers. Ever since the arrest of Assistant Police Inspector Vaze – considered a close aide of Mr. Singh – the political and police circles were abuzz with the possibility of his transfer. The transfer is also seen as an attempt by the State government to avoid yet another embarrassment witnessed after the arrest of Mr. Vaze and the delay in transferring him from the Crime Intelligence Unit of the Mumbai police.

CM appeals to Centre to take back Bill

BJP-led Centre holds elections and where party cannot win, they dismantle the govt., says Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Addressing supporters at Jantar Mantar on Wednesday, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal appealed to the Central government to take back the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021, introduced in the Lok Sabha by the latter.

Hundreds of party supporters, MLAs, and Ministers, protested against the Bill at Jantar Mantar.

"People are unhappy that the BJP government has introduced a Bill in Parliament, which says that from now, Delhi government means L-G. Then what will be the meaning of us? What will be the meaning of the

people of Delhi? What will be the meaning of the CM and the will of the people? Then why was the election conducted? Then why did people vote? Then there is no meaning of people giving us 62 out of 70 seats," the AAP chief said.

He said the Supreme Court had said that all powers should be with the government and no file has to go to L-G. "The BJP does not believe in the people, democracy, and Constitution. It does not want to follow the orders of the Supreme Court," he said.

'Unfair means'

Mr. Kejriwal said that in the Assembly election in 2015, AAP won 67 out of 70 seats,



AAP workers staging a protest at Jantar Mantar on Wednesday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

and in 2020, 62 out of 70 seats and added that in the civic body byelections held recently, the BJP did not win a single seat. "People are rejecting BJP for AAP, but the BJP does not want to accept this fact. They only want to rule Delhi through unfair means," he said.

"They are doing this across the country, they hold elections and where they cannot win, they dismantle the government. Now that they cannot buy AAP MLAs despite trying, they want to dismantle the government by bringing in a law," he added.

AAP senior leader Manish Sisodia said that the Bill is not only an act to curtail the powers of the Delhi government, but it is to also stop the Kejriwal model from making progress in Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh, because the BJP is threatened.

Sandeep Mishra, 9, a Class IV student, who was holding a placard at the protest site, said "Modiji has

brought a black law to give more power to the L-G. I have come to protest against it. I attended online class in the morning, but skipped the afternoon session."

When asked how the Bill will affect him, AAP MLA Praveen Kumar, said that scores of people come to the MLA office daily to address their problems. "Once this Bill is passed, the MLAs won't have any assurance that they can solve the issues as L-G will have the powers. People go to the MLA office when their sewers are not working, or electricity is down and not to the L-G office. What is the point of them voting for us if they have to rely on the L-G?" he asked.

Dictatorship of Modi govt. can now be seen in Delhi: Congress

It says Bill granting powers to L-G an assault on democracy

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Delhi Congress on Wednesday held a dharna at Jantar Mantar to protest against the National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021, introduced by the BJP government in the Lok Sabha. The Congress leaders said that the Bill was an assault on democracy as it would take away powers from the democratically elected government and the wishes of the people and place it in the hands of a person appointed by the Central government.

Delhi Congress chief Ch. Anil Kumar said that the "dictatorship" of the Narendra Modi government that people have been getting to see across the country can now be seen in Delhi as well with the attempt to dilute the powers of the elected government via the Bill. The party called for the immediate withdrawal of the Bill.

The elected MLAs of Delhi will have no power to take decisions on behalf of the people, who have voted them to power through a democratic process. All the power will be with one man that is appointed by the Centre who will have no clue as to what the people of Delhi want. This is a dangerous Bill as it will make a mockery of our democracy," Mr. Kumar said.

Mr. Kumar alleged that the AAP was the "B team" on the BJP and therefore supported the Union government's decision to snatch the Bill as it will make a mockery of our democracy," Mr. Dutt said.



DPCC president Anil Kumar addressing party workers during a protest at Jantar Mantar on Wednesday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

State to the status of Union Territories and was doing only a "token" protest against the Bill.

Delhi Congress vice-president Abhishek Dutt pointed out that when the party asked for permission to protest at Jantar Mantar, they were told not to bring more than 1,000 people or build a stage but was very clear that the police had given permission for the AAP's "token" protest by rolling out a red carpet and allowing them to build a stage for their event.

In Puducherry, the Congress government put up a fight against the BJP and ultimately Kiran Bedi the then Lt. Governor was brought back to Delhi. In Delhi, Mr. Kejriwal has no such power. He should sit on dharna till the Bill is not revoked instead of making a show of protest," Mr. Dutt said.

FIRs for illegal structures near Tikri protest site

'It is causing damage to public property'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

Two FIRs have been registered by Haryana Police in separate police stations at Bahadurgarh against unknown persons for digging borewells and raising permanent structures at farmers' agitation site near Tikri border.



Farmers constructing a brick house at Tikri border in Delhi. ■ FILE PHOTO

In an FIR registered at Sadar Bahadurgarh police station, the complainant, Sidharth Singh, Haryana Shahari Vikas Pradhikaran, Estate Officer, said that unknown persons were raising permanent structures on the agency's road dividing Sector 10 and 12.

The FIR, registered under Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act and the IPC, further said that illegal borewell were also dug up along the road causing damage to public property.

The second FIR was registered at City Bahadurgarh police station under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code and Section 8B of the National Highways Act. The complainant, Manish

Kumar, Human Resources manager at Rohad toll plaza on National Highway-9 said that illegal borewells were being dug up near Najafgarh flyover slip road and demanded for the removal of the encroachment.

All-India Kisan Sabha State vice-president Inderjit Singh said: "The Haryana government asks the Central government for an early resolution of the agitation through talks instead of focussing on these 'frivolous' issues. The so-called permanent structures are not concrete structures. And it won't take long to dismantle them once the agitation ends," said Mr. Singh.

Farmer's death: examine X-ray report, says HC

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday ordered the Delhi Health Secretary to form a board of experts to examine the X-ray report of a 25-year-old farmer who died during the farmers' protest rally here on the Republic Day.

Justice Yogesh Khanna also directed the doctors of Maulana Azad Medical College here to prepare the X-ray report from the original X-ray plate which has been received by Delhi Police from their Uttar Pradesh counterpart.

The court posted the case for further hearing on April 14.

Timings

THURSDAY, MAR. 18	
● RISE 06:28 SET 18:31	
● RISE 09:16 SET 22:55	
FRIDAY, MAR. 19	
● RISE 06:26 SET 18:32	
● RISE 09:51 SET 23:50	
SATURDAY, MAR. 20	
● RISE 06:25 SET 18:33	
● RISE 10:30 SET 00:00	

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	34	17
Safdarjung	34	17
Palam	34	19

Delhi Palam Today
33°C A pleasant hazy morning. Warm day would continue with partly cloudy sky. Thunderstorm may occur at some places.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
33°C Thunderstorm and rain with gusty winds likely to affect at some places.

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Domestic help held for beating toddler

Case against victim's kin for hiring minor

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

A 13-month-old toddler was allegedly beaten by a minor domestic help "out of aggression" causing her life-threatening injuries in Sector 56 here.

The juvenile in conflict with law, aged around 13 years, has been detained.

The victim sustained multiple fractures with injuries on abdomen, kidney and liver. She was on ventilator, according to the FIR registered on charges of attempt to murder and causing grievous hurt under the IPC on Wednesday. The incident

took place on March 15.

A case has also been registered against the family under the Juvenile Justice Act for hiring a minor.

A police officer, on condition of anonymity, said the domestic help felt annoyed due to constant crying of the toddler and kicked her out of aggression. She, however, said the family never ill-treated her.

The toddler's father in his complaint said he had hired the minor help for babysitting three months ago and paid her ₹9,000 per month. On the day of incident, the parents were out shopping.

DDA invites bids for Dilshad Garden project

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

As a part of the in situ slum rehabilitation and redevelopment of JJ clusters at Dilshad Garden, the Delhi Development Authority has invited request for proposal to select a private partner to undertake the redevelopment project through

Public-Private Partnership mode, the urban body said on Wednesday.

The project is proposed to cover approximately 3,367 households, with a project cost of ₹468.10 crore. The dwellers will also be provided with a rent support to enable them to relocate temporarily.

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UPI-Now available in ASBA for Retail Individual Investors ("RILs") applying through Registered Brokers, DP's and RTAs. Retail Individual Investors also have the option to submit the application directly to the ASBA Bank (SCSBs) or to use the facility of linked online trading, demat and bank account.

Investors are required to ensure that the bank account used for bidding is linked to their PAN.

*ASBA has to be availed by all the investors except Anchor investors. UPI may be availed by RILs. For details on the ASBA and UPI process, please refer to the details given in ASBA Form and abridged prospectus and also please refer to the section "Issue Procedure" beginning on page 377 of the RHP. The process is also available on the website of Association of Investment Bankers of India ("AIBI"), BSE Limited ("BSE") and National Stock Exchange of India Limited ("NSE"), and together with BSE, the "Stock Exchanges" and the General Information Document. ASBA Forms can be downloaded from the website of the Stock Exchanges and can be obtained from the list of banks that are displayed on the website of SEBI at www.sebi.gov.in. List of banks supporting UPI, please refer to the link: [www.sebi.gov.in](http://www.sebi.gov.in/sebiweb/other/OtherAction.do?do?Recognised=pi=yes&nlmd=40). For RILs Bidding using the UPI Mechanism may apply through the SCSBs and mobile applications whose names appear on the website of SEBI (www.sebi.gov.in/sebiweb/other/OtherAction.do?do?Recognised=pi=yes&nlmd=40) respectively, as updated from time to time. ICICI Bank Limited has been appointed as Sponsor Bank for the issue. For issue related queries, investors may contact the Book Running Lead Managers ("BRLMs") and Registrar to the issue on their respective email IDs as mentioned below. For UPI related queries, investors can contact NPCI at the toll free number: 18001201740 and Mail ID: ipo.up@npci.org.in.

Risks to Investors

1. The Book Running Lead Managers associated with the issue have handled 34 public issues in the past three years out of which 11 issues closed below the issue price on listing date.
2. The Price/Earnings ratio based on diluted EPS on restated basis for Fiscal 2020 for the Issuer at the upper end of the Price band is 22.93.
3. Average cost of acquisition of Equity Shares for our Selling Shareholders ranges from ₹ 58.77 per Equity Share to ₹ 200.57 per Equity Share and offer price at upper end of Price band is ₹305.
4. Weighted Average Return on Net Worth for Fiscals 2020, 2019, 2018 is 8.99%.

OPEN

CLOSES ON: FRIDAY, MARCH 19, 2021 **

**** The Bank and the Selling Shareholders may, in consultation with the Book Running Lead Managers, consider closing the Bid/Issue Period for QIBs one Working Day prior to the Bid/Issue Closing Date in accordance with the SEBI/ICDR Regulations.**

In case of any revision in the Price Band, the Bid/Issue Period will be extended by at least three additional Working Days after such revision in the Price Band, subject to the Bid/Issue Period not exceeding 10 Working Days. In cases of force majeure, banking strike or similar circumstances, the Bank and the Selling Shareholders may, for reasons to be recorded in writing, extend the Bid/Issue Period for a minimum of three Working Days, subject to the Bid/Issue Period not exceeding 10 Working Days. Any revision in the Price Band and the revised Bid/Issue Period, if applicable, shall be widely disseminated by notification to the Stock Exchanges, by issuing a public notice, and also by indicating the change on the respective websites of the Book Running Lead Managers and at the terminals of the Syndicate Members and by intimation to Designated Intermediaries and the Sponsor Bank, as applicable.

The issue is being made through the Book Building Process, in terms of Rule 19(2)(b) of the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Rules, 1957, as amended ("SCR") with Regulation 6(1) of the SEBI ICDR Regulations, wherein not more than 50% of the Net Issue shall be allocated on a proportionate basis to Qualified Institutional Buyers ("QIBs", the "QIB Portion"), provided that the Bank and the Selling Shareholders may, in consultation with the Book Running Lead Managers, allocate up to 60% of the QIB Portion to Anchor Investors on a discretionary basis in accordance with the SEBI ICDR Regulations ("Anchor Investor Portion"), of which one-third shall be reserved for domestic Mutual Funds, subject to valid bids being received from domestic Mutual Funds at or above the Anchor Investor Allocation Price. In the event of under-subscription, or non-allocation in the Anchor Investor Portion, the balance Equity Shares shall be added to the Net QIB Portion. Further, 5% of the Net QIB Portion shall be available for allocation on a proportionate basis only to Mutual Funds, and the remainder of the Net QIB Portion shall be available for allocation on a proportionate basis only to All QIBs, including Mutual Funds, subject to valid bids being received at or above the Issue Price. Further, not less than 15% of the Net Issue shall be available for allocation on a proportionate basis to Non-Institutional Bidders and not less than 35% of the Net Issue shall be available for allocation to Retail Individual Bidders in accordance with the SEBI ICDR Regulations, subject to valid bids being received at or above the Issue Price. All potential Bidders (except Anchor Investors) are required to mandatorily utilise the Application Supported by Blocked Amount ("ASBA") process providing details of their respective ASBA accounts, and UPI ID in case of RILs using the UPI Mechanism, if applicable, in which the corresponding Bid Amounts will be blocked by the SCSBs or under the UPI Mechanism, as the case may be, to the extent of valid Bid Amounts. Anchor Investors are not permitted to participate in the issue through the ASBA process. For details, see "Issue Procedure" beginning on page 377 of the RHP.

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PERSONAL

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I, ONKAR Singh R/O Khasra No 5/14 Swaroop Nagar Delhi 110042 have lost marksheets of Class 10th (Roll No. 8139140), 12th (Roll No. 9136400) in Delhi. Call: 9953992211

PERSONAL

CHANGE OF NAME

I, BAKTAWAR Singh Negi born on 05 June 1963 residing at H. No. 441 Block A, Sec 02 Greater Noida - West, Dehradoon, Distt. G.B. Nagar, Noida - 201306, have changed my name to Bakhtawar Singh Negi vide affidavit dated 15 March 2021 at Noida.

BUSINESS OFFER

TENDERS

Narangs International Hotels Pvt. Ltd.

Hotels • In flight Catering • Fast Foods

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FOOD AND BEVERAGE ITEMS : Fresh Vegetables, Fruits, English / Exotic Vegetables, Frozen Green Peas, American Corns and fries, Milk and Dairy Products, Processed Cheese, Poultry Products, Eggs, Fish & Sea Food, Mutton, Frozen Processed Meat, Canned / Bottled Products, Bakery & Confectionery Products, Chocolate Covering, Cocoa Powder, Cocoa Butter, Aerated Beverages and Mineral Water, Grocery & Provision (Rice, Pulses etc.), Dry Fruits, Atta / Maida, Blister / Sachet Items (Jam, Marmalade, Pickle, Tomato Ketchup & Mouth Freshener etc.), Tenderloin Fillet, Spices, Sugar (M31), Tetra Pack Juices, Tea, Cheese (Imported & Indian), Roti & Wraps, Mayonnaise, Tomato Ketchup & Gravies.

NON-FOOD ITEMS : Plastic Items (Glasses, Cutlery etc.), Aluminium Foil / Pans / Examination Gloves, Cling Film (Food Wrapper), Hygiene / Cleaning Material, Chemicals (Hygiene, Laundry & Lab), Dry Ice, Cake Boxes, Paper products (Napkin, Toilet roll, Kitchen towel, Plates & Bags), HM, LD & PP Bags-plain (Biodegradable), Housekeeping items, Linen Items, Printing & Office Stationery Items, Pest Control services, Charcoal, Automobile Spare Parts, Electrical Goods, Hardware Items, Flowers, Industrial Salt.

TRANSPORTATION : Bus for staff facilities.

TERMS & CONDITIONS :

- Tender forms and relevant specification can be obtained from our Purchase Department for Rs. 1200/- (non-refundable) between 1400 Hrs, to 1700 Hrs. from 18th March, 2021 at The Ambassador Sky Chef, IGI Airport Complex, New Delhi - 110037.
- The Management reserves the right to reject or accept all offers or in part without assigning any reason whatsoever.
- Rates must be inclusive of delivery & any other charges but exclusive of GST, which should be specified separately.
- Last date for receipt of filled tenders is 31st March, 2021 upto 1700 Hrs.
- Sealed tenders must be addressed to:

Corporate Purchase Manager

Narangs International Hotels Pvt. Ltd.

The Ambassador Sky Chef

IGI Airport Complex, New Delhi-110 037.

Phone No. 011-42225243

PUBLIC NOTICE

PUBLIC NOTICE

Mis Aditya InfraDevelopers Pvt. Ltd.

Address:-Ground Floor, Corporate One,

Plot No.-5, District Center, Jasola,

New Delhi,110025

Corporate Purchase Manager

Narangs International Hotels Pvt. Ltd.

The Ambassador Sky Chef

IGI Airport Complex, New Delhi-110 037.

Phone No. 011-42225243

TRANSPORTATION :

Bus for staff facilities.

TERMS & CONDITIONS :

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Plot No.-5, District Center, Jasola,

New Delhi,110025

Corporate Purchase Manager

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The Ambassador Sky Chef

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Phone No. 011-42225243

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ASSEMBLY POLLS

DELI THE HINDU | THURSDAY, MARCH 18, 2021

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)

Forecast for Thursday: Thunderstorm with lightning/hail/gusty winds likely at isolated places over Rajasthan, West Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha, Chhattisgarh, Marathwada, Telangana, coastal & south interior Karnataka, Kerala and Mahe. Heat wave conditions likely at isolated places over Saurashtra and Kutch

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	... 33.5	19.3	...	Kozhikode	... 34.6	25.8	...
Ahmedabad	... 39.2	21.6	...	Kurnool	... 38.6	24.5	...
Aizawl	... 27.8	9.1	...	Lucknow	... 34.0	17.9	...
Allahabad	... 36.1	17.5	...	Madurai	... 36.2	22.6	...
Bengaluru	... 33.6	19.5	...	Mangalore	... 36.5	25.9	...
Bhopal	... 35.9	20.6	...	Mumbai	... 35.8	22.0	...
Bhubaneswar	... 38.6	23.9	...	Mysuru	... 33.9	18.2	...
Chandigarh	... 34.1	16.1	...	New Delhi	... 34.2	16.8	...
Chennai	... 32.0	24.5	...	Patna	... 34.2	19.0	...
Coimbatore	... 35.4	21.6	...	Port Blair	... 31.6	24.5	...
Dehradun	... 32.0	14.6	...	Puducherry	... 31.0	22.2	...
Gangtok	... 18.0	10.7	...	Pune	... 36.4	19.7	...
Goa	... 33.2	25.2	...	Raipur	... 37.0	21.5	...
Guwahati	... 33.8	18.6	...	Ranchi	... 33.7	17.7	...
Hubballi	... 34.0	21.0	...	Shillong	... 23.1	11.2	...
Hyderabad	... 36.9	22.3	...	Shimla	... 21.6	10.6	...
Imphal	... 30.8	11.1	...	Srinagar	... 16.1	5.7	...
Jaipur	... 36.0	22.0	...	Thiruvananthapuram	... 34.6	24.1	...
Kochi	... 32.8	25.4	...	Tiruchi	... 35.8	23.2	...
Kohima	... 23.6	10.4	...	Vijayawada	... 37.3	24.6	...
Kolkata	... 36.8	23.2	...	Visakhapatnam	... 32.2	25.2	...

