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NEARBY

SP-BSP combine gains more OBC heft in U.P.

LUCKNOW

The SP-BSP-RLD alliance in Uttar Pradesh gathered strength on Tuesday with the formal support of three smaller OBC-based parties of Purvanchal — in particular the Nishad Party, which had trounced the BJP in the 2018 Gorakhpur by-election.

NEWS ▸ PAGE 10

Two minors killed in house fire

NEW DELHI

Two children were killed when a fire broke out in their house in south-east Delhi's Shaheen Bagh on Tuesday afternoon. The fire department said they are yet to ascertain the cause of fire.

DELHI METRO ▸ PAGE 1

OPPORTUNITIES ▸ PAGE 17
DELHI METRO ▸ 6 PAGES

Very, very serious matters in CBI report on Saradha case: SC

Former Kolkata police chief connived with accused in ponzi cases, says agency

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday asked whether it is expected to close its eyes, "suppose if some very very serious matters" come to light.

The court's observation came after perusing the CBI's status report on the examination of former Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar in Shillong in connection with the multi-crore ponzi scam cases, including the Saradha and Rose Valley scandals. A three-judge Bench, led by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi, however, refrained from making any comments on the contents.

CBI team manhandled

The petition stems from a February 3 incident in which the West Bengal police manhandled a CBI team that went to Mr. Kumar's Kolkata residence to question him in the Saradha scam case.

The Supreme Court, while transferring the probe into the ponzi scams to the CBI from the State police, had ordered the latter to fully support the central investigating agency to reach the truth.

However, what began as a contempt case has now snowballed into the CBI levelling allegations that Mr. Kumar, as the functional head of the West Bengal government-appointed Special Investigation Team (SIT), actively connived with the high-profile accused in the ponzi scams to tamper with the crucial call data records (CDRs).

Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, for the CBI, said the statements made by the contemnors in their affidavits were misleading and false. The court asked the CBI to file an application listing the allegations, supported by full facts, in the next 10 days.

CONTINUED ON ▸ PAGE 10

Anatomy of a scam

Debjani Mukherjee

- The present case emanates from the investigation of ponzi scheme cases, mainly the multi-crore Saradha scam. The Saradha group collected **₹2,459.59 crore** from the public between July 2008 and April 2013. They have to return around **₹1,983.02 crore** to the depositors. And this is only the principal amount, minus the interest
- In 2014, SC ordered all cases to be given to CBI. It took over the probe into **76 cases** against the group and other companies. One chargesheet and six supplementary ones have been filed from November 2014 to January 2019

Sudipta Sen

- CBI wants to investigate the **"larger conspiracy"** which emerged during the probe. It wanted call data records of five mobile phones, belonging to main accused **Sudipta Sen** and **Debjani Mukherjee**, for 2012 and 2013
- **The CBI's allegation is that the West Bengal police gave the crucial call records after an unexplained delay of 14 months. Also, the call records that were provided were found to be incomplete and tampered with**

70% of fleet will be airborne in a month, Jet assures govt.

CEO, CFO meet Aviation Ministry and DGCA officials

JAGRITI CHANDRA
NEW DELHI

Jet Airways hopes to have over 70% of its planes back in air in the next month as the SBI-led consortium provides the beleaguered airline interim funding, its top brass told the government on Tuesday.

The management, including chief executive officer Vinay Dube and chief financial officer Amit Aggarwal, met officials of the Ministry of Civil Aviation and the Directorate-General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on the airline's operations.

"Our discussions were on how the airline can provide enough aircraft so demand can be met and passengers are not put to any hardship owing to either a rise in airfares or large cancellations," Pradeep Singh Kharola, Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, said at a briefing.

The airline now has only 35 planes flying, out of a total of 103 planes, and will aim to get 40 more planes airborne by the April-end, the officials said.

Waiting for a plan: Grounded aircraft of Jet Airways parked at Mumbai Airport on Tuesday. ▪ PRASHANT WAYDANDE

Mounting dues

Nearly 50 planes have been grounded owing to the non-payment of lease rentals, while others are inoperable because of maintenance issues that have led to large-scale flight cancellations.

The airline's chairman Naresh Goyal and his wife Anita resigned from the Board on Monday, effecting a resolution plan under which an interim fund of ₹1,500 crore would be pumped in by the lenders.

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JET GEARS UP TO RESTORE SUSPENDED FLIGHTS ▸ PAGE 13

BJP asks M.M. Joshi not to contest, fields Pachauri in Kanpur seat

Senior leader reveals party directive

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Former Union Minister Murli Manohar Joshi ruled out contesting in the Lok Sabha election, writing a letter to his constituents in Kanpur on Monday, stating that he was doing so after BJP general secretary (organisation) Ram Lal reportedly told him to withdraw from the fray. The party on Tuesday fielded Satyadev Pachauri in Kanpur.

Murli Manohar Joshi

The letter, circulating widely now, is unsigned but has been vouched to be genuine by Mr. Joshi's aides and BJP leaders in Kanpur.

"Dear voters of Kanpur, Shri Ramlal, General Secretary (organisation), Bharatiya Janata Party, conveyed to me today that I should not contest the ensuing General Elections from Kanpur or elsewhere," read the note by Dr. Joshi.

Earlier, former Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani was replaced by BJP president Amit Shah in the Gandhinagar constituency, former Union Minister Shanta Ram was replaced in Kangra, and veteran Kalraj Mishra was asked not to contest either Deoria or any other seat.

GENERATIONAL SHIFT ▸ PAGE 10

Six choke to death after entering septic tank in T.N.

Three of family among those killed in tragedy at residence near Sriperumbudur

In full swing: Rescuers at work at a house in a village near Sriperumbudur in Kancheepuram district. ▪ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Six persons, including a 53-year-old shopkeeper and his two young sons, died of asphyxiation in the septic tank of a house at a village near Sriperumbudur in Kancheepuram district on Tuesday.

The police identified the deceased as Krishnamoorthi, 53; his sons, Kannan, 23 and Karthik, 21; Paramasivam, 31; Lakshmikandan, 35; and Shradha Bhai, 28.

The police said Krishnamoorthi ran a shop outside his home at Selvaperumal Nagar, near Sriperumbudur. He had engaged a few conservancy workers to clean and repair the septic tank in the morning. The workers left after completing their task before noon, and Krishnamoorthi went into the tank later to check whether the work was done properly. He lost consciousness after inhaling poisonous gases and fell down in the tank.

Sons jump in

Realising that their father had fainted, his sons jumped in to rescue him. They too felt uncomfortable and collapsed. On seeing them fall, the family's tenant Paramasivam, Lakshmikandan, a worker in a gas agency and a migrant worker Shradha Bhai, who had come to the shop to buy something, tried to rescue the three, and climbed in. But all of them were asphyxiated, the police said.

Finding the six trapped, passersby and other neighbours alerted the 108 ambulance service and the police. Personnel of Fire and Rescue Services, who rushed to the spot, found them motionless in the tank.

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COMING SOON — ROBOT ▸ PAGE 5

'Use of NSA in cow slaughter cases wrong'

VARGHESE K GEORGE
BHOPAL

The use of the National Security Act (NSA) by the Madhya Pradesh police in cases of suspected cow slaughter was wrong and will not be repeated, Chief Minister Kamal Nath has said.

Terming the controversial use of the law that primarily targeted Muslims a legacy of the previous BJP government, he told *The Hindu* in an interview that instructions were given to the police to stop the practice. Mr. Nath faced criticism for continuing with the BJP policy after reports emerged that his government, too, had invoked the NSA in such cases.

"Objectives of the NSA are very clear. It was the previous government's policy to do this [use it in cow transportation cases]," he said, terming the practice a "misuse of the law."

INTERVIEW ▸ PAGE 9

Ishrat Jahan's mother moves CBI court

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
AHMEDABAD

Shamima Kauser, mother of Ishrat Jahan, who was killed along with three others in an alleged fake encounter in Gujarat in 2004, has approached the local CBI court here challenging the Gujarat government's refusal to grant sanction to prosecute former police officers D.G. Vanzara and N.K. Amin, charge-sheeted by the agency.

The Gujarat government recently refused to grant sanction to prosecute the officers. It reportedly stated that they were doing their official duty and therefore cannot be prosecuted.

In her application, Ms. Kauser submitted that the Gujarat government's decision would have serious repercussions and obstruct judicial proceedings. She also contended that the special CBI court had earlier rejected the application of Mr. Vanzara and Mr. Amin on the ground that there existed evidence against them in the crime.

"In August 2018, this court rejected the theory that the applicant's daughter was killed in an encounter and held that the chargesheet prima facie showed that the encounter was staged," she stated in her application moved by her lawyer Vrinda Grover in the Ahmedabad court.

She also sought a copy of the government's report on refusal to grant sanction.

Meanwhile, both accused have moved their application in the court, asking for proceedings against them to be dropped, following the Gujarat government's refusal to sanction their prosecution.

'Political parties most distrusted, Army, judiciary win people's trust'

Survey ahead of polls shows lack of jobs is single biggest worry

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Lok Sabha election, a public opinion survey in 12 States has found that political parties are the most distrusted political institutions in the country.

Also, one in five among those surveyed felt that unemployment was the single biggest issue facing the country today.

Negative net rate

The survey, Politics and Society between Elections 2019, found that political parties had a negative net trust rate of -55% (calculated as the percentage of respondent who trust them minus the percentage who do not). They are the only institutions with a negative net rate.