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air we are breathing**Yesterday**

CITIES	SO ₂	NO _x	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	31	.74	.36	.80	.140	...
Bengaluru	.7	.47	124	.97
Chennai	.9	.19	.52	.47	.63	...
Delhi	5038	.349	.411	...
Hyderabad	.2	.59	.28	.120	.117	...
Kolkata	35	.22	.26	.260	.219	...
Lucknow	18	.60	.36	.359	.324	...
Mumbai	2050	.298	.256	...
Pune	.6	.76	.64	.160	.116	...
Visakhapatnam	10	.56	.35	.98	.105	...

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)
SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.
NO_x: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.
CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.
PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

BJP campaign focused on attacking Ajmal

Despite AIUDF chief's denial, Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma claims the former is eyeing CM post

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

Perfume baron Badruddin Ajmal appears to be the flavour of the poll season for rural Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

In campaign after campaign, the saffron party has attacked Mr. Ajmal, president of the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) and a Lok Sabha member. The AIUDF is a constituent of the 10-party Mahajot or grand alliance headed by the Congress in Assam.

Campaigning for his party candidate in Barhampur on Wednesday, the State's Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma devoted much of his speech to the AIUDF chief.

"Congress has joined hands with Ajmal to form the next government with him. Congress sold out to him for the lust of power. Can we ac-



AJUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal. ■ FILE PHOTO: RITU RAJ KONWAR

cept his ideology?" he asked.

Referring to a video where Mr. Ajmal allegedly said women should give birth to as many children as possible, Dr. Sarma said: "He is not bothered about the health of women. His sole objective is to become the Chief Minister of Assam at any cost."

Mr. Ajmal had a few days

ago said he never was and never would be in the race for the Chief Minister's chair. He had also made it clear that the AIUDF agreed to join the grand alliance to avoid a split in the anti-BJP and secular votes.

The combined vote share of Congress and AIUDF was more in 14 seats that the BJP

continuing his attack, Dr. Sarma slammed the AIUDF chief for promising to reopen the madrasas if the Mahajot wins the three-phase election ending April 6.

"Ajmal wants to reopen the madrasas. Should people become doctors and engineers or *mullahs* and *maulvis*?" the Minister said.

The Sarbananda Sonowal government had two months ago enacted a law to convert 729 State-run primary, up-

per primary, high and higher secondary madrasas into general schools.

"We have to protect Assam. Voting for Congress will mean inviting Ajmal to Dispur [Assam's seat of power]. If he captures power, the Assamese people will not be able to hold their heads high," Dr. Sarma said.

Ajmal's reaction

Mr. Ajmal had in an interview used a Bengali proverb – *"Jato dosh, Nando Ghosh"* – to explain the BJP's obsession with him. The adage literally means: "Blame Nando Ghosh for every ill or for everything that goes wrong".

"It is easy to cover up for governance failure in Assam. Just blame it on Badruddin Ajmal and sell his fear by painting him as a representative of Bangladeshis or illegal migrants or Mughals or whatever," he said.

No wage hike for now, says Gauhati HC

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The Gauhati High Court has given tea estate owners in Assam the "liberty" to decide if they want to follow the State government's order on increasing the daily wages of plantation workers by ₹50.

This effectively means the tea estates can continue to pay ₹167 as the daily wage to their workers.

Hearing a petition of the Indian Tea Association and 17 tea companies for staying the wage hike, Justice Michael Zothankhuma on March 16 said the interim order passed more than a week ago "shall continue until further orders". The judge had on March 8 restrained the State government from taking any "coercive action" against the tea estates for not following its February 23 notification.

Leaflet seeks answers from BJP in Assam tea gardens

Questionnaire for workers apolitical, says tribal students' body

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Has the BJP given you Scheduled Tribe (ST) status? Have you received a daily wage of ₹351.33? Did you get land 'patta' (record of rights)?

These are the first three of 11 questions tea plantation workers – men and women – are being armed with across eastern Assam. The questionnaire, claims the All Assam Adivasi Students' Association (AAASA), is apolitical although the BJP is mentioned in each query.

The AAASA had organised

its 18th annual Mahasabha at Haleem tea estate in north-eastern Assam's Biswanath district from March 12-14. An elaborate discussion on the issues that matter most for the plantation workers led to printing the questionnaire.

Promise for change'

"One may assume from the questionnaire that we are batting for Congress or any other opposition parties. The only reason that the questions are aimed at the BJP is that the party has been in power for five years along with its associates and

the tea workers largely voted for them for the promised 'parivartan' (change) and 'achche din' (good days)," AAASA president Stephen Lakra told *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

"The idea behind giving each of our adult community members the 11-question leaflet is not to make any analysis but to let them be aware of the promises made so that they can ask questions to whenever BJP or AGP (ally Asom Gana Parishad) candidates or leaders canvass in their areas," he said.

sign," he said.

The Minister said the matter could be settled if Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat agreed to give his voice sample for investigation. The audio clips leaked during the turmoil caused by the then Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot's rebellion had purportedly carried the conversations between Mr. Shekhawat and several BJP and Congress leaders.

Final reports

The SOG has since filed final reports in three FIRs – two of them registered on the complaint of ruling party's chief whip Mahesh Joshi – for attempts to topple the democratically elected government, as the case under Section 124-A (sedition) of Indian Penal Code was not proved. The case was transferred to the Anti-Corruption Bureau, which is still investigating the matter.

The BJP members demanded an inquiry by the Central Bureau of Investigation into the matter and trooped into the well of the House, leading to adjournment of the proceedings twice.

When Mr. Dharialal said the BJP was making an issue in order to protect Mr. Shekhawat, the BJP MLAs created a ruckus in the Assembly.

On the BJP's allegation that

the audio clips were prepared in the Chief Minister's Office and circulated by the CM's Officer on Special Duty, Mr. Dharialal said the voice clips were received on WhatsApp and forwarded them did not constitute an offence.

The Chief Minister also called for occupation-based immunisation for school and college students and teachers, judges, bus drivers and conductors, panchayat members, MLAs, MPs etc. to pave the way for normalisation of crucial activities and check "super-spreaders". He advocated early opening of courts to end the citizens' wait for justice, and also of

schools and colleges to bridge the gap between poor and affluent families in terms of education.

During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's virtual COVID-19 review meeting with Chief Ministers of all States, Captain Amarinder Singh on Wednesday urged the Centre to review its im-

munisation strategy to vaccinate all age groups in selected areas, while announcing a stricter policy to deal with the problem.

The Chief Minister also called for occupation-based immunisation for school and college students and teachers, judges, bus drivers and conductors, panchayat members, MLAs, MPs etc. to pave the way for normalisation of crucial activities and check "super-spreaders". He advocated early opening of courts to end the citizens' wait for justice, and also of

schools and colleges to bridge the gap between poor and affluent families in terms of education.

During the meeting, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal said that while swiftly acting to the present COVID-19 situation, a mega vaccination drive had been run across the State. "We have planned to launch such mega drives on every Monday and Tuesday to ensure that every beneficiary receives vaccination doses," he said.

During the meeting, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal said that while swiftly acting to the present COVID-19 situation, a mega vaccination drive had been run across the State. "We have planned to launch such mega drives on every Monday and Tuesday to ensure that every beneficiary receives vaccination doses," he said.

NORTH

Punjab CM meets Sidhu

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Chief Minister Amarinder Singh and ex-Minister Navjot Singh Sidhu, who had been at loggerhead for nearly past one-and-a-half years, since the Lok Sabha polls in 2019, met on Wednesday.

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PH: 9820350726

selvakumar.n@thehindu.co.in

THE HINDU

India's National Newspaper

RBI Kehta Hai...
Jaankaar Baniye,
Satark Rahiye!



Issued in public interest by
भ



Allaying concerns

Public trust is a key ingredient to successful vaccination programmes

A little over 392 million doses of vaccine have been administered globally, according to the Bloomberg Vaccine Tracker, with India accounting for around 9% of them. In the last week, there have been a flurry of reports from Europe, of blood clots developing in a very small fraction of those vaccinated and leading to a cascade of European countries announcing a temporary halt to their vaccination programmes involving the AstraZeneca (AZ) vaccine. WHO and the European Medicines Agency have underlined that there is no causal link between vaccines and the occurrence of such clots. In fact, there are less than 40 such occurrences reported so far, and that is much below the background of about 1,000 to 2,000 blood clots every single day in the general population, say studies based on the U.S. population. These organisations advocate that the ongoing vaccination drives continue, even accelerate, as the rate of vaccination is not keeping pace with what is required to control the pandemic. However, there are good reasons too for the countries to have called for a temporary halt. The AZ, Pfizer and Moderna vaccines have been released under emergency use authorisations, meaning that the entire profile of risks associated with them have not been thoroughly studied. History is replete with instances of vaccines that have been taken off even years after approval after a slight increase in untoward complications. As of now, the risk of dying from serious COVID-19 far outweighs that from vaccine reactions and it is such a calculation that weighs on the minds of regulators before approving vaccines.

Unlike drugs administered to the sick, vaccines have a higher bar of proving themselves safe as they are given to the healthy. Regulators of all countries rely on the experiences of others, as exemplified in India alone where it was AZ trials in the United Kingdom that paved the way for approval in India. Therefore, a warning in one country must immediately activate the sensors in another. India has a long experience with vaccinations as well as expertise in evaluating risk; however, transparency and prompt data sharing, thereby building public trust, is not one of its strong suits. This was evidenced by the approval of vaccines in spite of scant efficacy data. There is almost no information by the National Committee on Adverse Events Following Immunisation on the nature of serious adverse events following immunisation. This is in contrast to the frequent analyses shared by organisations such as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on adverse events. Public trust is a key ingredient to successful vaccination programmes and this can be only earned by the government's zealous attention to allaying concerns.

Immigration conundrum

The American Dream is struggling to remain a vision premised on diversity and migration

It is unlikely that President Joe Biden ever imagined that it would be a cakewalk to undo some of the most damaging policies implemented by his predecessor Donald Trump, but even he might not have anticipated how quickly the thorny question of immigration reform could spiral into a full-blown crisis. In recent weeks, an unprecedented surge of unaccompanied minors at the U.S.'s southern border has pushed the need for comprehensive reform, front and centre. The sudden spike in their numbers in U.S. custody – over 4,000, according to reports – is already wearing federal resources thin. Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas struck a grim note when he said the U.S. was “on pace to encounter more individuals on the southwest border than we have in the last 20 years”. Complicating the entire exercise is the COVID-19 pandemic, which has made it impossible to take down a Trump-era emergency rule that gives border agents the authority to summarily turn away most migrants other than unaccompanied minors, denying them the right to have their asylum claims heard. In a sense, the mounting crisis is related to a sweeping immigration reform proposal unveiled by Mr. Biden's administration a month ago, as well as smaller bills that the Democrat-controlled Congress could pass with less resistance, including measures to quicken the process for grant of legal status to agriculture workers and “Dreamers”, or undocumented immigrants who entered the U.S. as children.

There are also plans under way to redress the ills of the legal migration system, many obstacles to which were erected by the Trump White House, including a controversial rule to raise mandatory minimum pay for foreign workers on the H-1B visa for skilled immigrants that is largely granted to Indian nationals. Similarly, some analysts have estimated that the Biden administration's proposed immigration bill could potentially increase annual ‘green card’ or permanent residency numbers by 35%. Mr. Biden's broader, omnibus immigration legislation proposal includes an eight-year pathway to citizenship for the nearly 11 million undocumented immigrants and the use of hi-tech systems for border patrol enforcement. The right, led by the vocal Congressional Republican minority, has attacked all such proposals as not being tough enough and encouraging the border surge, whereas the left, led by Democrats such as Representatives Ilhan Omar and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, have taken on Mr. Biden for not being humane enough. The intractable immigration conundrum that the country has wrestled with from its very inception is whether the American Dream is an inclusivist vision of economic growth premised on embracing diversity and skilled migration, or whether the Trumpian ‘America First’ battle cry for nativist populism will carry the day. What Mr. Biden does in the months ahead will help answer this question.

Pulling India's democracy back from the brink

Suggestions that its democratic credentials have been tarnished merit a serious, thoughtful and respectful response



IRFAN NOORUDDIN

Governments, like the citizens that live under their influence, come in a dizzying array of types, challenging simplistic efforts of classification. In spite of all this variation, what remains constant is this: throughout history, governments wield considerably more power over the governed than the other way around. Actually that is a gross understatement. The vast majority of governments that have ever existed have enjoyed essentially unfettered power over their subjects. Of course, some rulers have been more enlightened and benign than others and grasped the insight that ruling is easier when one's right to do so is viewed as legitimate than simply through coercion; but even such philosopher-kings were not above the exercise of arbitrary power when necessary. And these were the exceptions: most elsewhere, power was maintained and known by its iron fist.

Institutional checks

Happily, human progress has made this description of state-society relations sound quite anachronistic, even though fundamental alterations in the balance of power between governors and the governed are the happenings of contemporary history. The first institutional check on sovereign power is arguably the establishment of the English Parliament in what British historians term the Glorious Revolution. Tired of unending wars that it was asked to fund through people and treasure, an emboldened nobility asserted its right to be consulted by the monarch in matters of war and the purse. But for the non-Lords of the British Isles, precious little changed. That was the late 1600s, and while the French and American Revolutions of a century later spawned political theory of the

highest order proclaiming the inalienable freedoms of all men created equal, the truth is that the era of colonialism, and continued exclusion of women, as well as racial and religious minorities, meant that it was not until the mid-1950s that the revolution only dreamt about for millennia before became reality.

Finally, leaders were expected to return periodically to face the judgement of the governed through universal suffrage elections, and their power in office was constrained by a constitution whose guardian was an independent judiciary, and whose actions were scrutinised and made public by an empowered press charged with a sacred responsibility to speak truth to power on behalf of the powerless.

In the heady days that followed the Second World War, with colonial rule beating the retreat, the spirit of national self-determination heralded the proliferation of newly independent countries around the world. The ideological battleground of the Cold War forced these new states to choose between democracy, the *sine qua non* of which was competitive elections, and its many alternatives, the latter often justified by the fig leaf of communist ideology. But a mere few decades later, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the start of a unipolar American era led many erstwhile dictatorships to announce elections. As one commentator infamously stated, it was the end of history and liberal democracy had won the day.

Pillars of governance

What the democratic triumphalists failed to anticipate was that elections, while vital to the exercise of democracy, are just one leg of the governance stool. The others, equally necessary for the system to hold steady, are the strength and independence of the other public institutions of the state whose fealty was to the Constitution rather than any elected government; and the vibrancy and vitality of the press who served as the people's representatives, asking questions and uncovering



truths that made the powerful squirm, and that levelled the playing field for citizens charged with rendering judgement on incumbents at the next election. But the electoral autocrat, as academic observers labelled them, understood this architecture all too well, and initiated a sustained, often violent, assault on these very institutions, even arguing brazenly that the counter-majoritarian impulses of constitutionalism were in fact anti-democratic! It is a playbook honed and refined by Vladimir Putin (Russia), Viktor Orbán (Hungary), Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Turkey) – and incompetently (thankfully) attempted by Donald Trump (the U.S.).

Global scrutiny and indices

It is against this background that the kerfuffle about western academic institutions that generate and publish annual indices of democracy around the world must be understood. Freedom House (based in Washington DC) and the Varieties of Democracy project (V-Dem, based in Gothenburg, Sweden) are two of the more well-regarded efforts to conceptualise and measure the state of democracy globally each year.

Their methodologies and indicators are transparently public, and the data sets they provide are widely analysed by researchers worldwide. Like most academic work, their efforts are destined to be ignored by most, but the announcement last month that both indices had independently decided to downgrade India's democratic rating has set off a firestorm of indignant protest by many who view it as a frontal assault on the current government. India's Exter-

nal Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar dismissed these ratings as irrelevant certificates issued by self-appointed arbiters in the West for which India had little use. Fair enough, though a cynic might point out that the government is all too glad to trumpet positive recognition by western organisations that laud India's improving investment environment, for instance. Some certificates are more useful than others.

What drove the decision to reduce India's score on these indices? Both Freedom House and V-Dem utilise explicitly multi-dimensional schema that combine many different indicators using, in V-Dem's case particularly, quite sophisticated statistical techniques. Their methods have been repeatedly peer-reviewed and validated by thousands of studies that establish a very high degree of correlation with other academic efforts to measure democracy. Their key facet is a conception of democracy that is holistic, and that gives considerable weight to the freedom of the press and the independence of the judicial branch. Concerns about the undermining of these institutional checks-and-balances on the power of the Indian state led both institutions to reduce India's score on their index. (Freedom House also reduced its score for a Trump-battered United States, for those wondering.) Nor are such concerns limited to India as a web search for the phrase ‘democratic backsliding’ will reveal. Democracy has been in retreat globally for a while.

Is India less “free” than it was a decade ago? Maybe; maybe not, but it is disingenuous to pretend that the mere perception that it might be so does not have negative consequences for the country's ambitions to be a fully paid-up member of the Quad, or of the D-10 (a moniker for a group of 10 leading democracies), both of which western clubs require a certificate attesting an applicant's democratic credentials for admission. One need not agree with the scoring to recognise its import. To do otherwise is to crib about whether the setting or grading of

an examination was fair as if this could alter an adverse university admission decision it caused – at a certain point, it is besides the point.

Shun the preferred gallery

How can India reverse the damage caused? First, the government must resist peevish responses. An international audience increasingly savvy to misinformation sees through the copy-paste Twitter campaigns of pliant celebrities and pro-government bots. India's democratic credentials are intrinsic to its identity and its greatest source of legitimacy internationally. The suggestion that these credentials have been tarnished merits a serious, thoughtful, and respectful response, rather than a clever quip that plays to one's preferred gallery but does nothing to assuage one's critics. Second, the courts and press must own up to their part in this debacle. Institutional independence is a hard-won resource to be husbanded and invested wisely by their custodians. Doing so strengthens them and the government with whom they serve the people. Third, strong democracy requires a strong Opposition, as much as it does an incumbent secure enough to face criticism without getting defensive. Without an Opposition to provide voters a viable alternative, the most powerful check on power devised by human society – elections – loses its power, and with it, so does democracy.

For almost 75 years, India's democratic exceptionalism in the developing world has been a source of genuine pride for its citizens, and made it a beacon for others seeking to learn from its enviable record of holding free and fair elections at all levels of society. But concerns caused by increasing attacks on the press and the erosion of judicial autonomy undermine that image. It is that reality, not the publishing of an academic index, to which the government and the nation must respond.

Irfan Nooruddin is the author of ‘Elections in Hard Times: Building Stronger Democracies in the Twenty-First Century’

Aligning a missile deal with destination Manila

India's emergence as a regional security provider will depend on the way it handles the BrahMos sale to the Philippines



HARSH V. PANT & JAVIN ARYAN

Earlier this month, India and the Philippines signed the “Implementing Arrangement” for “procurement of defense material and equipment procurement”. This agreement lays the groundwork for sales of defence systems such as the highly anticipated export of the BrahMos cruise missile, through the government-to-government route. As the Secretary, Philippine Department of National Defense publicly acknowledges, the archipelagic country's intention of purchasing the missile, and a potential export deal for India, moves one step closer to reality. This deal will be of great significance for multiple reasons, and even though the procurement process is progressing steadily, there are many challenges that lie ahead.