On the other end of the scale, the Army is the most trusted institution in the country, with an effective trust rate of 88%, while the judiciary – including the Supreme Court, High Courts and district court – enjoys an effective trust rate of more than 60%.

The report, published jointly by Azim Premji University and Lokniti, surveyed about 24,000 people from 12 States – Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal and Delhi.

Each State had about 2,000 respondents. Previous surveys over the past two years had covered 12 more States, and researchers expect to collate all three surveys for a more comprehensive analysis in future.

Electoral process

"For too long, studies on Indian democracy have focused only on elections, as though our democratic system can be reduced to the electoral process," said political scientist Zoya Hasan at the report launch on Tuesday.

She welcomed the survey which did not focus on how many seats would be won by which party, but rather looked into the perspectives and opinions of the Indian voter.

Apart from measuring institutional trust, the survey attempts to provide a glimpse into people's views on governance, sexuality, gender, nationalism, populism, caste and religious identities.

Researchers also asked respondents what was the single biggest problem facing the country. Almost 20% of those surveyed said unemployment was their biggest concern. Among the youth between 18 and 35 years, that figure shot up to 49%.

Other issues cited include development, growth and poverty (15%) and law, governance and corruption (13%).

Exploring perceptions about religious nationalism, the survey asked whether the government should punish those who eat beef, engage in religious conversion, do not stand for nationalism or refuse to chant 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai'.

Largest support

It found differences across States, with people in Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Uttarakhand being mostly likely to support punishment in such cases. Punishment for beef consumption had the largest support; only Nagaland and Jammu and Kashmir had a higher percentage of respondents who opposed punishment rather than supported it in this case.

Why elections are great for some stand-up artistes

Bucking the trend of celebrities and entertainers getting co-opted, comics are packing a punch

NAMRATA JOSHI
MUMBAI

In 'The Azadi Tour 2019', the latest edition of the political satire show *Aisi Taisi Democracy* that's currently travelling to various Indian cities, the three performers get introduced to the audience as "Rahul, Varun and Sanjay with none of them sporting that significant surname – Gandhi." The joke sets the tone for an irreverent political evening where the artistes – Indian Ocean musician Rahul Ram, and comics Varun Grover and Sanjay Rajoura – spare no politician or party. The subversive spirit of the show peaks with a song set to the tune of a popular Hindi film song, *Saawan ka mahina*, from *Milan* (1967): "*Chunaav ka mahina, hai mach gaya shor; phir aaya hai time to choose, who will screw us more*".

Sharp barbs: One of the early *Aisi Taisi Democracy* performances in Mumbai.

At a time when large sections of the mainstream media, film personalities, and entertainers are seen as being co-opted by a majoritarian political establishment, a handful of comics are bucking the trend. What's more, it seems to be working for them, especially in gaining viewership among the youth. So you have Kunal Kamra logging more than 5.9 million views on YouTube for his latest act, *Wah Modiji Wah*, which he kicks off by wondering, "Why can't I directly vote for Ambani? What is Modiji doing between me and Ambaniji?"

Akash Banerjee, who last year quit his job as vice-president, Radio Mirchi, to pursue political satire full time, finds that his *The Deshbhakt* is about to touch half-a-million subscribers within a year of its existence. The Indian Election episode of Hasan Minhaj's *Patriot Act* (that, among other things, talked hilariously about a "hand tugger/hugger" parallel between Donald Trump and Narendra Modi) got 2,140,008 views on YouTube at the last count. Meanwhile, 'The Azadi Tour 2019' is logging sold-out shows in city after city. It was in the run-up to the 2014 election that political satire first came into its own as a counter-narrative.

CONTINUED ON ▸ PAGE 10

Anti-dam monk opts out of poll contest for 'greater green cause'

Lama Lobsang Gyatso was to challenge Pema Khandu from Mukto constituency

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Lama Lobsang Gyatso, a Buddhist monk and a crusader against mega dams, has opted out of the Assembly elections in Arunachal Pradesh for a "greater green cause".

The Janata Dal (Secular) had given the 39-year-old monk a ticket after he had decided to challenge Chief Minister Pema Khandu in Mukto, one of the three Assembly constituencies in Tawang district.

Mr. Khandu is the BJP candidate from Mukto. His brothers – Jambey Tashi and Tsering Tashi – also are party candidates for the other two seats in the district.

"Saving the fragile Eastern Himalayan ecology matters more than contesting. I do not want the votes of people against big hydropower projects to be split since an environment protection forum is backing the Congress candidate," Mr. Gyatso said.

> **I do not want the votes against big hydropower projects to be split as an environment protection forum is backing Cong. candidate**
>
> LAMA LOBSANG GYATSO
> Crusader against mega dams

The 'Save Mon Region Federation', of which Mr. Gyatso was a leader, has declared support to Mukto Congress candidate Thupten Khunpen.

The monk, who was an administrator at the landmark Tawang Monastery, felt that it would be better not to affect the chances of Mr. Khunpen, a former abbot of a minor monastery in the district, in the bid to defeat Mr. Khandu, an advocate of hydroelectric projects.

Mr. Gyatso left the monastery after falling out with a former abbot who allegedly gave sanction to a number of mega hydroelectric projects. During opposition to two proposed mega dams in Tawang district, Mr. Gyatso was arrested on April 28, 2016. On May 2 that year, the police fired at protesters who were demanding his release, killing two monks.

One of Mr. Khandu's pursuits is harnessing the "huge hydroelectric potential" of Arunachal Pradesh. "Getting clearance for the projects is a major hindrance. The issue must be discussed," he had told industry captains last year.

His father and former Chief Minister Dorjee Khandu had scripted the State's hydropower policy in 2007, which entailed charging upfront money from dam developers per megawatt of installed capacity. Between 2007 and 2015, the State government signed agreements with public sector and private players for 142 hydropower projects ranging in capacity from 4.5 MW to 4,000 MW.

This policy was in line with former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's plan to add 50,000 MW of hydropower in India by 2017. Arunachal Pradesh accounted for most of the projects envisaged.

Mamata to attend united Opposition rally in Andhra

Will go to Assam on April 5; to release TMC manifesto today

STAFF REPORTER
KOLKATA

Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee will campaign for Telugu Desam Party chief N. Chandrababu Naidu as a part of the united Opposition's plan to counter the BJP.

She will reach Visakhapatnam on March 31 to meet Mr. Naidu and other leaders of the united Opposition. The show of strength will see participation from former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, Aam Aadmi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal, Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Tejashwi Yadav, National Conference's Farooq Abdullah and Nationalist Congress Party leader Sharad Pawar.

Mamata Banerjee • FILE PHOTO

On April 5, Ms. Banerjee is scheduled to fly to Assam for campaigning. She will then return to Bengal to commence the campaigning for her party candidates in the first phase of the seven-phase election.

Ms. Banerjee's support for her Andhra counterpart is being interpreted as a reciprocal gesture for the former during her three-day dharna after the Central Bureau of Investigation officials tried to raid the house of Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar in February. Mr. Naidu was also a prime presence in the TMC mega rally at the Brigade Parade grounds in Kolkata on January 19. Mr. Naidu had previously called Ms. Banerjee the "main pillar of the Opposition".

TMC manifesto

However, before embarking on her election campaign in the southern and the eastern States, Ms. Banerjee will release her party's manifesto on Wednesday.

Four get 25 years' jail for gang rape

STAFF REPORTER
BERHAMPUR

Four youths involved in the gang-rape of a minor girl in 2016 were convicted and sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment by a Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) court in Odisha's Berhampur on Tuesday.

The convicts had raped a 17-year-old girl at the MKCG Medical College ground in Berhampur on March 17, 2016. The convicts are in their late 20s and are residents of the city. They had abducted the victim from a nearby area and committed the crime.

The court also imposed a ₹50,000 fine on each convict. In case of default, they will have to undergo another year of imprisonment.

Senior BJP leader quits party in Odisha

Subash Chauhan was denied ticket for the Bargarh Lok Sabha seat

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BHUBANESWAR

Senior BJP leader Subash Chauhan, who was denied a party ticket to contest from the Bargarh Lok Sabha constituency, resigned from the party on Tuesday.

Mr. Chauhan quit despite being appointed vice-president of the party's Odisha unit.

In his resignation letter to the BJP's State unit president, Mr. Chauhan said he felt that the party was now being controlled by a particular leader and the Sangh Parivar was being used to protect him.

A former national president of the Bajrang Dal, Mr. Chauhan had contested the Lok Sabha election as a BJP nominee in 2014 and lost the election by 11,000-odd votes.

The BJP has fielded its national secretary Suresh Pujari from Bargarh for the upcoming poll. Mr. Pujari had unsuccessfully contested from Sambalpur in 2014.

After being denied the Lok Sabha ticket, Mr. Chauhan was offered a ticket to contest from the Bijepur Assembly constituency, which he had turned down.

Chief Minister and Biju Janata Dal president Naveen Patnaik is contesting from Bijepur this time.

Mr. Chauhan's resignation comes close on the heels of the resignation of Raj Kishore Das, a senior leader from Mayurbhanj district, from the BJP.

Mr. Das, who resigned from the party on March 23, had formally joined the BJD on Monday.

According to political analysts, the two resignations will affect the BJP's poll prospects in western Odisha as well as in the Mayurbhanj Lok Sabha constituency in north Odisha.