Features of the system

Research and development of the BrahMos cruise missile systems began in the late 1990s. Manufactured by BrahMos Aerospace Limited, a joint venture between the Defence Research and Development Organisation and the joint stock company Military Industrial Consortium NPO Mashinostroyenia (earlier known as the Federal

State Unitary Enterprise NPOM of Russia), this is the first supersonic cruise missile to enter service. Capable of attaining a speed of Mach 2.8 (almost three times the speed of sound), it has a range of at least 290 km (a new version can reach up to 400km).

Travelling with such velocity means that it would be difficult for air defence systems utilising surface-to-air missiles to intercept the BrahMos while making it easier for it to target and neutralise advanced fighter jets such as the Chinese J-20 fighter aircraft moving at less than Mach 2. Even so, efforts to increase the speed and range of the missile in its next iterations are under way, with a goal of achieving hypersonic speeds (at or above Mach 5) and a maximum range of 1,500 km.

Early naval and land variants of the BrahMos were inducted into service by the Indian Navy in 2005 and the Indian Army in 2007. Subsequently, an air-launched variant was successfully tested in November 2017 by the Indian Air Force from its Sukhoi-30MKI fighter jet, giving the missile a dominating presence in all three domains.

Export as a goal

These advanced and powerful capabilities of the BrahMos not only augment the strength of the Indian military but make it a highly desirable product for other countries to procure as well. Exporting the system, hence, has been on the agenda for more than a decade. Doing so would boost the



credibility of India as a defence exporter, help it meet the target of \$5 billion in defence exports by 2025, and elevate its stature as a regional superpower. Countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates, Argentina, Brazil, and South Africa have so far shown an interest in acquiring the systems.

Geo-political impact

The implications of the Philippines becoming the first country to import the BrahMos would be wide-ranging and consequential in the Indo-Pacific. To begin with, it would caution China, with whom the Philippines has been engaged in a territorial conflict in the South China Sea, and act as a deterrent to Beijing's aggressive posturing. Indeed, this is why China has been wary of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries acquiring defence systems such as the BrahMos. Further, taking lessons, other nations threatened by Chinese belligerence may come forward to induct the BrahMos into their arsenals, thereby

boosting India's economic, soft, and hard power profile in the region and providing the Indo-Pacific with a strong and dependable anchor with which they can protect their sovereignty and territory.

Possible hurdles

The Government of India has prioritised making the country ‘Atmanirbhar’ in the defence manufacturing sector and establishing itself as a major defence exporter. The Philippines, on the other hand, has decided to buy the BrahMos out of geopolitical and strategic necessities. Nonetheless, two major roadblocks still remain in the Manila deal.

The first is the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), which aims to sanction individuals and entities who engage in a “significant transaction” with a listed entity. So far, Turkey and China have been penalised under CAATSA for purchasing the S-400 Triumf air defense systems from Russia. NPO Mashinostroyenia is one of the listed Russian entities. And since 65% of the components, including the ramjet engine and radar seeker used in the BrahMos, are reportedly provided by NPO Mashinostroyenia, the export of the missile systems may attract sanctions. Remarkably, the United States, of which India is a major defence partner, has maintained ambiguity over whether it will introduce sanctions over India's acquisition of the S-400, licensed production

The second issue pertains to financing. A regiment of the BrahMos, including a mobile command post, four missile-launcher vehicles, several missile carriers, and 90 missiles, reportedly costs around \$275.77 million (₹2,000 crore). Ravaged by the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries which are interested in the BrahMos would find it difficult to purchase it. The cost of the systems has been a major hurdle in moving forward to reach a deal with the Philippines. To remedy this, India has offered a \$100 million line of credit, and the Philippines is thinking of purchasing just one battery of the BrahMos, consisting of three missile launchers with two to three missile tubes each.

With India determined to develop itself as a hub of defence manufacturing, how it handles the sale of the BrahMos would be an important factor in its potential emergence as a net provider of regional security in the Indo-Pacific.

Harsh V. Pant is Director, Studies at the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), New Delhi and Professor, International Relations at King's College London. Javin Aryan is a research intern at the ORF

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.

Staying safe

There seems to be a misconception that after the second dose of the vaccine for COVID-19, the person concerned can neglect all precautions and protocols in public spaces such as wearing a mask and the washing of hands. This is significant because some people have propagated the message that even one dose of the vaccine is enough for necessary immunity against the virus. This is absolutely false. There must be proper awareness among the

public about vaccine efficacy and administration. Also, health-care workers and people above 60 years who have received the first dose must be intimated about the second dose at least two days before the jab. The election process in certain States and a Union Territory must not be used as an excuse for any sort of laxity in health care.

Ds. JAYASEKHAR V.P., Payyanur, Kannur, Kerala

■ Amidst concerns of a second wave of COVID-19

infections, it is surprising to see most people including politicians without a mask. It is time that people out in public spaces without a mask are penalised. Maybe this will result in better compliance.

R.G.C. SEKHAR, Secunderabad

The Congress's G 23

The report, “G 23 cannot exist in any other party, says Rahul” (Inside pages, March 17), is perhaps the first admission by a member of the Gandhi family that the

frontliners are in fact a group of dissenters. All that they have been laying emphasis on is the need for introspection as far as party affairs are concerned and an election for the post of party president. On the post counts, their activities can hardly be classified as anti-party activity. The Congress is perhaps the only party that refuses to look within even as the edifice keeps crumbling after every election. The Congress has a hoary history and has always been able to claw its way

back to power even after decisive defeats, but this time around, it is clearly sinking.

C.V. ARAVIND, Bengaluru

Bank privatisation

The Finance Minister's statement that the Government is privatising only two public sector banks (PSB) is amusing. It is akin to saying, “I am removing only two bricks from the foundation of the pillar called PSB.” The Government chose amalgamation as a

remedy and brought down the number of public sector banks. What prevents the Government from going in for another merger involving the banks that have been left out, or with the Big Five? The Government is ill-advised in the matter of privatisation. Denationalisation of nationalised banks will prove to be as much a retrograde step as demonetisation proved disastrous in 2016.

M.R. ANAND, Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh

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Re-evaluating inflation targeting

The evidence and trends for inflation in India go against the benefits claimed for the policy



PULAPRE BALAKRISHNAN &
M. PARAMESWARAN



Food prices shot up after the COVID-19 lockdown last year due to disruptions in supply chains. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

As the term of the original agreement between the Centre and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on inflation targeting ends on March 31, evaluations of this aspect of monetary policy have begun to emerge in the public domain. Two points have been made: first, that the inflation rate has remained within the prescribed band of 2% to 6% since 2016, when inflation targeting was introduced, and secondly that the RBI has succeeded in anchoring inflationary expectations. In fact, the lower inflation rate has been seen as the outcome of the latter. Our long-term research on inflation in India suggests that the evidence, however, is not conclusive on the efficacy claimed for inflation targeting.

Though macroeconomic policy may not be of wide interest, a rudimentary understanding of what is meant by inflation targeting may be useful. Inflation targeting is only one of a set of imagined inflation control policies. Globally, inflation control became *de rigueur* after the high inflation that followed the oil shock in the early 1970s. In fact, well before inflation targeting was advanced, Milton Friedman had brought inflation control to the centre stage through his relentless highlighting of the ever-lurking threat of inflation.

On the other hand, in India, policymakers had engaged with inflation since the 1950s, when plans to industrialise met the challenge of inflation. Thus, scepticism about inflation targeting as a strategy of inflation control does not imply that inflation control is not a legitimate objective of economic policy. While the monetarist Friedman had prescribed money-supply targeting as the means to control inflation, inflation targeting prescribes the use of the interest rate to target inflation. So, really, what is new about inflation targeting is only the instrument chosen, not the goal itself. There is, however, the vague suggestion that it is likely to be more effective than the monetarist ap-

proach, as the instrument, the policy interest rate, is under the direct control of the central bank.

Logical vulnerabilities

However, what has remained hidden in public discourse is the economic model that underlies inflation targeting. This model revolves around the proposition that inflation reflects "overheating", or economic activity at a level greater than the "natural" level of output, having been taken there by central banks that have kept interest rates too low, at a level lower than the "natural" rate of interest. From this follows the recommendation that the cure to inflation is to raise the rate of interest set by the central bank, the so-called policy rate, which in India is termed 'repo' rate. A feature of this theory of inflation is that its central construct, the natural level of output, is unobservable. This makes it next to impossible to verify the explanation, which is also self-referential. The exponent starts out by stating that the inflation rate is rising as the output is higher than its natural level, but when asked how it has been concluded that output is actually higher, the response is "for inflation is rising". Understanding phenomena on the basis of faith is not scientific. Despite this logical vulnerability, inflation targeting is a reality in that it is the Centre's stated policy of inflation control.

Our work demonstrates that the model that underlies inflation targeting is not statistically validated for Indian data. But instead of going into specifics, we scrutinise in this article whether recent history supports the claim that inflation targeting has been successful on the grounds that the inflation rate has remained within the band agreed to between the

government and the RBI, and whether it has been achieved by "anchoring inflation expectations".

Inflation in India entered the prescribed band of 2% to 6% two years before inflation targeting was adopted in 2016-17. In fact, inflation had fallen steadily since 2011-12, halving by 2015-16. This by itself suggests that there is a mechanism driving inflation other than what is imagined in inflation targeting.

The view is further strengthened by the finding that the decline in inflation over the five years concerned was led by the relative price of food. While falling food-price inflation per se does not rule out the possibility that expectations of inflation may have fallen in this period, it would be difficult to explain why expectations would have fallen so sharply even in the absence of inflation targeting, considered essential for anchoring expectations. Recall that the adoption of the policy in 2016 came after inflation had entered the prescribed band. RBI data on household expectations show them remaining well above 6% for twelve years up to 2020. Finally, it is the flaring up of both inflation and inflation expectations after March 2020, when the COVID-19 lockdown was announced, that makes it difficult to believe the thesis of an "overheating" economy. Why did expectations soar if they had been anchored through inflation targeting? On the other hand, we can explain the flaring up of inflation in terms of food prices, as supply chains were disrupted due to the lockdown.

In conclusion, for the sake of argument, let us assume that over the past five years, inflation in India has been controlled via inflation targeting. It may then be asked what the

benefits of this have been. We can think of five variables of interest in this context, namely growth, private investment, exports, non-performing assets (NPAs) of commercial banks, and employment.

Conflicting patterns

The economy's trend rate of growth actually began to decline after 2010-11. So, inflation targeting could not have caused it, but it is of interest that sharply falling inflation could do nothing to revive growth, belying the proposition that low inflation is conducive to growth.

For investment, there is reason to believe that higher interest rates, the toolkit for inflation targeting, may have been harmful. The swing in the real interest rate of over 5 percentage points in 2013-14 was powered further in 2016, when inflation targeting was adopted, and could have contributed to a declining private investment rate. It is interesting that policy entrepreneurs assert that the benefits of low inflation may be considerable for private investment.

We need to say nothing about exports and employment, except that they had fared poorly since inflation targeting became official.

Finally, NPAs. It has long been recognised that a central bank focusing on inflation may lose control of financial stability. NPAs have grown since 2016, and the cases of IL&FS, PMC Bank, PNB and YES Bank suggest that poor management and malfeasance in the financial sector could escape scrutiny when the central bank hunkers down to inflation targeting.

We end with two points. Inflation control will always be relevant but there is no conclusive evidence that the policy has worked in India. Secondly, the presumed benefits of low inflation are yet to surface. So, we should guard against the possibility that inflation targeting may deliver the worst of all worlds, i.e., raising interest rates, with all negative consequences, without lowering inflation. Lastly, assuming that the decline in inflation in India is due to inflation targeting would stand in the way of acknowledging the source, the vagaries of the price of food.

Pulapre Balakrishnan is with Ashoka University, Sonipat and M. Parameswaran is with the Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram

A Gandhian route in Myanmar

The swelling civil resistance in the country serves as a reminder of the strength of collective non-violence



RAMIN JAHANBEGLOO

Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 while she was still under house arrest in Myanmar. In a lecture in 2012, she described the award as a recognition that "the oppressed and the isolated in Burma were also a part of the world, that they were recognising the oneness of humanity". It is ironical that 30 years later, the Nobel laureate, who turned a blind eye to the suffering of the Rohingya Muslims in her country, is now back under house arrest imposed by the military junta in Myanmar.

Several weeks of non-violent demonstrations and a deadly crackdown have roiled the nation since the military coup d'état on February 1, which brought back full military reign following several years of a quasi-electoral rule. However, the most important part about the coup is not the house arrest of Ms. Suu Kyi, but the unstoppable non-violent civil resistance of the Myanmar population. It is as if once again, the Myanmarese have come to regard the Gandhian concept of non-violence as a radically shared social contract that bolsters the intervention of the ethical in politics. Despite the security forces' harsh methods against protesters, the anti-coup sentiments in Myanmar have so far been non-violent and peaceful.

Mahatma Gandhi chose a spinning wheel as a symbol for his idea of non-violence. It represented two messages: the wheel was the main instrument to protest against India's growing industrialism, and it was also a symbol of resistance to the British-made clothes that had replaced Indian handmade clothes. In the United States, Martin Luther King turned to the symbol of the "American Dream" as a hope of social justice and equity for every member of the American society. Today, the three-fingered salute that was adopted by activists in Thailand has become a strong symbol of resistance for democracy in Myanmar.

A moral strength

The growing interest among the new generation of Myanmar activists in Gandhian non-violence is not a new phenomenon. For a long time, during her previous house arrest, Ms. Suu Kyi's Buddhist spirituality provided her with a moral strength in the direction of non-violent resistance. "Non-violence means positive action. You have to work for

whatever you want. You don't just sit there doing nothing and hope to get what you want. It just means that the methods you use are not violent ones. Some people think that non-violence is passiveness. It's not so," she said in an interview many years ago.

Her message is in tune with that of peaceful protesters who defy fear. As such, there are many similarities with Ms. Suu Kyi's argument, which underlined the fact that "it is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it". Ms. Suu Kyi saw the non-violent revolution in Myanmar as an attempt by the people to act as the Buddha taught. In Buddhism, she argued, "each man has in him the potential" to realise this. But "under despotic rule, man is valued least, as a faceless, mindless – and helpless – mass to be manipulated at will".

The quest for democracy

Today, at the centre of Myanmar's protest movement, the core quality is inner strength. It is the spiritual steadiness that comes from the belief that non-violent resistance is right, even if it does not bring down the military junta immediately. This is what the late Czech dissident and artist, Václav Havel, called "the power of the powerless". What the young Myanmar protesters represent is that the powerless do have power, and that power can be manipulated through non-violent means.

Let us also not forget that the protesters' quest for democracy not only presents serious challenges to the authority of the military power in Myanmar and its legitimacy, but also questions the democratic nature of all those global powers that put into question the authenticity of the non-violent resistance of the Myanmar population.

Gandhi associated politics with ethics. He once wrote: "I have always derived my politics from ethics or religion and my strength is also derived by my deriving my politics from ethics. It is also because I swear by ethics and religion that I find myself in politics. A person who is a lover of his country is bound to take a lively interest in politics."

The future of Myanmar is not up to the military, it is up to those who follow the example of Gandhi in the streets of Yangon and Mandalay. The military and dictatorial powers in the country are trying to exorcise this spectre, but the winds of Gandhian non-violence are once again blowing strong and are unlikely to dissipate soon.

The author is Director of the Mahatma Gandhi Centre for Nonviolence and Peace Studies at O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat, Haryana

Looking beyond privatisation

Placing PSBs in the hands of private players is not a panacea for India's banking sector woes

RAJMOHAN UNNITHAN

cient by supporting the green, blue, and dairy revolutions. They have also contributed significantly to infrastructural development.

Public sector banks in India are currently earning considerable operating profits, to the tune of ₹1,74,390 crore in 2019-20 and ₹49,603 crore in 2018-19. Why is the government then, instead of strengthening PSBs, starving them of the required capital and human resources through disinvestment and the proposed privatisation? Placing such a huge network of bank branches and the infrastructure and assets in the hands of private enterprises or corporates may turn out to be an irrational move. It could lead to denial of convenient and economical banking services to the common man; the risks of monopoly and cartelisation may only complicate the issue.

Stringent laws

Furthermore, in the context of privatisation and efficiency, it is unfair to blame PSBs alone for the alarming rise of NPAs. On the contrary, stringent measures are required to recover large corporate stressed assets, which is a key concern for the entire banking sector. This must include strong recovery laws and taking criminal action against wilful defaulters. So far, the government has not exhibited a firm willingness to implement these measures. Wilful default by large corporate borrowers and subsequent recovery haircuts, imposed through the ill-conceived Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, has resulted in a heap of write-offs, putting a big dent on the balance sheets of PSBs. This has not only affected the profitability of the banks, but has also become an excuse to allege inefficiency.

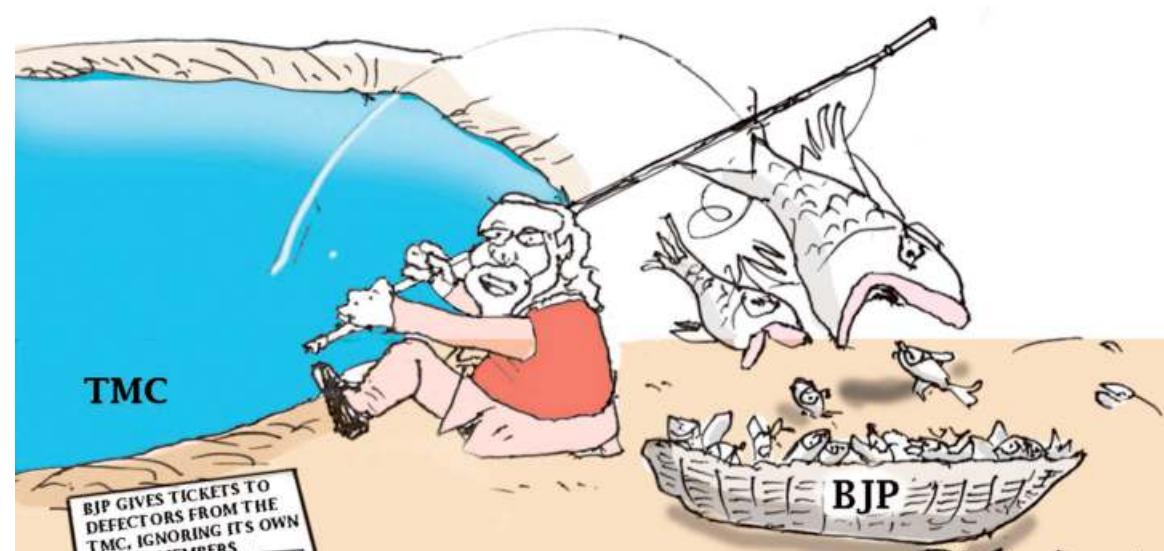
There is an urgent and imperative need to bring in a suitable statutory framework to consider wilful defaults on bank loans a "criminal offence". A system to examine top executives of PSBs across the country will also help in improving accountability. But privatisation of PSBs is not a definitive panacea for the problems of the banking sector in India.

Equitable growth

The move also helped in promoting more equitable regional growth, and this is evident from RBI data. There were only 1,833 bank branches in rural areas in the country in 1969, which increased to 33,004 by 1995 and continued to grow over the next decades. Banking services also reduced the dependence on moneylenders in rural regions. Nationalised banking improved the working conditions of employees in the banking sector, as the state ensured higher wages, security of services, and other fringe benefits.