BJD symbol promotes folk dance form

'Jodi Sankha' troupes are much in demand at election rallies in Odisha

SIB KUMAR DAS
BERHAMPUR

Conch, the election symbol of the Biju Janata Dal, has become a catalyst for promotion of a traditional folk dance form named 'Jodi Sankha' from Ganjam district.

During most of its political activities, especially during election rallies, 'Jodi Sankha' troupes are used as identity of the BJD. Now these troupes are much in demand from all over the State.

Conch or 'sankha' is a salient feature of the 'Jodi Sankha' troupes due to which they are much sought after during the BJD rallies. Performers in colourful attire blow two fused conch shells while dancing and creating physical formations to the beats of drums. The accompanying instruments are traditional 'changu' drum and 'mahuri', the Odia version of 'shehnai'.

The sound of conch shells of the 'Jodi Sankha' troupes has become the BJD's electoral war cry.

'Jodi Sankha' performers leading a BJD rally in Berhampur. • LINGARAJ PANDA

Most 'Jodi Sankha' troupes have now started wearing green dresses to match the party's colours.

Martial arts

Convener of the Odisha Folk Foundation Bighneswar Sahu said that this dance form had a martial arts beginning as it needs high stamina. Sound of conch is considered auspicious and these troupes traditionally performed at religious functions, marriages and other processions. 'Jodi Sankha' troupes also perform during cultural fests throughout the country, he added.

Since the advent of the BJD in State politics, income of 'Jodi Sankha' troupes has increased.

Politicians of other parties refrain from using these troupes in their election rallies as it promotes the BJD's poll symbol, said a performer, Subham Kumar Sahu.

There are around 100 'Jodi Sankha' troupes in Ganjam district, each having 20 to 40 members. At times, several 'Jodi Sankha' troupes are called together for big rallies. The rally organised in Berhampur on March 3 to welcome Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik during his visit to inaugurate the Janibili drinking water project was led by around 1,000 'Jodi Sankha' performers.

Pabitra Mohapatra of 'Gangeswar Jugal Sankha Badya' troupe of Narendrapur said that although there is little scope to show up real artistry during political rallies, yet it provides necessary income to the performers to keep alive the traditional folk form. A troupe member G. Krishna Reddy of Badakusasthali village said that during election season they take the whole payment in advance. Based on the number of performers, 'Jodi Sankha' troupes charge between ₹20,000 and ₹40,000 for participation in any political rally.

Ajit vows to 'bury' BJP in Muzaffarnagar

RLD leader banking on social arithmetic of Jatav-Jat-Muslim in riot-hit district, but faces an uphill task

OMAR RASHID
MUZAFFARNAGAR

"Do you recognise me? I fought nine parliamentary elections, with both wins and losses. But why have I come to Muzaffarnagar to contest election, you tell me?"

The question is directed at an audience of men and boys gathered around a Ravidas temple, a place of worship for Dalits, in Ladwa, a village in western Uttar Pradesh's Muzaffarnagar district.

There are Dalits, Muslims, Jats, and OBC communities like Kashyaps/Dheevar in the audience, most of whom are seated on neatly arranged red plastic chairs or standing in clusters.

Their eyes are locked at the makeshift stage, dressed in banners of three parties – Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party and Rashtriya Lok Dal – where a bespectacled man wearing a white kurta-pyjama is standing holding the microphone.

"I have come to Muzaffarnagar because you are responsible for bringing the BJP to power. You fought with each other and destroyed the *bhaichara* [brotherhood]. As a result of that you have to bear Modi today," he says.

RLD chief Ajit Singh addressing a public meeting in Amirnagar, Muzaffarnagar. ▪SANDEEP SAXENA

New challenge

Now 80, RLD chief Ajit Singh has had many ups and downs in his political career, but facing a steep downward curve since 2013, perhaps the stakes have never been higher for his party as they are in the 2019 election.

Moving out from his traditional seat of Baghpat, Mr. Singh has played a gamble by deciding to contest from Muzaffarnagar, a constituency which was marred by communal violence in 2013, triggering a communal polarisation which eventually helped the BJP sweep the State.

While he has an uphill task to overturn the deficit from 2014, when the BJP's Sanjeev Balyan secured a massive 6.53 lakh votes (58.98%), his fight is bolstered by the support of the SP and the BSP. Mr. Singh is going from village to village addressing nukkad sabhas to connect with his new electorate in the sugar belt.

"You want to bear Modi for five more years," he asks the crowd at Ladwa. Some of them reply: "No, not any more." Mr. Singh then says: "Maintain your bhaichara, and Modi will disappear. You did that in Kairana, didn't the BJP lose?"

The 2013 communal violence demolished the RLD's carefully stitched decades old Jat-Muslim coalition. The results were clear in 2014; Mr. Singh himself stood a humiliating third from his bastion Baghpat.

The Hindu followed Mr. Singh through his nukkad sabhas and found most of his attacks targeted at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, backed by his desire to restore the RLD's lost social coalition. "Just defeating Modi won't do. You will have to bury him. You will have to uproot him," he tells the crowd, his fist smacking the air passionately.

The audience bursts into claps and shouts of "Chaudhary Ajit Singh zindabad" resonating in the open venue. "Modi, your *achhe din* are gone, our *achhe din* are coming," he declares.

Local support

After the sabha is over, Mr. Singh moves into his SUV and the cavalcade drives past sugarcane and wheat fields and reaches the house of a prominent RLD old-timer, a farmer, to pacify him. To secure his win, Mr. Singh would require to revive support of all such disgruntled loyalists and the farmer, despite not being in the best of health, is convinced to address a nukkad sabha for Mr. Singh at the next location, Titavi. Along the way, drum beats, shower of flowers and handshakes welcome the Jat veteran.

At Titavi, explains to people the economic downfall caused by the riots and how the local steel rod factories are still shut. "I want to bring Muzaffarnagar back to the same position where it was before the riots," he says.

With the SP and BSP in alliance with the RLD, Mr. Singh has ensured consolidation of the Jatavs and Muslims, with the latter itself making up for 41% of the district population. That the combined vote of the SP, BSP and RLD in each of the five Assembly segments of Muzaffarnagar in 2017 polls had crossed 50% also presents a hope for him.

However, to ensure a victory and galvanise his party, he faces the challenge of reviving his appeal among the Jats, a section of whom are still inclined towards Mr. Modi and Mr. Balyan, who himself is a local Jat.

To woo them, Mr. Singh focuses on issue of cane dues, menace of stray cattle and joblessness, and accuses the BJP of trying to divide the country in the name of the Army, which also recruits from the Jat community.

Farmers' woes

The RLD chief strikes a chord with Virendra Singh, a Jat farmer listening patiently in the crowd. Virendra complains that the rate of milk and cattle have fallen under the BJP rule. Another Jat, Rajendra Singh, hits out at Mr. Modi over the unemployment issue, while farmer Soraj Singh, a traditional RLD voter, regrets voting for the BJP in 2014 due to the riots. "All they did was increase the power tariff. Even if the BJP fields a Jat, we will vote for Chaudhary ji," says Soraj.

Raj Kumar, a Jatav, also speaks against the BJP. "We are fed up of BJP. I lost ₹80,000 during demonetisation."

A few kilometres away in Kutba village, the opinion is, however, split, with many Jats still supporting Mr. Modi and happy to see the back of the previous Muslim MPs from Muzaffarnagar. Current MP Sanjeev Balyan hails from Kutba, which along with its adjoining village Kutbi, witnessed eight deaths during the 2013 violence.

While young Akshay Kumar praises the sitting MP for building metalled roads, widening the canal track and setting up solar panels, Randheer Singh, a farmer, is happy with the ₹2,000 he received under the PM KISAN scheme. They also praise the Balakot air strikes, with one local comparing Mr. Modi to a patriotic king.

Parveen Balyan, who works at a local sugar mill, compares the alliance partners to "thieves" ganging up against Mr. Modi. He also questions Mr. Singh for choosing Muzaffarnagar. "For 20 years he was a Minister and an MP but what work did he do?" asks Parveen.

Like a section of Jats, OBC groups like Kashyaps, Dheevars and Julahas, and upper castes are also tilted towards the BJP. "We don't care about the candidate, we want BJP," says Sonu, a Julaha, in Dhindhawali. His namesake, Sonu, a Rohilla Rajput, admits Mr. Singh has the arithmetic to back up a strong fight but still expects the BJP to win. "All I want is a strong government, a BJP government," he says.

Former BJP leaders join Congress in Rajasthan

12 Independent MLAs also inducted

MOHAMMED IQBAL
JAIPUR

Former BJP leaders Ghanshyam Tiwari, Surendra Goyal and Janardan Singh Gehlot joined the Congress in the presence of party president Rahul Gandhi at an event of party workers here on Tuesday.

Twelve Independent MLAs were also inducted into the Congress as associate members after they agreed to support the ruling party in the Rajasthan Assembly.

Mr. Tiwari, a six-time BJP MLA and considered a hardliner, had rebelled against the then Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje and floated the Bharat Vahini Party ahead of the 2018 Assembly elections. Mr. Goyal, a Minister in the previous Vasundhara Raje government, had resigned from the BJP after being denied ticket from Jaitaran constituency in the Assembly polls.

Mr. Gehlot, who was originally in the Congress, had resigned and joined the BJP in 2008 when he was denied party ticket from Karauli constituency. Jaipur Zila Pramukh Moolchand Meena and Jaipur Mayor Vishnu Lata also joined the Congress at the meeting of booth-level party workers.