As an institution, PSBs are vehicles of the Indian economy's growth and development, and they have become the trustees of people's savings and confidence. The PSBs played a huge role in making the country self-sufficient

Rajmohan Unnithan is an MP from Kasaragod, Kerala



DATA POINT

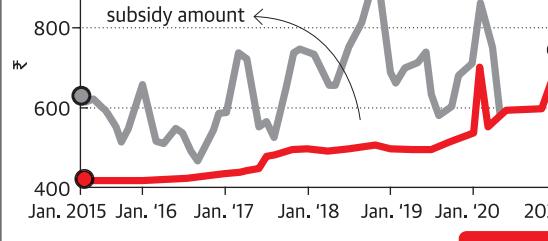
Through the roof

The price of subsidised domestic LPG increased by more than ₹100 between November 2020 and February 2021 across many metros in India. The increase was mainly due to a drastic fall in the LPG subsidy amount that was being directly transferred to consumers' accounts since 2015. Before the recent spike in prices, the government had been steadily increasing the price of subsidised cylinders over the last two years, thereby reducing the subsidy amount, despite a drastic fall in international LPG cost after FY14. By Vignesh Radhakrishnan, Suman Sen and Naresh Singaravelu

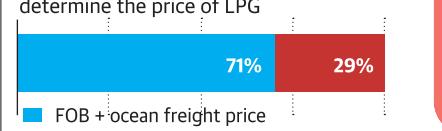
1. SUBSIDY AT ₹0 | Since May 2020, no subsidy has been declared by the government for domestic cylinders in Delhi. Following a sharp rise in non-subsidised LPG price, consumers have been paying at the higher market rates, which in February 2021 averaged at ₹719 per 14.2 kg cylinder in Delhi

■ Non-subsidised LPG price ■ Subsidised LPG price

The gap between the lines indicates the subsidy amount



2. PRICE BUILD-UP | Over 70%* of the LPG retail price in Delhi is determined by the international Free On Board (FOB) price of LPG. FOB is a weighted average of Saudi Aramco contract price for Butane (60%) and Propane (40%). Apart from base price, factors like import charges, bottling charges, freight, delivery charges, GST, distributor commission, determine the price of LPG



3. FALL OF FOB | The international FOB price of LPG fell drastically from around ₹880 per metric tonne (MT) in FY14 to ₹394/MT in FY16. It again fell in FY21 to ₹382/MT. These are average prices for respective years

■ The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) was instituted to provide concessionary LPG connections to rural BPL families. However, even when LPG prices were relatively lower, a significant share of beneficiaries preferred to use traditional solid fuels. With the recent price increase, LPG usage may drop further

■ A December 2019 CAG report said many beneficiaries did not use the service after the initial refill. Over 35% reverted to traditional fuels mainly due to the higher price of LPG refills

■ A study by RICE institute in 2018 in rural parts of Bihar, M.P., Rajasthan and U.P. found similar results. While LPG coverage increased by 44% compared to 2014, 73% of households having both LPG connections and traditional fuels used solid fuels the day before the survey

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FROM PAGE ONE

Quick steps required to curb 'second peak': PM

The Prime Minister noted that there was an urgent need to maintain COVID-appropriate behaviour.

Mr. Modi emphasised the need for provision of micro-containment zones. He called for special attention to the referral system and

Serious issue if 3 cr. ration cards were cancelled: SC

She said the family's ration card was cancelled due to non-linkage with Aadhaar. She sought an independent investigation into the starvation deaths, restoration of the cancelled ration cards and compensation for the death of her daughter.

Mr. Gonsalves said the government's continued emphasis on Aadhaar was unfortunate as the Supreme Court had laid down in clear terms that "no insistence on Aadhaar can be done for statutory entitlements".

"Tribals either do not have Aadhaar cards or the identification does not work in tribal and rural areas. Because of this reliance on Aadhaar cards, can you imagine three crore cards are gone?" he submitted.

"Three crore cards have gone?" the Chief Justice asked incredulously.

"Yes, starvation deaths are taking place. Three crore ration cards have gone... I can show the Union of India's declaration. It is an announcement of the Prime Minister," Mr. Gon-

salves responded.

He argued that the States were in a denial mode, blaming the deaths on dengue and malaria.

"In fact, anything but lack of food. This cruel exercise deprived millions of Indians living below the poverty line of food and led to starvation deaths in Jharkhand, U.P., Odisha, Karnataka, M.P., Maharashtra, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and other States," the petitioner's side said in a report prepared after going through the responses obtained from the States.

Additional Solicitor General Arman Lekhi said the statements made by the petitioner side were misplaced. Issuance of ration card was not dependent on the Aadhaar card. Alternative mechanisms were in place. Besides, the issuance

No decision on national NRIC till now, RS told



Nitinand Rai

In 2018, before the passage of the CAA, the then Minister of State for Home Hansraj Gangaram Ahir had informed the Rajya Sabha that "as per the provisions contained in Rule 3 of the Citizenship Rules 2003 framed under the Citizenship Act, 1955, the Registrar General of Citizen Registration shall establish and maintain the National Register of Indian Citizens and prepare the Population Register".

The NPR's link with the NRC and the yet-to-be-implemented CAA has been opposed by many States and civil society groups.

On November 16, 2016, the then former Minister of State for Home Kiren Rijiju stated: "The Government has approved the preparation of Population Register comprising details of usual residents in the country. The preparation of Population Register is a part of preparation of NRIC under provisions of the Citizenship Act, 1955 read with the Citizenship Rules 2003."

Though the government is now denying that the NRC is on the cards, the Citizenship Rules framed in the year 2003 say that NPR is the first step towards compilation of NRC. NPR was first collected in 2010 and then

Chennithala alleges poll roll fraud in Kerala

He files complaint with CEC, seeking removal of fake voters

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Leader of the Opposition in Kerala Ramesh Chennithala on Wednesday raised the allegation of voter identity fraud.

In a complaint to the Chief Election Commissioner, Mr. Chennithala said a 61-year-old woman in the Uduoma constituency in Kasaragod had come into possession of at least five voter identity cards. She could use the cards to vote multiple times. The photograph on the cards was the same. However, the names and addresses differed slightly.

Mr. Chennithala said Congress workers saw a similar pattern in all 140 constituencies in Kerala. There seemed to be a conspiracy at the government's apex level to create fake voters to swing the election in favour of the ruling front illegally.

He alleged that Congress workers had stumbled upon 4,506 fake voters in the Kazhakuttam constituency. The number of fake voters for Kollam was 2,534, Thrikkappur 1,436, Koyilandy



Serious charge: Ramesh Chennithala alleged discrepancies in the voters' list on Wednesday. ■ S. MAHINSHA

4,611, Nadapuram 6,171, Koothuparamba 3,525 and Ambalappuzha 4,750.

'Check electoral rolls'

Mr. Chennithala said he suspected the active connivance of officials responsible for preparing the electoral list. They owed allegiance to the ruling front.

Chief Electoral Officer

(CEO) Teeka Ram Meena has asked District Election Officers to examine whether any deliberate attempt has been made to enter the names of voters multiple times in the electoral rolls.

Mr. Meena sought reports from the poll officials in Kasaragod, Kozhikode, Alappuzha, Kollam and Thiruvananthapuram districts.

RSS leader's outburst may impact BJP's prospects

Party leadership in Kerala fears losing Hindu votes to Cong.

BIJU GOVIND

KOZHIKODE

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) ideologue R. Balasankar's outburst against the Kerala State BJP leadership and his sneaking suspicion that the party has a tacit deal with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) is likely to impact the prospects of the BJP in the Assembly polls.

In its defence, the State BJP leadership, including party chief K. Surendran and Union Minister of State for External Affairs V. Muraleedharan, has explained that his statement could have stemmed from the denial of the Chengannur seat. However, Mr. Balasankar's premise has provided plenty of ammunition to the Congress, which has often alleged that the BJP and the CPI(M) have worked out a covert deal in the election.

The Congress leaders have taken it up as a campaign issue wherever the party is in direct fight with the CPI(M) in the polls. But the Left Democratic Front has dismissed the allegation as baseless.

BJP's Sobha to take on Kadakkampally Surendran

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The BJP fielded Sobha Surendran against Devaswom Minister Kadakkampally Surendran of the CPI(M) in the Kazhakuttam Assembly constituency on Wednesday. Sabarimala was the central plank of Ms. Surendran's campaign. Kazhakuttam has nearly two lakh voters and Backward class Hindus, Latin Catholics and Muslims are the dominant communities.

P.C. Thomas quits NDA, joins Congress-led UDF

KOTTAYAM

In yet another major realignment of forces within the Kerala Congress platform, the Kerala Congress faction led by P.J. Joseph has merged with the Kerala Congress led by P.C. Thomas. Mr. Thomas had on Wednesday announced his party's decision to pull out of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to join the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF).

For the BJP's State unit, its leadership fears that the allegation will possibly lead to a situation where the party will lose a major chunk of Hindu votes, especially those of the Nair community, to the Congress in Central Travancore districts.

Part of parleys

In fact, it was Mr. Balasankar who has been trying to facilitate the parleys between the RSS leadership and the Nair Service Society, which has been successful to a great extent. He was also involved in the dialogues with the Or-

IN BRIEF

KCR to announce Pay Revision Commission

HYDERABAD

The Telangana government will announce benefits of the Pay Revision Commission recommendations to all employees in a few days. "I will announce it in the Assembly after the MLC election results," Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao said assuring that it would be respectable and please the employees.

Karnataka justifies caste corporations

BENGALURU

Justifying its action of creating various corporations, including the newly created Veerashaiva-Lingayat Development Corporation, the Karnataka government on Wednesday told the High Court that it intended to create more such bodies. "The action is a part of the larger macro-policy of the State to promote welfare for all, through focussed micro-development initiatives," the government said.

A.P. to announce list of Mayors, Dy. Mayors today

GUNTUR

Adviser (Public Affairs) Sajala Ramakrishna Reddy has said that the list of candidates for Mayors, Deputy Mayors, Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons of Andhra Pradesh will be announced on Thursday. Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had been discussing with the party members on the selection of candidates, he said.

Yediyurappa rules out lockdown

But he warns against complacency

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

Categorically ruling out any lockdown or night curfew in the State, Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa on Wednesday warned that this did not mean people could become complacent and go about without wearing masks or not following COVID-19 protocols.

"The situation is now in people's hands. I have instructed the Home Department to strictly enforce rules. If people do not cooperate, we will be forced to consider other stringent measures," the Chief Minister said after attending Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with the Chief Ministers.

It referred to the directions imposed by the Supreme Court in the Swaraj Abhiyan cases on the implementation of the Food Security Act, which included social audits, framing of rules and setting up vigilance committees.

The Hunger Watch Report of the Right to Food Campaign in 2020 characterised the hunger situation in India as "grave". India ranks 94 out of 107 countries in the Global Hunger Index 2020 and is in the "Serious Hunger Category".



KARNATAKA

Karnataka takes corporates' help to upgrade health infra

CSR panel, led by Geetanjali Kirloskar, will oversee plan

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

To upgrade health and medical education infrastructure and services, especially in the wake of the pandemic, Karnataka is set to rope in corporates in a big way.

The Health department has set up a CSR committee headed by Geetanjali Kirloskar, who is part of the Kirloskar Group, to oversee this.

Health and Medical Education Minister K. Sudhakar said Ms. Kirloskar would set up a consortium of like-minded corporate companies interested in pitching in with their CSR funds for the comprehensive development of health and medical education sectors in the State.

The State had sought permission to take up vaccination drive in old age homes and apartment complexes, he added.

He was speaking on Wednesday at an event organised

to onboard Ms. Kirloskar as head of the CSR committee under the Health and Family Welfare and Medical Education departments.

Ms. Kirloskar said, "I am glad to partner with the State government in this vital and critical initiative. I appeal to like-minded companies to pitch in with their CSR funds for upgrading the healthcare sector in Karnataka."

Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa, who chaired the event, also appealed to companies to come forward and be part of the initiative.

Mr. Yediyurappa handed over a copy of the order appointing her as the head of the committee.

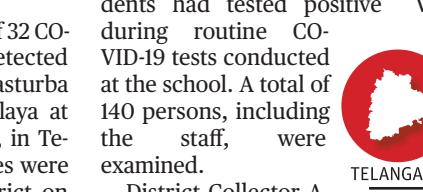
Schools as hotspots raises concern in Telangana

COVID-19 protocols being reviewed as at least 68 students in two separate institutions test positive

STAFF REPORTER

HYDERABAD

A day after a cluster of 32 COVID-19 cases was detected among students of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya at Tekriyal, Kamareddy, in Telangana, only six cases were recorded in the district on Wednesday. Health teams have tested around 1,460 persons.



TELANGANA

On Tuesday, the 32 students had tested positive during routine COVID-19 tests conducted at the school. A total of 140 persons, including the staff, were examined.

District Collector A. Sharath visited the school on Wednesday and inspected the facilities. He said

parents took 13 of the 32 COVID-positive students back home with them. The remaining 19 would also be sent home depending on isolation facilities available.

Officials would earmark a block on the school premises to isolate students whose homes did not have enough space.

The Collector added that medical officers would check on them regularly.

Officials plan strategy

Meanwhile, officials of Telangana Minorities Residential Educational Institutions Society (TMREIS) went into a huddle on Wednesday to chalk out plans to check the spread of COVID-19 infection

to its other institutions. Thirty-six staff and students at one of the schools run by TMREIS had tested positive on Tuesday.

The TMREIS has under its control 204 schools across the State.

After Tuesday's scare at the Nagole branch, the organisation began reviewing COVID-19 protocols.

Penury doesn't deter him from public service

Politics is my life, says CPI candidate Marimuthu, who lives in a thatched house

S. GANESAN

TIRUCHI

Amidst a flock of affluent candidates contesting the April 6 Assembly polls in Tamil Nadu, K. Marimuthu, the candidate of the Communist Party of India (CPI) for the Thiruthurai poondi (Reserved) constituency in Tiruvanamalai, stands out in stark contrast.

The 49-year-old political activist, who lives in a thatched house in Kaduvakudi, has spent over half his life as a full-time party worker fighting for public causes. His wife, Jayasudha, is an agricultural labourer.

The Minister said the Ministry of External Affairs had directed the CGI in New York to verify the address and credentials of M/s EMCC Global Consortium LLC following a request from the State government.



Of little means: Marimuthu was born into a family of poor agricultural labourers belonging to a Scheduled Caste.

vocation. My wife is into agriculture, and we cultivate land taken on lease. We get by with whatever we have," says Mr. Marimuthu, whose two children are in high school.

Articulate and well-informed, Mr. Marimuthu, a commerce graduate, joined the CPI in 1994. He was drawn by the work done by the party for ordinary peo-

the benefits of government schemes reach these labourers, many of whom live on poromboke and temple lands. I will strive to get house site pattas for them," he says.

The lack of job opportunities in the constituency is another concern for him. "Many youngsters migrate to other districts for jobs. I will explore the feasibility of establishing a paper manufacturing unit as paddy straw is abundant," he adds.

Since the constituency is economically, socially and educationally backward, he plans to consult experts to evolve plans for the overall development of the region and prevent seawater intrusion. He says he will work on the preservation of mangrove for-

ests in the Muthupet lagoon and tourism promotion in the region.

Mr. Marimuthu, who filed his nomination on Wednesday, has declared in his affidavit that his wife owns the ancestral house where the family lives, and 75 cents of agricultural land, totally valued at ₹1.75 lakh. He has ₹3,000 in hand and ₹58,000 in his bank account. His wife and daughter own about three sovereigns of gold. Though Thierruthurai poondi is a Communist heartland and candidates of the Left parties have won here 11 times since 1962, the CPI, while contesting as part of the Makkal Nala Kootani, lost the seat to the DMK in 2016.

CM YK

10 years on and in yet another battle, Mamata pushes tough rebranding

Didi replaced the class politics of the Left; the identity politics that she helped emerge threatens to devour her but still this election is about her

VARGHESE K. GEORGE

JHARGRAM

Any political chatter in West Bengal quickly veers into grassroots corruption by the functionaries of the ruling Trinamool Congress, who themselves do not deny its ubiquity. "Yes, our people have taken money," says Prasun Sarangi, sitting on a sidewalk in a dimly lit market in Jhargram, a town surrounded by vast forests and tribal hamlets in Jangalmahal. "But it's Didi [Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee] who has admitted to this fact, and has promised action... and she is herself the candidate in all 294 constituencies of West Bengal... these local leaders do not matter," said the district vice president of the party.

Even opponents of the Trinamool appear to concede a certain moral high ground for the two-term CM, who is fiercely fighting for a third, in the face of



New forces: Gazi Sahabuddin Siraji is Canning East candidate of the ISF, a new party offering a platform for segments of Muslims unhappy with the CM. • VARGHESE K. GEORGE

strong anti-incumbency. "Didi cannot be blamed. It is the local leaders who have fleeced us. They made so much money and live lavish lives," said Furqan Ali, a garment shop owner in Haroa in North 24 Parganas. He has switched his loyalty to the Indian Secular Front (ISF), a new party launched by Islamic cleric Abbas Siddiqui, which is in alliance with the Left Front and the Congress.

The paradox of anti-incumbency in West Bengal is that universal condemnation of the Trinamool is combined with a willingness to make allowances for Didi.

Ms. Banerjee called for the complete wiping out of the Opposition, and ended with a party of lawless cadres, points out Subhanil Chowdhury, political analyst. The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) says nearly 200 of its workers have been killed during the

Trinamool's rule; Home Minister Amit Shah said in December that 300 Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had been killed. "The panchayat elections of 2018 was the turning point. There was no

election. A third of the members were unopposed and where there was voting, it was fraud," Dr. Chowdhury says. "These local body leaders tightly control NREGA (National Rural Employ-

ment Guarantee Act), pensions and all other government schemes. They keep up to 30-40% of the money...They act with the nonchalance that they don't need votes to be in power."

an official at a Block Development Office in South 24 Parganas, who did not want to be named, said. Cyclone Amphan exposed their greed further, recalls Amartya Roy, an activist of Young Bengal that carried out relief work: "It was open loot."

Public perception

Didi is largely absolved in the public perception of corruption, but her endless pandering to identity politics is stuck on her, says Dr. Chowdhury. Muslims have been a particular focus, but the targets of her special attention are not limited to them. Dalits groups, Other Backward Classes (OBC) and subsections of Gurkhas—she has catalogued it all.

The BJP accuses her of Muslim appeasement, and she is trying to shake off that tag by displaying her Hindu devotion this year. But a Hindu who is also a Bengali. Ms. Banerjee now patronises

es Durga puja celebrations, with State support at unseen levels. Her call this time is to elect "the daughter of Bengal" as CM.

"The only thing predictable about Mamata's politics is that she is against the CPI (M). This time, Bengali nationalism is the only toolkit she is left with. But there are limits to this. Kolkata is a city that had a fall in population in absolute terms—the only city," says Prasenjit Bose, economist and activist based in the city. The State has a considerable non-Bengali population, which feels alienated from the plank of Bengali exceptionalism.