Welcoming the leaders into the party fold, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said nobody could have imagined that a BJP stalwart like Mr. Tiwari could join the Congress. "Mr. Tiwari has spent 50 years in Jan Sangh, RSS and BJP. One can understand the disquiet he must have felt in the Sangh Parivar, which has posed an existential threat to the country," he said.

BSP leader Dungar Ram Gedar joined the Congress as a full-fledged member.

DELHI Timings

WEDNESDAY, MAR. 27			
RISE	06:18	SET	18:36
RISE	00:09	SET	10:56
THURSDAY, MAR. 28			
RISE	06:16	SET	18:37
RISE	01:04	SET	11:44
FRIDAY, MAR. 29			
RISE	06:15	SET	18:37
RISE	01:55	SET	12:34

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	30	16
Safdarjang	30	16
Palam	31	17

Delhi Palam Today
32ºC Dry weather with hazy and pleasant morning. Day will be warm with partly cloudy sky.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
35ºC Pollution level will be moderate. A pleasant morning turns very warm day with partly cloudy sky.

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Battleground Bihar: Young voters laud Balakot air strike, farmers rue their fate

Elderly disillusioned, care little for polarisation in Nawada, Gaya constituencies

AMARNATH TEWARY
NAWADA/ GAYA

An animated political discussion is under way among a group of young men in Kharidi Bigha village in Nawada parliamentary constituency. Firebrand Bharatiya Janata Party leader and sitting MP Giriraj Singh has been asked to contest from the Begusarai seat. Alliance partner Lok Janshakti Party has announced the name of Chandan Kumar Singh, brother of don-turned-politician Suraj Bhan Singh, as the National Democratic Alliance's candidate from the constituency.

One of the young men says, "The BJP has committed a major mistake by shifting Giriraj Singh from here. He could have easily retained the Nawada seat." "Nawada has come alive ever since Giriraj Singh came here. Instead of crime, politics in Nawada [has] revolved around Hindu pride [since then]," Manish Kumar (25) tells *The Hindu*.

What's wanted most, though, is employment. Did Mr. Singh bring any factory or developmental project to Nawada? "No, not really, but at least he was socially connected and available to us," Raju Kumar (24) and Shib Kumar (26) respond immediately.

Poll huddle: Residents of Kharidi Bigha in Nawada discussing the upcoming Lok Sabha election. ▪RANJEET KUMAR

'PM's reflection'

Some of Kharidi Bigha's men work as waiters in Kerala, some have migrated to find employment in the unorganised sectors of Delhi and Jammu. For them, Mr. Singh is a political reflection of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. How? "He, too, talks about the pride of country and of Hindutva. Earlier, no politician had raised such issues, which are essentials of life," they say.

The group swells to a dozen and a mention of the Balakot air strike leads to animated responses, some in unison. Comments include: "Only a Prime Minister like Narendra Modi could have done this. Country should come first for every Indian, before any other issue." But will they vote for the BJP because of the air strike? "Yes, yes, yes...has it [the air strike] been done before?" they ask in one voice.

What about the BJP's alliance partner in Bihar, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar? " He has lost all his political credibility. One doesn't know [to] which side he will make his next move. He is a *paltimar mukhyamantri* (turncoat Chief Minister)," says Neeraj Kumar (22). He is a Kurmi, the same Other Backward Class (OBC) to which Mr. Kumar belongs.

But Mohammad Shagir Alam, a motorcyle mechanic from Ansar Nagar, a village under the Bundelkhand police station, says, "Ever since Giriraj Singh came to Nawada, this district has been completely polarised between Hindus and Muslims. We don't feel safe now, we don't venture out late in the evening, nobody knows what will happen. The situation was not like this before."

Last year during Ram Navami festival, there was a riot-like situation at the town's Sadhbavna Chowk and curfew was imposed for some hours. It was alleged that Mr. Singh visited those arrested in the case in jail. "It's frightening for people like us, who eke out their livelihood on a daily basis," adds Mr. Alam.

Nawada has 9.27% Muslim voters, while upper caste Bhumihars (the community to which Mr. Singh belongs) and Yadavs make up 12.06% and 16.69% respectively.

Unimpressed citizens

Elderly voters in Madho Bigha, Bhadauni and Akbarpur feel neither Mr. Kumar's government nor Mr. Singh have done anything for them.

"We are farmers. Will we eat national pride in the name of Hindutva? Social cohesion is more important than all these animosities prevailing between two communities in Nawada today," they tell *The Hindu*.

"Nothing has been done for farmers' welfare," says Ram Briksha Singh, a Bhumihar farmer.