Ms. Banerjee replaced the class politics of the Left, but the identity politics that she helped emerge threatens to devour her. "The BJP has been successful in convincing a good section of Dalits that they are victims of Muslim appeasement," says Dr. Chowdhury. And the ISF

is offering a new platform for segments of Muslim who are unhappy with Ms. Banerjee, also for the way they fit in her politics. "We are seen as recipients of some largesse, for no good reason," said Mujibur Rahman, in Bangalore. He says the Dalit in his own locality have shifted from the TMC to the BJP—a trend noted in Jangalmahal too.

The BJP is playing down its religious nationalism and focusing on development rhetoric. "It has been Bengal versus Delhi for a long time. This time, people want to be in alignment with the Delhi...the twin engines of development is our campaign focus," said Minal Kanti Bhuniya, party spokesperson in Jhargram. Didi wants to be seen as the incorruptible daughter of Bengal; the BJP portrays her as the author of chaos and barrier to the State's progress. This election is about Didi.

Sisir will join BJP soon, says Suvendu

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Trinamool Congress MP and senior leader of Purba Medinipur Sisir Adhikari is all set to join the BJP. At a public meeting in the district, the veteran leader's son and BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari made it clear that his father joining the BJP is just a matter of time.

"You all know Sisir baba. He will be present at Narendra Modi rally at Kanthi on March 24. I am suggesting he should go before that to Amit Shah's rally on March 21," Mr. Suvendu Adhikari said at Chandipur. Soon after Mr.

Suvendu Adhikari quit the Trinamool to join the BJP in December, speculation has been rife that his father and brother Dibyendu Adhikari will also join the BJP.

ANUJ KUMAR
GHAZIABAD

Addressing a kisan panchayat of the Bhartiya Kisan Union on Tuesday at the Ghaziabad protest site, BKU president Naresh Tikait once again said the Bharatiya Janata Party and the government were not worth believing. "We are in for a long haul. I want you to make the (farmers') movement part of your daily life," said Mr. Tikait.

He said more people such as Meghalaya Governor Satya Pal Malik should come in support of the farmers' movement. "We don't mind if he plays the role of an intermediary between the farmers and the government. He is from a farmer's family and understands farming and the region," said Mr. Tikait.

At a felicitation programme in Baghpat last week, Mr. Malik has said farmers should not go empty-handed from Delhi borders.

The monthly meeting of BKU is held at Sisauli village in Muzaffarnagar but Mr. Tikait said as many farmers are at the border, the organisa-

tion felt that the meeting should be held at the Ghaziabad site. This is the second time that such a meeting has been held at the Delhi-U.P. border, the first one in December 2020.

On the plan to make concrete structures on the road, the BKU president said, "We are not here to capture the road, but we have to make sure that farmers survive the summer without causing any discomfort to the locals."

RLD panchayat
Continuing with his mass outreach programme against the contentious farm laws, Rashtriya Lok Dal vice-president Jayant Chaudhary said on Tuesday that the farmer would bring down this government. "If the government thinks the farmer doesn't understand, it's mis-

taken," he said.
Addressing a kisan panchayat in Baheri area of Barailly, Mr. Chaudhary said there was a vast difference between what this government says and what it actually does and that farmers had understood its true character. "Its impact would be seen in the forthcoming elections," he said.

The RLD leader reiterated that he was not against private investment in agriculture but if the government ceased to play its role of an intermediary between the two, the farmers could not be saved from the corporate greed.

He charged that during the lockdown, the government kept making rules that helped two private players accumulate wealth while the common men kept losing their jobs.

Appropriation Bill gets the nod of Lok Sabha

Vardhan lists steps taken to improve healthcare infra

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Wednesday cleared the Appropriation Bill, allowing the Central government to draw funds from the Consolidated Fund of India for its operational requirements and implementation of various programmes.

The Bill was passed after Speaker Om Birla put it through guillotine, a legislative mechanism to approve the fast-tracking of the passage of outstanding demands for grants without discussion. Over the past few days, the Lok Sabha discussed the demands for grants for Railway, Education and Health Ministries.

On Wednesday, 26 members of the House participated in a debate on the Demand for Grants under the Health Ministry.

In his reply to the debate, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan listed the steps taken by the Narendra Modi-led government to improve the healthcare infrastructure, emphasising on the initiatives to contain the pandemic.

During the pandemic, the Union Minister said, the country achieved self-reliance in the production of PPTs, N-95 masks, diagnostic kits, ventilators and allied articles. On the criticism about slow pace of inoculation, Dr. Vardhan said the day India had recorded three million vaccinations, eight million were vaccinated in the entire world. India's share was about 36%.

India should make a move for peace'

Our only issue is basically over Kashmir, Pakistan PM says amid easing of tensions

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Pitching for trade between Pakistan and its neighbours such as India, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said the entire region would benefit "if India makes a move, if the Kashmir issue is resolved".

The comments came amid signs of a possible easing of relations, including a visit by the first sporting teams from Pakistan in years and talks on the Indus water treaty next week. Indian and Pakistani border commanders had last month agreed to abide by a ceasefire.

The Foreign Ministers of both countries have also been invited to the same regional conference on Af-



Imran Khan

ghanistan to be held in Dushanbe on March 30, which could be the first such opportunity for senior officials to meet since 1999.

"With India, it is very unfortunate that we have tried to resolve our issues through dialogue like civilised neigh-

bours, but it has not worked out. Our only issue is basically over Kashmir," Mr. Khan said at the Islamabad Security Dialogue on Wednesday, repeating an earlier statement made in Colombo in February.

He called India's decision to amend Article 370 and reorganise Jammu and Kashmir as a "big jolt" that led to a full breakdown in ties.

"India will also benefit with more trade and connectivity to Central Asia. This [Kashmir] is the one issue that holds us back. We will try our full efforts but it is for India to make a move, until they do that, we cannot move forward," he added, in a possible indicator that Pakistan expects steps from

New Delhi on Jammu and Kashmir's status before making the next move on trade.

Mr. Khan's visibly softened tone on India follows a speech by Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla on Monday that also appeared to have toned down some of the language on Pakistan. "India desires good neighbourly relations with Pakistan and is committed to addressing issues, if any, bilaterally and peacefully. However, any meaningful dialogue can only be held in a conducive atmosphere and the onus is on Pakistan to create such an atmosphere," Mr. Shringla said, giving India's stated position, but without the usual reference to state-sponsored terrorism from Pakistan.

Plan to test anganwadi food by FSSAI

JAGRITI CHANDRA
NEW DELHI

Mission POSHAN 2.0, likely to be sent for Union Cabinet approval soon, provides for testing of meals and food packets distributed at anganwadis for nutritional standards and quality by FSSAI labs.

According to a government official in the know, the government proposes to rope in NABL laboratories notified by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) and also use rapid food testing kits approved by the regulator. The latter will mitigate the need for samples to be sent to the laboratories for testing.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development, the nodal Ministry for implementing the Mission POSHAN, will also partner with the Panchayati Raj Ministry so that FSSAI and the National Institute of Nutrition can train Panchayati Raj functionaries at village level and anganwadi workers in maintaining and monitoring quality.

GOVERNMENT OF HIMACHAL PRADESH HIMACHAL PRADESH STATE ROADS TRANSFORMATION PROJECT (HPSRTP)

Request for Expression of Interest-cum-Request for Proposal (REoI-cum-RFP)

Name of Project: Himachal Pradesh State Roads Transformation Project (HPSRTP)

Loan No. / Credit No. : 9066-IN

Grant No. :

Date : March 17, 2021

The Chief Engineer-cum-Project Director, State Roads Project, HPRIDCL, Nirman Bhawan, Nigam Vihar Shimla-171002, Himachal Pradesh invites the Request for Expression of Interest-cum-Request for Proposals from national consultants for the consultancy services as detailed in the table below:

Sr. No.	Description of the Consultancy Services	Date of availability of Detailed Request for Expression of Interest-cum-Request for Proposals Document on HPRIDCL web site	Last date/Time for submission of Proposals
1.	Selection of IT Specialist to support implementation of MIS for HPPWD/HPRIDCL under HP State Roads Transformation Project (HPSRTP)	March 17, 2021 (Request for Expression of Interest-cum-Request for Proposal document)	March 31, 2021

Note:- Any further addendum/Corrigendum to this Request for Expression of Interest-cum-Request for Proposals Documents shall be available to all interested firms on official web site of HPRIDCL under <http://himachalservices.nic.in/hpridcl/HPSRTP.html>. Proposal must be delivered in a written form to the address below (in person, or by post) by March 31, 2021 at 15:00 hours (IST).

Chief Engineer-cum-Project Director, State Roads Project, HPRIDCL, Nirman Bhawan, Nigam Vihar, Facsimile: +91-177-2626663, Tel: +91-177-26267602

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CHEMIST Public Health Engineering Department, Gandhi Nagar, JAIPUR NIT No-Lab-45/ 20-21/ dated:-06.03.2021

TENDER NOTICE

On behalf of the Governor of Rajasthan PHED invites on line tenders in electronic format on website <http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in> and <http://sppp.rajasthan.gov.in>, from the aspirant eligible bidders, for the work of "Providing of service for the establishment and running of water testing laboratories at the 26 blocks H.Q.'s of districts district Alwar, Dausa, Jaipur, Jhunjhunu, Sikar (Region-Jaipur) Rajasthan along with the providing of skilled human resources, instruments, chemicals, glassware, other OEM requirements, collection and testing of water samples, uploading of sample testing results on IMIS/PHED web site, documentation as well as through the apps provided, GIS mapping of drinking water sources to locate each source and to linking such sources with their quality testing results (For 2 years)". The tender documents can be downloaded from the website as described below. Cost of downloading of tender documents is Rs 5000.00, which is to be paid in the form of Demand Draft/ Bankers Cheque/e-GRA'S Challan in favour of Chief Chemist PHED Jaipur, Rajasthan. Other details can be seen in tender documents.

S. No.	NIT No. & Date	Estimated Cost in Rs. (Lakh)	Earnest Money (in Rs.)	Date & Time of Downloading of Tender Documents	Last Date & Time of Online Submission of Tender	Date & Time of online opening of qualifying bids
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Lab-45 / 20-21/ dated:- 06.03.2021	1174.90	11,74,900/-	06-03-2021 (11:00 AM)	30-03-2021 (6:00 PM)	31-03-2021 (12:00 AM)

NOTE:-

1. The tender processing fee Rs. 1000.00 is to be paid in form of Demand Draft/ Bankers Cheque/e-GRA'S Challan in favour of MD, RISL Jaipur for each tender downloaded and processed.
2. Bidders who wish to participate in this tender will have to register themselves on website <http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in> and if they want to participate in online tenders then they will have to procure digital certificate as per information technology act 2000, using which they can sign and upload their electronic bids.
3. Bidders shall submit their offer online in electronic format on above mentioned website to time and date mentioned here in above.
4. Date & time of downloading of tender document is 06-03-2021 (11:00 AM); Pre Bid Meeting will be held on 12-03-2021 (02:00PM) at the office of the Chief Engineer (Rural), PHED, Jal Bhawan, Jaipur (Raj); Ph-0141-2222183.
5. Last date & time of Online submission of Tender is 30-03-2021(6:00 PM); date and time for physical submission of Cheque/e-GRA'S Challan CIN receipt of EMD & RISL Processing fee is 31-03-2021 (11:00 AM) at the office of the Chief Chemist PHED, Raj, Gandhi-Nagar-Jaipur.
6. Detailed NIT/tender document available on websites: <http://sppp.rajasthan.gov.in>, and <https://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in>.

<p

India known as first, reliable responder, says Jaishankar

'We provided COVID-19 vaccines to 72 countries'

DEVESH K PANDEY
NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Wednesday said in the last few years, India had developed a reputation of being the first and reliable responder in the region, stating that the country had provided "Made in India" vaccines for COVID-19 to 72 countries. Medicines have been supplied to 150 nations, 82 of them as grants.

In a statement to Parliament on the Vaccine Maitri initiative, Mr. Jaishankar said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision had provided an overarching framework to make the country's goodwill meaningful in terms of practical initiatives and activities. "We already saw that in our humanitarian assistance and disaster responses, whether in Yemen and Nepal or Mozambique and Fiji. As a result, in the last few years, India has deve-



C PM's outlook of human-centric cooperation is the driving force of Vaccine Maitri

loped a reputation of being the first and reliable responder in the region. We saw that too in critical negotiations of global importance like the Paris Agreement, where we had a key bridging role," he said.

The Minister said the supply of vaccines abroad was based on the assessment of adequate availability at

Hold China responsible: MP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Congress MP Manish Tewari said in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday that India, as the current head of the executive board of the World Health Organisation, should hold China responsible for spreading coronavirus across the world.

home. "From the Caribbean to the Pacific Islands, the message has been clear that the Prime Minister of India not only has the willingness to engage them personally, but to back that up with concrete development programmes. It is this outlook of human-centric global cooperation that is the driving force of Vaccine Maitri."

Reply to Disha's plea, HC tells Centre, Delhi Police

Documents are being leaked: activist

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday granted one last opportunity to the Centre and the Delhi Police to submit their response on climate activist Disha Ravi's plea to restrain the police from leaking case documents relating to the FIR lodged against her in the "toolkit" case.

Justice Prathiba M. Singh asked them to file their counter affidavits within two weeks and posted the case for further hearing on May 18.

The 22-year-old activist has stated that she is "severely aggrieved and prejudiced by the media trial surrounding her arrest and the ongoing investigation, where she is being viscerally attacked by the Respondent No. 1 (Special Cell, Delhi Police) and several media houses... on the basis of leaked investigative matter".

She was later granted bail by a trial court here on February 19.

Parliament building will be put to alternative use'

Puri clarifies on Central Vista project

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri told the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday that once the new Parliament building is ready, the existing one will have to be repaired and made available for alternative use but no comprehensive thought has been given on what use it should be.

He said no historical or iconic building in Lutyens Delhi would be demolished for the Central Vista project but a few buildings would have to be demolished "only when alternative offices have been constructed".

The Centre wants to redevelop the three-km

COVID-19 cases rise for 7th day

India reported 28,903 infections in 24 hours, says Union Ministry of Health

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

With an increase in COVID-19 cases for the seventh day in a row, India recorded its highest daily tally this year with 28,903 new infections in the 24 hours to 8 a.m. on Wednesday. Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said 70 districts across 17 States registered a 150% rise in cases in the past 15 days.

At a press conference here, Mr. Bhushan said: "India is currently reporting nearly 43% increase in the week-on-week rise in new COVID-19 cases and nearly 37% deaths in the same time. In the past two weeks, 70 districts in 16 States have registered a 150% rise in cases while 55 districts in 17 States have registered a rise of between 100 and 150%."

'Don't waste vaccine'
Warning against the wastage of vaccine, which, according to Mr. Bhushan, is at the rate of 6.5%, the Health Secretary said Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Jam-

mu and Kashmir were registering a rate higher than the country's average. "This wastage has to be curbed immediately," he said.

Member (Health), NITI Aayog, V.K. Paul said that currently India had "no reason for concern" regarding the use of Covishield vaccine.

"There is no question of stopping AstraZeneca's vaccine as of now. We are aware of the developments and reports of adverse reactions

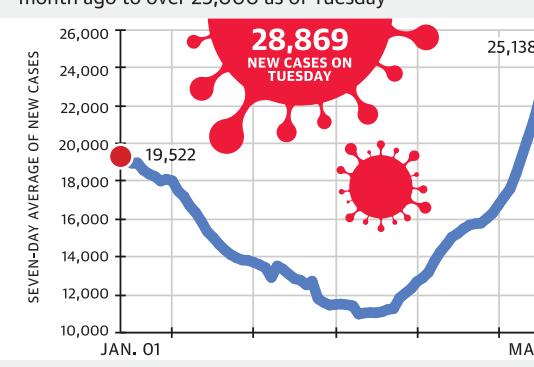
"the rise in cases is now being registered also in two and three tier cities which requires us to use all our knowledge and infrastructure to ease the situation."

Test more, States told

The Health Ministry directed the States/Union Territories to ensure strict adherence to mask wearing, physical distancing and hand hygiene.

"Greater vigilance and monitoring at highest levels for all potential events where crowds gather and clinical management in districts reporting higher deaths are all vital," said Mr. Bhushan.

He added that the States/Union Territories had been asked to ensure efficient implementation of the "Test, Track and Treat" strategy and significantly increase testing in all districts. "RT PCR tests – a minimum of 70% while ensuring all close contacts [approximately 30] be traced, isolated, tested in 72 hours – will aid in curbing an outbreak," said Mr. Bhushan.



[blood clot formation following the use of the vaccination] and the fact that countries in European Union including Germany, Italy and France, decided to temporarily halt the use. Our officials are following the developments and currently there is no signal of concern," Dr. Paul said.

He, however, cautioned against the surge in COVID-19 cases stating that while the first phase was seen mostly in bigger cities,

We never filed cases for divergent views: Minister

'Centre has not stopped anyone from airing their views'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Minister of State for Home G. Kishan Reddy informed the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday that the Central government never lodged false cases against anyone despite difference of opinion as witnessed during the Citizenship (Amendment) Act agitation and the ongoing farmers' protest.

He said that Centre had not stopped anyone from expressing their views within the framework of the Constitution.

The Minister was responding to a question by Manoj Kumar Jha of the Rashtriya Janata Dal whether the government planned to train policemen to differentiate between critique of government and critique of nation as large number of sedition cases ended in acquittal.

Chhaya Verma of the Con-

gress had asked if the government planned to amend Section 124 A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) framed by the British.

Reforms soon
Mr. Reddy said that the IPC was enacted vide Act 45 of 1860. "Section 124 A (sedition) was inserted by Act 27 of 1870 and further amend-

ed in the years 1937, 1948, 1950, Act 3 of 1951 and Act 26 of 1955. This is not a new Act, we are going to make big reforms, a committee has been constituted to suggest changes to IPC, seeking inputs from all stakeholders," he said.

'Sedition cases are few'
Ms. Verma said though there had been a 165% increase in sedition cases, only 2% ended in conviction.

"The cases of sedition was not tabulated in NCRB [National Crime Records Bureau] earlier, after the Modi government came to power we started tabulating it separately. 130 crore population... people comment on India's integrity through social media. The cases are not much, only in double digits, convictions are not determined by government, but courts," he responded.

BJP MP Ram Swaroop found dead

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Ram Swaroop Sharma, 62, BJP MP from Mandi in Himachal Pradesh, was found dead at his official residence in New Delhi on Wednesday.

The police said Mr. Sharma's personal assistant called the Police Control Room after the MP did not open his room in the morning.

Prima facie, it appeared to be a case of suicide, the police said.

Those in distress can dial Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health: 011-4076 9002

No outsider bought land in J&K, says Home Ministry

2,000 Kashmir migrants set to return this year

VIJAYA SINGH
NEW DELHI

More than a year after the special status of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) was revoked and the State made a Union Territory, the administration has identified over 22,000

government jobs but recruitment is yet to take place. No person from outside J&K has purchased land in the UT so far, according to information provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to a parliamentary panel.

The vacant jobs include 533 gazetted posts and



Land of the tiller: Agricultural land in J&K cannot be attached till the farmer holds the title, the MHA said. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

2,184 Class IV posts.

In a separate reply in Rajya Sabha on Wednesday, Union Minister of State for Home G. Kishan Reddy said around 3,800 Kashmiri migrant candidates had returned to Kashmir. Another nearly 2,000 migrant candidates are likely to return in 2021," he replied said.

provided under the Prime Minister's rehabilitation package. "Post-abrogation of Article 370, as many as 520 migrant candidates have returned to Kashmir. Another nearly 2,000 migrant candidates are likely to return in 2021," he replied said.

Probe sought into 'adverse effects, deaths'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A group of experts in public health, ethics, medicine, law, and journalism has written to Health Minister Harsh Vardhan and Drugs Controller General of India V.G. Somani, appealing for "time-bound and transparent investigation" following deaths and serious adverse effects after COVID-19 vaccination.

"We understand that at least 65 deaths have occurred following vaccination for COVID-19 since the vaccination campaign started on January 16. However, the National AEFI (adverse event following immunisation) Committee's investigation findings of only two of these deaths have been made public. We believe that due to the possible linkages of vaccination and blood clotting, all these deaths and adverse events should be reviewed together for a possible causal relationship with the vaccine," reads the letter.

Why is Arnab not in TRP scam FIR, asks HC

Court raps prosecution for slow probe

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday asked the Mumbai Police why Republic TV editor-in-chief Arnab Goswami had not been named an accused in the FIR in the Television Rating Point (TRP) manipulation case, and directed the prosecutor to inform by Thursday if they plan to do so.

A division Bench of Justices S.S. Shinde and Manish Pitale also asked the special public prosecutor Shishir Hiray how much more time they would take to complete the investigation.

The Bench said the FIR was filed in October 2020 and its March already. The court said, "You are investigating for the last three months. There are two chargesheets, and there seems to be no evidence against them. Isn't this a sword hanging over their heads?"

Mr. Hiray said the police have adequate evidence in

Frame rules for *amicus curiae*'

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta on Wednesday made a strong appeal to the Supreme Court to frame guidelines to rein in lawyers appointed as the court's *amicus curiae* in various cases, especially sensitive ones.

Appearing before a Bench led by Justice N.V. Ramana, Mr. Mehta said court-appointed *amicus curiae* tended to even interfere in the "running" of organisations such as the CBI. "An *amicus* is appointed to assist the court... It is time the court frame guidelines to demarcate the role of an *amicus curiae*," Mr. Mehta submitted.

DGCA taking action for improper use of mask'

HC content with steps taken, closes case

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) informed the Delhi High Court on Wednesday that action was being taken against passengers who refuse to wear masks properly, including de-boarding them or treating them as "unruly passengers".

A Bench of Justices Navin Chawla and C. Hari Shankar said they were satisfied with the steps taken

by the DGCA and decided to close the case initiated by the court itself on the protocol to be maintained by the passengers and the crew to curb spread of COVID-19.

Justice Shankar on March 8 passed a slew of guidelines for airlines staff and passengers after he witnessed an alarming situation during an Air India flight. "Many were exhibiting a stubborn reluctance to wear masks properly," the judge said.

The Opposition leaders said privatisation of various railway infrastructure would only benefit corporates and loss of revenue for the railways, pushing it to the brink

Don't privatise Railways, says Opposition

It will only benefit corporates and push it to brink like Air India, Indian Airlines'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

like the Air India and the Indian Airlines. It would also mean rise in fares.

'Long-term vision'
At the Conclusion of the debate on Demand For Grants for Railways, Mr. Goyal said the government had a long-term vision. "If a few private players want to run modern trains providing a comfortable journey to the passengers what is wrong in it," Mr. Goyal said.

The private equity was only being used to bring in modern amenities.

"Nobody needs to be worried. The Railways is the government's asset. Nobody is privatising it," he said.

Congress leader Naranbhai J. Rathwa said: "The private sector will not run trains on unprofitable routes and will increase the fare."

DMK leader P. Wilson said privatisation did not always mean improvement in efficiency. The catering services were privatised almost two decades back yet there were complaints from passengers. RJD MP Manoj K. Jha said

the government should resist the temptation to offer assets to capitalists. Shiv Sena MP Anil Desai said the government, instead of constructing the bullet train between Mumbai and Ahmedabad, should have focused on improving the existing infrastructure.

AAP member Sanjay Singh cited the example of the Habibganj station in Uttar Pradesh that was redeveloped by a private entity, where the cost of parking a two-wheeler is ₹50 an hour.

V-C complains against 'loud' azan in Prayagraj

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

Vice-Chancellor (V-C) of the Allahabad University Sangita Srivastava has allegedly complained to the district administration in Prayagraj about 'disturbance' caused to her by the call for azan from a mosque near her residence every morning.

A copy of the letter dated March 3 was widely shared on social media, though it could not be independently verified from the V-C.

In the letter, Ms. Srivasta-

va wrote to district Magistrate (DM) Bhanu Pratap Goswami saying every day at about 5.30 a.m., her sleep is "disturbed due to loud azan" from the "mik" by the mausoleum of a mosque nearby.

"The sleep so disturbed does not resume even after trying very hard. This also results in a headache throughout the day, causing loss of work hours," she wrote.

Ms. Srivastava appealed to the DM to provide a "quick response".

When art tastes like freedom

PRADEEP KUMAR

It was the first time 44-year-old Sathyamoorthy faced the camera. Originally from Salem, Sathyamoorthy, now a resident of Chennai and an LIC agent, walked into the set of *Pagaivanukku Arulvai* last month and donned a prisoner's outfit as asked by the film's director Anis.

By the time the cameras stopped rolling, Sathyamoorthy was overcome with déjà vu; it was a grim throwback to the days he spent incarcerated in Puzhal Central Prison (and Vellore Central Prison before that) – he had served 16 years from 2002 following conviction on a murder charge.

Sathyamoorthy is just one of at least 40 former prison inmates who will receive acting credits in Anis' upcoming film that is set in a prison. Produced by 4 Monkey Studios, *Pagaivanukku Arulvai*, also starring M Sasikumar, is expected to release in May 2021.

"One of the guys called home from the film set to say that sir [Anis] has made us prisoners in the movie too," quips 43-year-old R Srinivasan, a friend of Sathyamoorthy's and another former lifer.

Life beyond prison

It is at Anis' office in Valasaravakkam that I meet Sathyamoorthy, Sri-nivasan and eight others, all of whom are in their forties and have served terms between 14 to 25 years on murder charges.

Anis takes the banter lightly because nobody in the group is a stranger to him; he has been associated with them since 2016 when he first visited Puzhal Central Prison to train inmates in theatre.

Anis is the secretary of Prison Theatre, an agency he co-founded with Vetri Duraisamy, son of

former Chennai Mayor Saidai Duraisamy, who serves as its president.

The group I meet includes 'Sri-gaana' B Manikandan – known for his uncanny ability to beat a rhythm out of an empty vessel and reel out verses about life inside prison. Mani has sung a song composed by Ghibran for *Pagaivanukku Arulvai*. There is also 45-year-old 'Thirukkural' K Munusamy who has two undergraduate degrees, which he gained whilst incarcerated; Munusamy can flawlessly recite the whole *Thirukkural*. Among the others, one is adept at playing the keyboard, another, a *dholak*, while a third is an "excellent poet", exclaims Anis – clearly, all of them have an eye for art.

Unearthing such talent – as a means to offer distraction or aid in rehabilitation – was the objective when Anis walked into the prison in 2016.

Sponsored by the Government of Tamil Nadu, the filmmaker also had the support of former Superintendent of Prison-I, Puzhal, V Rukmani Priyadarshini.

She says, "Reformation through art was the aim. We had to make people who had no emotions experience a few... like love, pity and mercy, even if it meant generating them artificially. In a drama, these convicts had an opportunity to become

one with the role and feel these emotions."

Emotional is how Srinivasan, too, describes the time he spent at the workshop. "We liked the way he interacted and taught us. He even ate prison food alongside us. We had all these new emotions that we wanted to connect to, and it meant we kept looking forward to the workshop the next day," he explains.

It presents a stark situation, especially when Srinivasan follows it up with, "There have been times when many of us have woken up at night and felt like 'offing' ourselves. Prison life is depressing."

Tackling stigma

It means a lot to inmates that someone coming from the outside treats them with dignity – a privilege not extended to them by society – and keeps a promise.

Says Munusamy, "So many people come inside prison and promise jobs to us. But the



Take okay (Above) The group with Sasikumar; during filming with Anis; (below) 'Thirukkural' K Munusamy • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

words they spoke when we were locked up and how they treated us when we were out were markedly different. That is why it was a surprise that Anis sir kept his word. It was unexpected and hence so much sweeter."

After the week-long workshop, Anis organised the first drama featuring the then Puzhal inmates, titled *Haa-syakaarargal* – an experience that Thiruvur K Damu, 45, says was unique since "we discovered there were variations to laughter". The group has since performed in at least three different locations, including SPACES in Besant Nagar.

With its screen debut imminent, is the group look-

ing to pursue opportunities in films going forward? Anis interjects: "I have told them explicitly that is not an option. The last thing I want is for one of them to run from one production office to another with their photos in hand. I want them to dedicate a small amount of time from their routine lives to art... this venture [of making them a part of his film] is also to create a discussion on giving them opportunities and to break societal stigma against former prisoners."

Munusamy concurs that the stigma is real, often in-your-face and affects other members in the family. "A relative of mine is looking for a groom for his daughter and the prospective alliance got to know that our family has someone who had been to

prison for murder. That was a deal-breaker. In villages, the term *kolagaara kudumbam* (the murderer's family) is common usage. It is vile but this happens," he says. Anis adds: "I'm hopeful that the stigma will be broken."

Priorities matter

Whilst this group of former lifers are examples of novel ideas like utilising theatre for rehabilitation working wonders, these initiatives are few and far between.

The reason: such goodwill depend on the acceptance from serving jail authorities. Srinivasan remarks: "The prison's atmosphere is a reflection of the jail authorities' mindset."

Rukmani agrees. "It is true.

We sit down with a group of ex-life termers who will make their acting début in Tamil film *Pagaivanukku Arulvai*, directed by Anis



The words people spoke when we were locked up and how they treated us when we were out were markedly different

'THIRUKKURAL' K MUNUSAMY

Like many relics of the British Raj, Tipperary Bungalow, among the oldest in Yercaud, has a storied past that lives only in oral recollections. It continues to be the hub of a coffee plantation



It's a long way to Tipperary

NAHLA NAINAR

Though it is close to afternoon when we reach Yercaud, the hill station nestled in the Shevaroy range of the Eastern Ghats around 1,500 metres above sea level, is still blanketed in late winter mist.

Thanks to the lockdown, Yercaud's winding roads and

well-heeled. Some of the heritage structures though, especially those attached to plantations, have reinvented themselves as homestays.

The Tipperary Bungalow, a colonial-era house that is considered to be among the oldest buildings (approximately 120 years) in Yercaud, is one such property, perched upon a mini peak of its own.

The house is part of the eponymous 70-acre working coffee farm that also cultivates jackfruit, avocado, banana, wild turmeric and pepper.

Heritage home (Left) Walter Dickens at the Tipperary plantation; (below) Tipperary Bungalow today

• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

AND NAHLA NAINAR

On any day, visitors to the property – now functioning as a heritage bed-and-breakfast homestay – set in four acres, can expect to see local fauna like gaur and spotted deer from the veranda that opens out to views of the valley below from the master suite.

Like many relics of the British Raj, Tipperary Bungalow has a storied past that lives only in oral recollections. "Though my father purchased this property in 1970, we weren't really aware of its original British owners, the Dickens family, until quite recently," says N Satyendran, a former engineer and commercial pilot who runs the estate today.

Clan of coffee growers Whether the Dickens family of Yercaud was related to the famous Victorian author Charles Dickens (1812-1870) remains debatable in the absence of any documentary evidence, but there is little doubt that this India-based British clan did much to develop the commercial cultivation of coffee and other crops in the hill station.

"My great grandfather Alfred Ernest Stark Dickens (1844-1898) came to Yercaud in 1881; he had five sons and five daughters, and most of them were in the coffee business. Five generations of our family were based in Yercaud from the 1880s until 1950s, so there were at least 15 coffee plantations, each with their houses, run by us in that period," says Anna Dickens, over a WhatsApp phone call from London.

Approaching her 80th birthday, Anna is perhaps the Tipperary Bungalow's last link to its British owners. She visits

Yercaud in 2005, and was reportedly moved to tears when she saw her birthplace (she was born here on August 7, 1941).

A visit to the cemetery at the Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Yercaud shows the number of members from the Dickens family who are interred here.

"My aunt Gwendoline and her husband Leslie Dickens were the last occupants of the Tipperary. They sold the property in the 1950s before leaving India," says Anna.

Considering that Yercaud got its first metalled roads only in the early 20th Century, the Tipperary and other buildings of its vintage in the hill station are obviously great examples of native engineering using rudimentary infrastructure.

"We have tried to maintain the original style of the building, though quite a bit of it was in disrepair when we acquired it," says Satyendran. "The polished red oxide floors are still the same, and the thick stone walls keep the building insulated from extreme cold and heat through the year."

Anna remembers the Tipperary as being a popular meeting spot for the local British community. "We were a very musical family; and I played the antique grand piano that is still there in the reception room when I visited in 2005, though we don't really know how it was transported up there in those days!" laughs Anna.

The Dickens had a very busy social life, she adds. "We used to have picnics, dance and tennis parties very frequently. And people also used to dress up a lot, because I've got photographs of my aunts in fancy dress as well," says Anna.

As the wind sighs through the ancient willow tree guarding the Tipperary Bungalow, the mist clears, and then clouds up the area once again.

Turn the pages of a city

The Off We Go series' latest book for children snakes across Chennai, to bottle the *namma ooru* experience in vibrant technicolour

ANISHA MENEZES

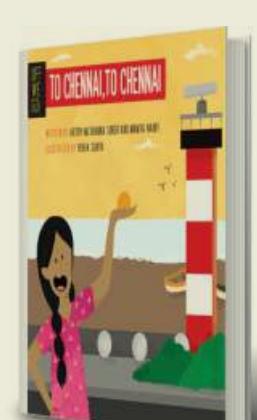
Chennai is celebrated through the prism of history for its kaleidoscope of cultural influences. But how do you distill the essence of a city and bottle it for a young reader?

Authors Arthy Muthanna Singh and Mamta Nainy, partners at Syllables27, have taken their readers on a journey across Indian cities through the 'Off We Go Series', with pit stops at Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Jaipur, and in the latest: Chennai. The series is a culmination of the work done at Young INTACH in collaboration with Talking Cub.

To Chennai, To Chennai, narrated by young Vijayalakshmi Srinivasan, snakes through the city, paying homage to its seats of culture at Kalakshetra Foundation, Cholamandal Artists' Village, Theosophical Society and its bounty of Nature at Guindy National Park, Nochikuppam fishing village and the Madras Crocodile Bank Trust and Centre for Herpetology.

Mapping her way through the city while sightseeing with relatives, 'Viji' treats readers to a microcosm of Chennai culture – through monikers of *paati*, *chitti*, *kanna* and *kutti*; recipes for homemade *kaapi* and *idlis*; the geometrical genius of a *kolam*; and the pretty *pavadai* and *pallankuzhi*.

"Left to me, this book would have been the first in the series. I confess I am biased, having spent a very large part of my life



Coming home A children's guide to Chennai • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

on a tea plantation in the Nilgiris. Tamil is the first Indian language I ever spoke," says Arthy, adding, "My father travelled often to Madras, and I remember twiddling my toes at Marina Beach, buying *mallige puu* to string onto my well-oiled hair, or just vegetating under the Adyar *aalamaram*."

Mamta Nainy elaborates on the delicate curation of the narrative of a city, steeped in stories: "The series was born out of a need to acquaint young readers not just with the histories and the built heritage of Indian cities but also with the accidental poetry that the city experience inspires."

The book's illustrator, Vibha Surya, spent most of her life in Chennai, and to her, the exercise in nostalgia was a worthy pandemic venture. "I went through endless photographs of my childhood, and visited a few places as well."

SWETA AKUNDI

On James Thomas' vision board for his wedding in April, are the shoes he has always dreamt of wearing: a black and white pair of Jordan II 'Concord'. It took some convincing, but he has coaxed his fiancée into wearing the same pair in all-white, to go with her gown. "Her only condition was that I buy them," says James, chuckling.

James is the co-founder of Bengaluru-based Sole Culture, a community of high-brand sport shoe enthusiasts or, as they call themselves, sneakerheads. At a recent meetup in Bengaluru, fellow sneakerheads gathered at Hard Rock Cafe to exchange, buy, flaunt and most of all talk about all things sneakers. The event, Sneakers Galore, hosted an auction where three pairs of shoes went under the hammer, selling for up to ₹20,000. "Our eyes first find the shoes, and then the faces," jokes James.

Quintessentially American, the sneakerhead subculture is finding its way to India through the same inspirations as it did in the US: basketball and hip-hop. Jordans by Nike, Yeezys by Adidas, ASICS, Balenciaga, and New Balance are finding place in Indian closets. These sell in the range of ₹10,000 to ₹30,000; limited edition or custom ones can be priced higher, running up to a lakh.

"I never anticipated this kind of growth in the number of Indian sneaker enthusiasts in the past couple of years," says 40-year-old Delhiite Atul Sharma. "When I started my blog Sneaker Talk India in 2017, I knew only a handful of sneakerheads," he says.

The blog, which has now evolved into a community of 10,000 people, was Atul's way of starting a conversation with fellow collectors, discussing the latest drops and reviewing them.

Every year, Atul hosts the Kicks Exchange festival for sneakerheads to meet and trade shoes. They have so far met in Delhi, Bengaluru, Kolkata, and Jaipur. Atul, who owns 150 pairs of shoes, buys a pair almost every month.

His 10-year-old daughter already has around eight pairs herself. "I haven't bought many for her because her feet are still growing. Once she is old enough, I will maybe stop buying for myself and start buying just for her," he says.

Every shoe has a story

At Sneakers Galore, a special section was dedicated to basketball giant Kobe Bryant, who passed away last year in a helicopter crash.

Sports, and basketball in particular, is



The other shoe drops

With high-end Jordans and Yeezys in their closets, India's sneakerheads are growing into a community of collectors, flaunting trivia and customised bling

a major draw for Indian sneakerheads. Bengaluru-based Nandith Jaisimha recalls the first pair of Adidas – all black sport shoes – that he got when he was 13. Soon, he went on to become a State-level basketball player. When Nandith buys sneakers, he looks for comfort and style, but most importantly, the story be-

hind the shoe.

With a collection of over 100 shoes, that is an omnibus of stories to tell. He has a custom closet built in his bedroom to put a section of his shoes up on display, which he keeps rotating and cleaning every couple of months. The ones he does not use, he passes on to kids in the

In swag (Clockwise from left) Sneakerhead Nandith Jaisimha; sneaker caps by Nishant Fogaat; Atul Sharma's 10-year-old with her budding collection and Nishant's customised shoes ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



present the glory days of the 1990s: they stand for Michael Jordan, Shaquille O'Neal, Kobe Bryant. "I am not interested in Yeezys because I didn't grow up idolising Kanye West," he says.

Homegrown passion

But to the younger lot of sneakerheads, the style inspirations come from the Indian music industry. The growth of sneaker culture here is closely related to the boom in regional rap, with rappers and musicians often flaunting customised bling. And here is where India is finding – forgive the pun – its own feet.

Rapper Raftaar's Pharrell NMD Hu have reflective text 'Raftaar' and 'Kalamkaar' lit up on each half. They were cus-

tomised for him by designer Nishant Fogaat, who shuttles between New Delhi and Osaka, Japan.

"Asian countries are the major exporters of fabric for shoemaking. So why don't we have shoes specific to Indian heritage?" asks Nishant. He has experimented with adding Indian prints like paisleys, folk arts such as warli and *sanghi*, as well as Japanese kimono prints, to designer shoes.

Celebrities, including cricketers (Virat Kohli), actors (Harshvardhan Kapoor) and musicians (Badshah), make up a significant portion of his clients. He works in collaboration with Nike, Puma and other brands; they direct the stars, whom they have signed on, to him for custom makes.

"My clients either get the final customised shoes from me, or buy their own and send them to me for additional work. Sometimes I stitch them from scratch," says Nishant.

The hypebeast culture

The music industry and celebrities have been Naveen Kumar's biggest influence; it was after all, a 50-Cent song that inducted him into the culture. At his ECR home in Chennai, the 25-year-old has a budding collection of 17 sneakers, mostly high-tops – used mainly by athletes, these extend above the ankle.

"I really like GV Prakash and Arya's collections. Arya is a hypebeast for sure. I do hope that one day I can call myself a hypebeast," he says. Hype culture is where the affluent are dressed head to toe in designer gear – the more limited the edition, the better. It is what is driving the market today.

"I remember the day I got the Nike Black Pigeon for 150 US dollars [less than ₹11k], I posted a picture of them on my social media. The same day, I got a call from a random 16-year-old kid in Delhi, offering me ₹50,000 for it," says Jaideep. "It's capitalism on steroids!"

The child, he explains, was a reseller looking to flip and sell shoes at higher than the retail price. Resale accounts such as these have been mushrooming all across social media. Since there are not many options available to buy in India, other than stores such as VegNon-Veg and Superkicks and other online platforms, many collectors get their contacts in the US and Europe to get them to India, and re-sell them.

"The resale market right now is a bubble that can burst any time," believes Nishant, "But even if it does, I hope the passion for shoes among people remains."

BOTTOMS UP

Before Nishant Fogaat started designing sneakers, he founded a business in caps made from worn out shoes. When the soles of his first pair of shoes lost all traction, he cut them open, and used the pattern to make a cap. The idea took off, and that is how he and his friends became literal sneakerheads.

Restoration of old shoes is another growing market, says Nishant. "A lot of these hyper-driven youngsters ask to restore worn out shoes, and then sell them for higher prices."



Stars of *The Falcon and The Winter Soldier*, actors Anthony Mackie and Sebastian Stan talk about the new Marvel offering and their much-celebrated camaraderie



Legacy continues (Above) Anthony Mackie (left) with Sebastian Stan in a still from *The Falcon and The Winter Soldier* ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

has a crazy fandom in itself?

Sebastian: That definitely helped for sure (smiles). That scene together in *Captain America: Civil War* was a real jumping-off point for us, and they have paired us together now for a couple years. Someone out there at Marvel was smart enough to see that they could explore it further.

Black Panther, which featured a cast of Black actors, was a monumental film for Marvel. And now Anthony, you are the lead in a show like this. How does that make you feel?

Anthony: It is a very personal experience. I am very fortunate to do what I love, and I have always wanted to do this.

That being said, with the idea of representation, or what it means for the Falcon going forward in the Marvel Universe... Sam Wilson is kind of the eyes and ears of the audience.

You know, he is not a superhero. He is a regular guy that was asked by Captain America to come help out. Of course, there is pride and recognition that comes along with that. But you just have to take it all in stride and never lose sight of yourself, because it would be so easy to become something that I am not.

The Marvel and Disney+ collaboration is off to a flying start with WandaVision. Do you guys feel a certain level of pressure to follow that up at all?

Sebastian: I don't think so, because we are such different shows. If anything, it has been really nice to just have them

kind of usher Marvel into the streaming world, if you will. It gave us a chance to sort of hone in on our series a little bit more because we got stopped during the pandemic.

Are there any particular scenes that you enjoyed the most during the shooting?

Sebastian: I would say any time that we have a staring contest is always an interesting time because it is sort of about who breaks first. And that is usually me (laughs). Also, whenever I am guessing whether or not Anthony has had his lunch before the scene because that is going to affect our energy going into it. Real men eat!

Anthony: (laughs uproariously) I agree, and also have to say there are a lot of scenes and lines between just the two of us in the show. One of my favourite scenes is the one on the cargo plane that is in the trailer. I find that to be so funny. Because the Winter Soldier is trying so hard to just be my friend. And I am so over him and the idea of him!

What has been your biggest takeaway from the year that was?

Anthony: Appreciation. Just slowing down, smelling the roses and really appreciating the opportunity that we have to do what we love. It is a big thing for me.

It really put things in perspective for me to have it all snatched away, and now having the opportunity to go back to it.

The Falcon and The Winter Soldier premieres March 19 on Disney+ Hotstar

GAUTAM SUNDER

They are back! Possibly Marvel Cinematic Universe's most-loved bromance and a duo that features in most highlight reels because of the actors' off-screen friendship.

Marvel Studios' *The Falcon and The Winter Soldier*, all set to premiere on March 19, reunites superheroes Sam Wilson and Bucky Barnes. More importantly, it brings back stars Anthony Mackie and Sebastian Stan, who have garnered global fandom for their hilarious banter on social media and in real-life, as Marvel follows up the success of *WandaVision* with another hotly-anticipated series.

Directed by Kari Skogland and created for television by Malcolm Spellman, the series plays out over six episodes and takes place following the events of *Avengers: Endgame*. Along with Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige, Anthony Mackie and Sebastian Stan join MetroPlus over a video call.

Why is *The Falcon and The Winter Soldier* a story that needed to be told?

Sebastian: At the end of

The bros are back

Avengers: Endgame, you are left with a question mark about what is next. You are also wondering how these two guys are going to handle it, and also, what does Captain America mean? So that in itself is really worth exploring.

Going deeper into their story and having six hours to really flesh out who these guys are, and going into their psychology at this point felt very accurate and earned.

What does Kari Skogland bring to this project?

Anthony: Kari is very good with character development and hiding exposition. When you watch her work, you are getting information from the characters but it doesn't feel like she is spoon-feeding you. A lot of the things in the script which, for the characters, either didn't work or weren't put together right, she worked out those moments to make those arcs and transitions smooth. Her smarts is something that can't be questioned.

The Marvel and Disney+ collaboration is off to a flying start with WandaVision. Do you guys feel a certain level of pressure to follow that up at all?

Sebastian: I don't think so, because we are such different shows. If anything, it has been really nice to just have them

Kicking up dust

Debutant director Pragabhal Das discusses the making of *Muddy*, billed as India's first film on off-road racing

SRIVATSAN S

Pragabhal Das has been carrying the weight of *Muddy* on his shoulders for close to six years now. Sometime in 2015, he got the idea of a film on off-road racing, based on the conversations he had with friends who are professional racers. With no prior experience in films, Pragabhal wanted his debut to be unique. "I have always been interested in all-terrain vehicles, although I have never participated in races," says Pragabhal, over a phone call from Palakkad. "When I spoke to real-time racers, it triggered a spark."

He developed the script, but the pre-production work alone took three years to complete, as it involved complex action sequences.



Big canvas A still from *Muddy*; (below) Pragabhal Das ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Billed as India's first film on off-road racing, Pragabhal says he wanted to shoot the racing portions in a realistic fashion. He had the storyboard ready when he met the producer, who, he says, was supportive of his idea.

"The location hunt alone took us a year," he says, adding that they went into filming in 2019.

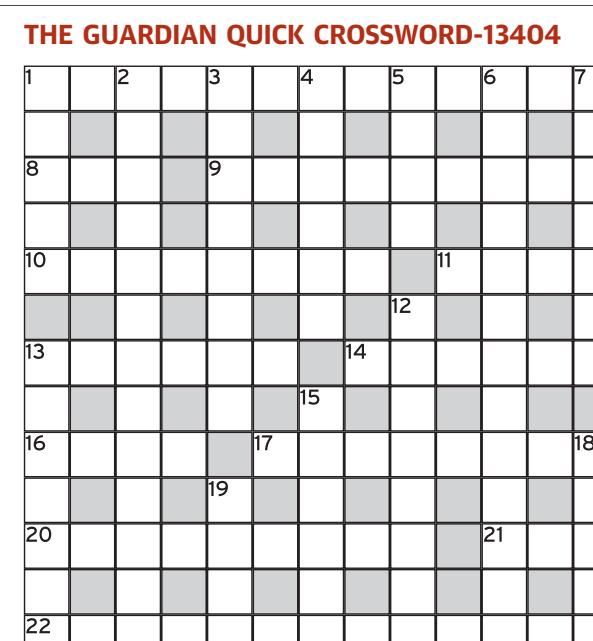
They had shot 30 hours of footage employing over 14 cameras to capture the mood. Pragabhal says the post-production, too, was time-consuming, given that *Muddy* is a "tech-

nical film". He worked closely with his editor San Lokesh (of *Raatchasan* fame) to bring the final runtime down to 130 minutes. "As it is an adventurous action film, I wanted a solid technical team. We were even careful that the sound design did not affect the background score."

Pragabhal tried pitching the script to stars, but he could not get the desired support as he was a newcomer. He went ahead with new faces and real racers. For a film that does not boast of big names, the reception for the teaser (16 million views in under a month) reaffirmed Pragabhal's confidence in *Muddy*, which is gearing up for a theatrical release in May. At one point during the filming, Pragabhal thought about the universality of his subject and began to explore the option of making it into a pan-Indian film.

"As it is a sports film, I wanted all audiences to watch it. Even if you don't speak the language, you can probably enjoy the visuals," he says. Pragabhal shot the talkies portions in Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada; *Muddy* is also getting a dubbed release in Hindi. Every stage of production threw up new challenges, agrees Pragabhal. The biggest lesson he learnt in his six-year journey was: "Not to look back and keep going without losing confidence."

THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13404



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Across

- 1 Causing disappointment after an impressive start (13)
- 8 Natural material from which metals can be extracted (3)
- 9 Disrespectful behaviour (9)
- 11 Sudden rush of wind (4)
- 13 Insubstantial (6)
- 14 Dried grape (6)
- 16 Clothes (informal) (4)
- 17 Offer as a sacrifice by burning (8)
- 20 Egg-laying (9)



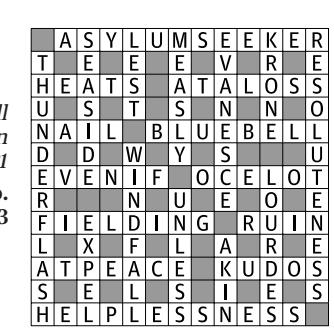
To play The Guardian Quick Crossword, The Hindu Cryptic crossword, Sudoku & other puzzles online, scan the QR code.

21 Intestines (3)

22 Prevents things getting out of hand (5,3,3,2)

■ Down

- 1 Shy away from (5)
- 2 Position that's very exposed to attack (3,6,4)
- 3 Like a close-knit and unfriendly group (8)
- 4 Put in (6)
- 5 A friendly and reliable country (4)
- 6 People gossiped (7,6)
- 7 Be unfaithful to one's partner (5,2)
- 12 Conveyer belt for arriving air travellers' luggage (8)
- 13 Joint just above a horse's hoof – to fletch (anag) (7)
- 15 Dance slowly while in an embrace (6)
- 18 Have a meal at home (3,2)
- 19 South-east Asian country (4)



Solution will appear on March 25, 2021

Solution No. 13403

'Quad summit strengthens U.S. hand ahead of talks with China'

We're working with allies and partners to enhance our leverage, says official

SIRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON

The U.S. has sought to build strength before engaging China later this week and the Quad summit is an example of this, a senior administration official said on Tuesday night during a briefing call with reporters.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan are scheduled to meet China's Director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi and State Councilor Wang Yi on Thursday and Friday. Both U.S. officials have been extensively engaged with allies, primarily in Europe and the Indo-Pacific, since the administration kicked off on January 20. Mr. Blinken is currently visiting Tokyo and Seoul along with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

Working together

"I think sometimes folks think of our allies and partners piece here as just being about choreography that somehow we just need to talk to our allies before we talk to China," the official, who did not want to be named, said. "I want to stress that that's actually not the case. Obviously that sequencing is part of the equation here,



Giving a boost: U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in Tokyo, Japan. ■REUTERS

but we're working actually with allies and partners to strengthen our hand."

"The Quad [summit] last week was probably the most important very clear illustration in practical terms of exactly what we're trying to achieve here, bringing together the four leaders in a virtual summit for the first time to actually do something together that we couldn't do individually, particularly on the vaccine distribution deliverable that was big and affirmative for the region," the official said.

"This isn't just about something that is here to counter China. This is about something that's actually about doing something that

enhances our leverage, enhances the quality of life in the region in meaningful ways," the official said.

U.S. President Joe Biden hosted the first ever summit meeting of the Quad grouping – the U.S., India, Australia and Japan – last Friday. The group announced a plan to produce and distribute up to 1 billion vaccines to overcome shortages in Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

The official said it was important for Beijing to hear directly from Mr. Blinken and Mr. Sullivan and that sometimes there is a "hope in Beijing that our public message is somehow different" from private message.

"And we think it's really important that we dispel that idea very early, and that we're very clear with delivering the same messages in private that you have heard from us in public," they said. The U.S. has said it will discuss a long list of concerns with China – these include human rights abuses, Chinese aggression in the neighbourhood, an erosion of democratic norms in Hong Kong and some of Beijing's economic practices and policies.

No joint statement

A meeting that involved both the Secretary of State and the National Security Adviser is also expected to send a message to Beijing that different parts of the administration were singing from the same song sheet.

The official said Beijing had a track record of "attempting to try to play favourites within an administration and in particular to play the Secretary of State and National Security Adviser off each other." The official also said there will not be a joint statement from the U.S. and China following this week's meetings and that the U.S. is also not expecting "specific negotiated deliverables" from the talks.

Putin approved operations to help Trump, says report

Russia sought to undermine Mr. Biden's candidacy, it says

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

Russian President Vladimir Putin authorised influence operations to help Donald Trump in last November's presidential election, according to a declassified intelligence assessment that found broad efforts by the Kremlin and Iran to shape the outcome of the race but ultimately no evidence that any foreign actor changed votes or otherwise disrupted the voting process.



Vladimir Putin

clear that even while Mr. Trump has cried foul about the legitimacy of the election, intelligence officials believe Russia sought to influence people close to Mr. Trump as a way to tip the election in his favour.

The report released on Tuesday from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence represents the most detailed assessment of the array of foreign threats to the 2020 election. These included efforts by Iran to undermine confidence in the vote and harm Mr. Trump's reelection prospects as well as Moscow operations that relied on Mr. Trump's allies to smear Joe Biden, the eventual winner.

Despite those threats, though, intelligence officials found "no indications that any foreign actor attempted to interfere in the 2020 U.S. elections by altering any technical aspect of the voting process, including voter registration, ballot casting, vote tabulation, or reporting results".

The document makes

with the U.S. and did not consider either election outcome as advantageous enough for it to risk the "blowback" that would ensue if it got caught with interfering.

The primary threats instead came from Russia and Iran, albeit with different intentions.

The report says Russia sought to undermine Mr. Biden's candidacy because it viewed his presidency as opposed to the Kremlin's interests, though it took some steps to prepare for a Democratic administration as the election neared. It also says Mr. Putin authorised influence operations aimed at denigrating Mr. Biden, boosting Mr. Trump, undermining confidence in the election and exacerbating social divisions in the U.S.

Mr. Biden, in an interview that aired on Wednesday on ABC's "Good Morning America," said that there would be repercussions for Mr. Putin for a variety of misdeeds, saying, "The price he's going to pay, you'll see shortly."

The President recounted that in their first call, held last month, he opened by saying to Mr. Putin that "we understand each other". When asked in the interview if he thinks Mr. Putin is a killer, Mr. Biden said, "I do."

Eight killed in U.S. spa shootings

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ATLANTA

Six Asian women were among eight people shot and killed at spas around the U.S. city of Atlanta, raising fears on Wednesday that it might be the most violent chapter yet in a wave of attacks on Asian-Americans.

A white man is in custody on suspicion of staging all the three attacks, the police said as a Georgia State Democratic party leader suggested that the attack matched "a pattern" of violence on Asian-Americans during the pandemic.

Four of the victims were killed at Young's Asian Massage near Acworth, a suburb of Georgia State capital Atlanta, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported.

Captain Jay Baker of the Cherokee County sheriff's office told the paper the victims were two Asian women, a white woman, and a white man, while a Hispanic man was wounded.

The police separately confirmed that four women had been killed in attacks on two other spas in the northeast of the city.

The police told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* that all four were Asian women.

South Korea's Yonhap News Agency reported that the country's Foreign Ministry had confirmed that four of the victims were of Korean descent.

Expressing concern over the incident, President Joe Biden said: "I know that Asian Americans are very concerned because, as you know, I've been speaking about the brutality against Asian Americans for the last couple of months," he said. "I think that it is very, very troublesome."

Authorities have identified Robert Aaron Long as a suspect in all the three shootings. "The suspect did take responsibility for the shootings," Captain Baker said.

"This is still early, but he does claim it was not racialized motivated."

"He apparently has an issue, what he considers a sex addiction, and sees these locations as... a temptation for him that he wanted to eliminate."

Katherine Tai unanimously confirmed as USTR by Senate

SIRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON

The U.S. Senate voted unanimously, 98-0, to confirm Katherine Tai as the next U.S. Trade Representative (USTR). Ms. Tai, whose parents are from Taiwan, is the first woman of colour to hold the position.

From determining how to take forward a Trump-era trade deal with China and negotiating with the Europeans on aircraft subsidies and a digital services tax to implementing the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, Ms. Tai is expected to have a packed agenda.

Ms. Tai, a corporate lawyer, argued – and won – cases for the U.S. against China at the World Trade Organization (WTO) during the Obama administration when she was head of the USTR's China division.

As the Biden administration heads towards its first bilateral meeting with Beijing later this week, questions on how to take the



Katherine Tai
trade relationship forward loom.

For now a 'Phase 1' trade deal negotiated by the Trump administration is in place. Bilateral trade balances were of central importance to former President Donald Trump's 'America First' policy and a key factor in the dynamics between the U.S. and other countries.

China had agreed to purchase \$200 billion in U.S. goods in exchange for reduced tariffs on \$120 billion worth of products under the agreement. During her confirmation hearing, Ms. Tai called on China to stick to its

on trade.

India will seek to negotiate a fresh bilateral trade deal now that there is a confirmed USTR, as per what Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said last month.

The Minister had said that the government would take a fresh look at "different ideas" to avoid the problems of the past.

U.S. sanctions 24 China, HK officials

ASSOCIATED PRESS
HONG KONG

The U.S. sanctioned 24 more Chinese and Hong Kong officials over Beijing's ongoing crackdown on political freedoms in the semi-autonomous city.

The step reflects Washington's "deep concern" about the erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy following changes to its election system endorsed by China's ceremonial legislature last week, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement on Wednesday.

Foreign financial institutions that deal with the 24 officials would be subject to U.S. sanctions, the State Department said.

The imposition of new sanctions "fully exposes the U.S. side's sinister intention to interfere in China's internal affairs, disrupt Hong Kong and obstruct China's stability and development," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said.

The Minister had said that the government would take a fresh look at "different ideas" to avoid the problems of the past.

'Tough' to withdraw troops from Afghanistan by May 1, says Biden

Taliban warns of consequences if U.S. fails to meet deadline

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Joe Biden has said that it would be "tough" to meet the deadline to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan by May 1, as agreed with the Taliban in a deal secured under Donald Trump.

"Could happen, but it is tough," Mr. Biden said when asked about the May 1 deadline in a TV interview broadcast on Wednesday.

"I'm in the process of making that decision now."

The Taliban quickly reacted

to Mr. Biden's comments, with a spokesman saying there would be "consequences" if the U.S. did not stick to the agreed timetable – further raising pressure on the fragile peace process.

"The Americans should end their occupation in accordance with the Doha deal and fully withdraw their forces from Afghanistan by May 1," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said.

"If they don't do it, be it for any reason and pretenses, then they will be responsible for the consequences," he added.

Office of the Commissioner and Director of Agricultural Marketing Government of Andhra Pradesh, Guntur E-Procurement Tender Notice
E-Procurement T.No.SE(AM)/AP/GNT/E/p/18/2021-Dated: 16-3-2021
Online tender is invited by Superintending Engineer (AM) Guntur from the reputed firms for providing consultancy services for Selection of Third Party Quality Control Agency (TPQCA) for all Civil Engineering Works in Agricultural Marketing Department in the State of AP. E-procurement site will open on 18-03-2021 at 11.00 A.M. Any other information can be had from the www.tender.approcurement.gov.in and <http://market.apnic.in>. Cell No. 9182361156, 9182361199, DIPR 632PP/CL, Dt: 17-03-2021 Sd/- Superintending Engineer (AM)

said, adding that "the people of Afghanistan will make their decision".

Mr. Biden also took a direct swipe at Mr. Trump's Afghanistan policy, saying it "was not a very solidly negotiated deal" that the then-President oversaw.

"The failure to have an orderly transition from the Trump presidency to my presidency... has cost me time and consequences.

That's one of the issues we're talking about now, in terms of Afghanistan," Mr. Biden added.

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**(Neeraj Mathur)
ADDL. CHIEF ENGINEER
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As criticism grows, Biden tells migrants not to come to U.S.

He defends dismantling of Trump's policies

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden on Tuesday urged migrants not to come to the United States, as criticism mounted over a surge in people arriving at the southern border with Mexico, including thousands of unaccompanied children.

"Yes I can say quite clearly don't come over... Don't leave your town or city or community," he said in an interview with ABC News, addressing the migrants.

Speaking hours after his head of homeland security defended the administration's immigration policies, Mr. Biden also shrugged off claims that his dismantling of former President Donald Trump's tough stance had encouraged the surge, pointing out that there had been similar surges in 2019 and 2020.

"The idea that Joe Biden said 'come' - I heard the other day that they're coming because I'm a nice guy... Here's the deal, they're not," he said.

On January 20, his first day in office, Mr. Biden scrapped several of Donald Trump's contentious immigration policies, including halting new construction of a border wall and proposing legislation to create a citizenship pathway for the nearly 11 million people living illegally in

Japan court backs same-sex marriage

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TOKYO

Japan's failure to recognise same-sex marriage is unconstitutional, a court ruled on Wednesday, in a landmark verdict on the issue that campaigners welcomed as a major victory.

Lawyers for plaintiffs in the case said the ruling should pile pressure on lawmakers to accept same-sex unions, but the path to any such recognition is still likely to be lengthy.

The court in northern Sapporo ruled that the government's current failure to offer same-sex couples ways to "enjoy even a part of the legal effects that arise from marriage... violates Article 14" of the constitution, which mandates equality under the law.

DIRECT ADMISSION NOTIFICATION FOR DOCTORAL (PART TIME & FULL TIME) AND MASTER'S PROGRAMME FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2021-22.

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CORRIGENDUM

The clause (vii) of Qualifying Requirement of Notice Inviting Tender (No.10/CE(CM)/UPCL-10/2020-2021-BANKING OF ENERGY) published on dated 14.03.2021 in various news papers is hereby substituted and shall be read as under:

(vii) The bidder has to submit a self declaration on Rs. 100/- non-judicial stamp paper declaring that the bidder has cleared all his dues/liabilities and has no outstanding net financial liability/net dues towards UPCL on the last date of submission of bid.

UPCL reserve the right to unilaterally reject the bid at any stage of the processing of the tender if the declaration submitted by the bidder is found false/incorrect/misrepresented.

All other terms and conditions of the Tender shall remain unchanged.

No.124/EE(CM)/UPCL-A-2
Dated 17.03.2021 SE (Commercial)

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MARKET WATCH

	PRICE	CHANGE
Sensex	49,802	-1.12
US Dollar	72.55	0.00
Gold	44,519	0.09
Brent oil	67.49	-0.68

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	688.25	-29.10
Asian Paints	2422.95	-45.65
Axis Bank	727.90	-9.85
Bajaj Auto	3569.60	-84.85
Bajaj Finserv	9525.10	-88.20
Bajaj Finance	5259.80	-96.15
Bharti Airtel	522.90	-6.40
BPCL	432.05	-21.80
Britannia Ind	3467.90	-21.20
Cipla	772.15	-20.15
Coal India	139.85	-5.85
Divis Lab	3378.30	0.05
Dr Reddys Lab	4355.85	-93.85
Eicher Motors	2647.00	-14.05
GAIL (India)	138.40	-4.85
Grasim Ind	1367.10	-17.40
HCL Tech.	987.45	-19.80
HDFC	2515.55	5.15
HDFC Bank	1495.35	-16.80
HDFC Life	689.80	-13.25
Hero MotoCorp	3190.55	-64.50
Hindalco	326.40	-7.50
Hind Unilever	2226.30	-17.75
ICICI Bank	589.50	-5.45
IndusInd Bank	1008.95	-25.75
Infosys	1387.00	3.00
Indian Oil Corp	98.20	-2.20
ITC	210.60	2.75
JSW Steel	422.50	-3.45
Kotak Bank	1868.35	-34.85
L&T	1437.65	-24.15
M&M	836.95	-5.90
Maruti Suzuki	7064.65	-85.65
Nestle India Ltd.	14655.75	-286.20
NTPC	106.55	-3.00
ONGC	109.35	-5.75
PowerGrid Corp	220.45	-4.00
Reliance Ind	2055.35	-45.25
SBI Life	888.95	-25.10
State Bank	368.15	-10.40
Shree Cement	26842.20	-588.60
Sun Pharma	584.75	-17.55
Tata Motors	305.80	-14.15
Tata Steel	704.40	-19.65
TCS	3112.95	2.90
Tech Mahindra	1020.05	-6.50
Titan	1472.55	-28.40
UltraTech Cement	6520.25	-119.70
UPL	609.20	-11.05
Wipro	419.65	-9.65

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	72.34	72.66
Euro	86.07	86.45
British Pound	100.50	100.98
Japanese Yen (100)	66.24	66.53
Chinese Yuan	11.12	11.17
Swiss Franc	77.90	78.25
Singapore Dollar	53.69	53.93
Canadian Dollar	58.01	58.27
Malaysian Ringgit	17.54	17.64

Source: Indian Bank

NPS, APY subscribers rise 22% to 4.2 cr. in Feb.

NEW DELHI
Subscribers under NPS and APY pension schemes grew by almost 22% to 4.2 crore at February-end, government data showed. **PTI**

New DFI must curb reliance on foreign funds, says K.V. Kamath

India's sovereign rating must go up at least a notch: former development banker

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Making a case for an upgrade in India's sovereign rating, former New Development Bank president K.V. Kamath on Wednesday said the new development finance institution (DFI) cleared by the Union Cabinet must be careful about preventing 'excessive reliance' on foreign funds.

"With all the efforts that the government is making, I would think that the sovereign rating itself would need to move up. I don't think that they can hold India's rating where it is; whenever you look at this rating is misplaced by at least a notch, if not more," Mr. Kamath said. The Economic



Hard truth: Even global development banks' soft loans are 'not really soft', says Mr. Kamath. ■ P. SIVAKUMAR

NPAs likely to rise in first half of 2021: FICCI-IBA

Bad debts expected to be above 10%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

Asset quality of banks, which saw some improvement in the second half of 2020, is likely to worsen during the first six months of 2021, a survey showed.

The findings are part of the 12th round of bankers' survey carried out by FICCI-IBA between July and December 2020.

The survey was conducted on 20 banks, including public sector, private sector and foreign banks.

In the current round of the survey, half of the respondent banks reported a decline in NPAs during the second half of 2020. About 78% of participating state-

run banks cited a reduction in NPA levels. "However, in terms of outlook, nearly 68% of respondent bankers expect the NPA levels to be above 10% in the first half of 2021," the survey showed.

Close to 37% of respondents expect NPA levels to be upwards of 12%.

India seeks quick solutions in its bid to keep the series alive

Home side has to deal with selection questions and PowerPlay batting issues against Wood and Archer; winning toss will help, given the success of chasing sides so far

ENGLAND IN INDIA

ASHWIN ACHAL
AHMEDABAD

Much was made of the importance of winning the toss and batting first in the preceding Test series, but as it turns out, the spin of the coin has played an equally vital role in the T20Is. Only this time, opting to field has been the preferred option, leading to easy victories for the chasing side in all three outings so far.

Trailing 1-2 in the five-match series, India skipper Virat Kohli will hope to win the toss and bat second in the fourth T20I here on Thursday.

Awkward, sticky bounce
A combination of factors has contributed to this trend. On the slow Narendra Modi Stadium pitches, the early overs have offered an awkward, sticky bounce. This has forced normally attacking batsmen to bide their time in order to come to grips with the surface.

In the first and third T20Is, India's task was made that much harder by the brilliance of Jofra Archer and Mark Wood. Both England pacers have been rapid, touching the 150 kmph mark, while generating steep



Nothing going right: Rahul has scored just one run in three innings in this series. ■ SPORTZPICS/BCCI

bounce from short of a length. They have attacked the stumps as well, evidenced by Wood cleaning up K.L. Rahul with a terrific in-dipper on Tuesday, and when Wood and Archer hit timber to send back Shikhar Dhawan and Rahul respectively in the first outing.

Restricted to measly returns in the PowerPlay – 22/3 in the first T20I and 24/3 in the third – India was forced to play catch-up.

England captain Eoin Morgan has preferred to chase, a sentiment echoed by teammate Jos Buttler. "In T20 cricket in general, there

seems to be a trend where batting second is advantageous," Buttler said, after his unbeaten 83 on Tuesday.

Clarity of thought
Buttler was likely referring to the clarity of thought when hunting a fixed target, as opposed to spending time to as-

sess a good total when batting first. The dew factor under lights – which leads to bowlers facing difficulty in gripping the ball – also sways the argument in favour of chasing.

India, meanwhile, has some selection questions to answer. Will Suryakumar Yadav – left out for the third T20I despite not getting a chance to bat on his international debut on Sunday – be given another chance to prove his worth? And what of Rahul, who has scored only one run in the series so far. If Rahul is dropped, Ishan Kishan could move up from one-drop to opener – a spot where he tasted great success in the second T20I.

The teams (from):

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

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

Match starts at 7 p.m.

Special 100 for 'pioneer' Morgan

Buttler hails his captain for becoming only the fourth male cricketer to feature in 100 T20Is

ASHWIN ACHAL
AHMEDABAD

From making his international debut for Ireland in 2006 to earning his 100th T20I cap for England, it has been an incredible journey for Eoin Morgan.

In the third T20I here on Tuesday, Morgan became the first England men's player and fourth in history – after Shoaib Malik, Rohit Sharma and Ross Taylor – to play in 100 T20Is. Morgan has donned the role of captain in 57 outings, and under his leadership, England has reached the top of the ICC



Morgan... an unforgettable moment. ■ ECB



world team rankings.

And of course, Morgan was central to England's most famous limited-overs triumph – at the 2019 ICC 50-over World Cup. With the bat, the Dublin-born south-paw can pull off the unorthodox reverse-sweeps and classic drives with equal ease. The 34-year-old is the crown jewel in England's white-ball set-up.

Emotions ran high before play began on Tuesday, when teammate Jos Buttler spoke a few words and presented a special cap to his

captain. "The words that he (Buttler) said did warm my heart. It meant a huge amount to me," Morgan told the host broadcaster.

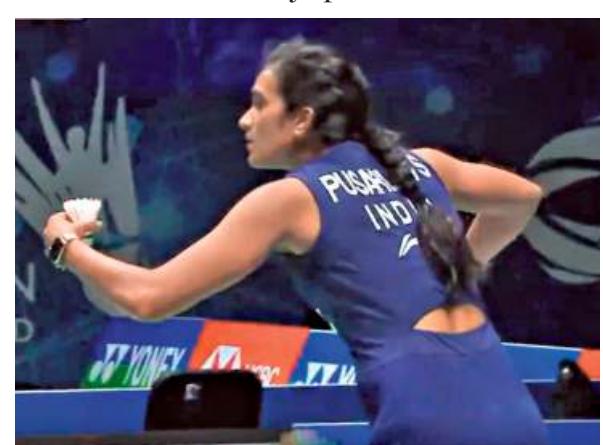
Buttler was effusive in his praise for Morgan, describing him as a 'pioneer'. "Morgan has been a pioneer for England's white-ball cricket. He has always been ahead of the curve, alongside Kevin Pietersen. They were two guys I always looked to in white-ball teams who could do it a bit differently, take the game forward and be ahead of the curve."

Selfless

"As a leader, Morgan has taken English white-ball cricket to a place it has never been before. We all enjoy playing for him, in the environment he has created. He's a selfless guy, but I reminded him that today really was about him and it's no mean feat to get 100 caps," Buttler said in a media interaction.

Sindhu starts well

Srikanth and Kashyap crash out



All-round game: PV. Sindhu displayed a wide range of strokes in her win over Sonia Cheah. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Gurbaz
delivers for
Afghanistan



Gurbaz. ■ FILE PHOTO

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ABU DHABI

Opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz smashed a half-century to help Afghanistan register a 48-run win over Zimbabwe in the first T20I on Wednesday. Gurbaz smashed seven sixes and six boundaries in his 45-ball 87 to steer Afghanistan to 198 for five in 20 overs.

Rashid Khan (three for 28), Karim Janat (two for 14) and Fareed Ahmad (two for 31) then restricted Zimbabwe to 150 for seven to give Afghanistan a 1-0 lead in the three-match series.

The scores: Afghanistan 198/5 in 20 overs (Rahmanullah Gurbaz 87, Asghar Afghan 55) bt Zimbabwe 150/7 in 20 overs (T. Kamunhukamwe 44, Rashid Khan 3/28).

South Africa finishes in style with a five-wkt. win

Mithali comes up with unbeaten half-century to bail her team out, but her effort not enough

SA IN INDIA

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
LUCKNOW

South Africa revealed the depth of its resources as it beat India by five wickets in the fifth one-day, to wrap up the series 4-1, at the Atal

Bihari Vajpayee Ekana Stadium on Wednesday.

On a pitch, different from the ones used in the previous matches, there was some support for the Indian spinners in the second innings after the host had lost its fourth toss.

Left-arm spinner Rajesh-

wari Gayakwad troubled the Proteas with three for 13 from 10 overs, but the visitors recovered from being down 27 for three to script a memorable victory.

Losing early wickets

With the high-scoring Lizelle Lee, the 'Player of the Series', not playing and South Africa struggling after losing early wickets, there was scope for an intense fight. However, it was not to be. Mignon du Preez and 'Player of the Match' Anneke Bosch turned the tide in South Afri-

ca's favour with half centuries and a 96-run partnership, before two smart catches by skipper Mithali Raj revived the hopes in the Indian camp.

The aspirations of the home team were dashed as Marizanne Kapp and Nadine de Klerk saw South Africa through with an unbroken 58-run alliance.

Earlier, India was in deep trouble at 53 for three, before Mithali came up with another rescue act, remaining unbeaten on 79 off 104 balls with eight fours and a

straight-driven six.

The Indian team suffered both in batting and bowling as Harmanpreet Kaur retired after an uncharacteristically slow knock of 30 off 55 balls.

Missing a fifth bowler

Harmanpreet's absence was acutely felt as India did not have a capable fifth bowler to capitalise on the favourable situation, while defending a modest total of 188.

Quite remarkably, South Africa was able to find the players to bolster the team at every turn.

SCOREBOARD

INDIA
Priya Punia b Kapp 18 (25b, 4x4), Smriti Mandhana c du Preez b Sekhukhune 18 (30b, 3x4), Punam Raut c de Klerk b Shangase 10 (18b, 1x4), Harmanpreet Kaur retd. hurt 30 (55b, 3x4), Mithali Raj (not out) 79 (104b, 8x4, 1x6). D. Hemalatha c Jafta b de Klerk 2 (15b), Sushma Verma lbw b de Klerk 0 (10b), Jhulan Goswami c Sekhukhune b Shangase 5 (19b, 1x4), Monica Patel c Wolvaardt b de Klerk 9 (11b, 1x4), Challura Prathyusha run out 2 (3b), Rajeshwari Gayakwad b Sekhukhune 0 (7b); Extras (b-1, lb-2, w-12): 15; Total (in 49.3 overs): 189.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-26 (Priya, 5.6 overs), 2-52 (Punia, 11.6), 3-53 (Smriti, 12.1), 4-137 (Hemalatha, 36.4), 5-139 (Sushma, 38.4), 6-158 (Jhulan, 43.3), 7-173 (Monica, 46.1), 8-176 (Prathyusha, 46.6), 9-188 (Rajeshwari, 49.3).

SAFETY SA BOWLING

Shabnim 6-0-30-0, Kapp 10-1-25-1, de Klerk 10-1-35-3, Shangase 9-0-43-2, Sekhukhune 8.3-0-26-2, Bosch

INDIA BOWLING
Jhulan 10-0-37-0, Rajeshwari 10-4-13-3, Monica 9.2-0-34-0, Hemalatha 10-0-44-1, Prathyusha 9-0-60-1.

Toss: South Africa.

Player-of-the-match: Anneke Bosch; **Player-of-the-series:** Lizelle Lee.

South Africa won by five wickets with 10 balls to spare and clinched the series 4-1.

First T20I: March 20, 7 p.m.

CHAMPIONS

Dominant display: South Africa outplayed India 4-1 in the ODI series. ■ BCCI

SUDOKU

7	9	6		1	5			
					3			
2	9	8	5	6				
				6	9	3		
3						6		
9	1	3						
	5	2	3	8	7			
2								
7	6		4	3	5			

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to puzzle 13198

V	H	I	W	S
O	R	I	N	A
E	N	I	C	R
U	D	G	M	E
R	O	L	H	T
I	L	L	O	E
S	M	N	T	E
H	E	P	O	S
E	P	O	T	E
O	T	T	E	A
R	E	E	T	A
V	O	G	H	O
G	U	I	N	R
E	S	M	A	O
A	C	A	T	N
Y	A	E	N	R

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

2	8	5	7	9	6	4	3	1
9	3	4	5	1	2	6	8	7
7	1	6	4	3	8	5	2	9
5	6	1	3	7	4	2	9	8
3	9	2	6	8	5	1	7	4
8	4	7	9	2				