A group of farmers are seen reading a Hindi newspaper in the afternoon sun by the roadside at Ganjas village in the neighbouring constituency of Gaya. When asked about the welfare schemes launched by the NDA government for the farmers, Surendra Yadav, Rajendra Chaudhury, Ram Vilas Singh, Subodh Rajak and Durga Paswan laugh out aloud and say, "We are yet to get the ₹6,000 that the Modi government has announced. Officials at the local block office need a lot of papers and when we go with the papers, the Internet connection fails, only to be restored past midnight."

They also rue that the government is taking away their agricultural land "forcibly" for the construction of a railway yard at nearby Bandhua.

Dharmendra Kumar, Sudhir Kumar, Vikas Kumar and their friends, students of Gaya College, are rooting for Mr. Modi. "We will vote for PM Modi, not for any local candidate. Modi must be given a second chance," says Dharmendar Kumar. To the question whether that would help them secure employment, Vikas Kumar says, "*Gulami se acchha berojgari hai* (it is better to be unemployed than to be a slave)."

"Every day Pakistan sends terrorists to our country. They kill our soldiers and innocent men. For how long will we tolerate this? Only a PM like Modi can give them a fitting reply," they say in unison.

Under the alliance's seat adjustment, Gaya has gone to the Janata Dal-United kitty this time, with sitting BJP MP Hari Manjhi replaced by JD (U)'s Vijay Manjhi. The Gaya constituency has 20.24% Yadav, 14.02% Musahar (Dalit) and 13.6% Muslim voters. Both Nawada and Gaya go to the polls on April 11.

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Vikhe-Patil star campaigner for Cong., despite son's defection

This will ensure that the leader will campaign for party's candidates, say sources

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

Despite his son contesting the Lok Sabha polls on the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) ticket, senior Congressman and Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the State Radhakrishna Vikhe-Patil has been named as one of the party's star campaigners in Maharashtra for the first and second phases of the elections.

Mr. Vikhe-Patil's son, Dr. Sujay Vikhe-Patil, joined the BJP after talks between the Congress and Nationalist Congress Party failed over the Ahmednagar seat. Mr. Vikhe-Patil then announced that he will not campaign in Ahmednagar and said that the party president Rahul Gandhi will decide on whether he will stay on as LoP.

Ticket to ride: Sujay Vikhe-Patil joined the BJP after talks between Congress-NCP failed over Ahmednagar. ▪ FILE PHOTO

Congress sources said that naming Mr. Vikhe-Patil as a star campaigner will either ensure that he goes out and campaigns for the party or is criticised by the high command, if he sits idle.

The list of 40 star campaigners includes former Indian cricket team captain Mohammad Azharuddin, actor Nagma Moraji, MP from Madhya Pradesh Jyotiraditya Scindia, Maharashtra general secretary of All India Congress Committee (AICC) Mallikarjun Kharge, Haryana general secretary, AICC, Ghulam Nabi Azad, UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Mr. Gandhi, Uttar Pradesh-East general secretary, AICC, Priyanka Gandhi-Vadra and former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh.

Newly appointed Mumbai Congress chief Milind Deora and his predecessor Sanjay Nirupam are also part of the list. Three former chief ministers of Maharashtra, Ashok Chavan, Sushilkumar Shinde and Prithviraj Chavan, too are featured along with AICC member Balasaheb Thorat, an arch-rival of Mr. Vikhe-Patil.

Congress may offer Shirdi to Shetty

Party requests Swabhimani Paksha chief not to break away over Sangli logjam

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

The logjam between the Congress and the Raju Shetty-led Swabhimani Paksha over the candidature of the Sangli Lok Sabha constituency in western Maharashtra will be resolved in the next two days, leaders of both parties said on Tuesday.

In a meeting between Mr. Shetty, who is member of Parliament from Hatkanangale (Kolhapur), and senior Congress leader Satej 'Bunty' Patil, the Congress has reportedly requested Mr. Shetty not to break away from the democratic alliance on the question of the Sangli Lok Sabha seat.

According to sources, the Congress is ready to offer Mr. Shetty the Shirdi Lok Sabha seat in Ahmednagar district in the event the Sangli impasse remained unresolved.

Raju Shetty

The scions of the house of former Maharashtra Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil are miffed at the Congress granting the Sangli seat to Mr. Shetty, causing the late Mr. Patil's grandson, former Union Minister of State and former MP Pratik Patil, to exit the party last week.

Mr. Shetty has already said his party had made an offer to Mr. Pratik Patil and his brother Vishal to contest on the Sangli seat, but that the brothers had refused.

'Don't want infighting'

The Swabhimani Paksha chief also made it clear that his party did not desire the seat at the cost of sparking an internal controversy within the Congress or creating ill-feeling among members of the house of the late Vasantdada Patil.

"The Swabhimani Paksha has no desire to covet a seat mired in controversy. We are aware of, and fully respect, the great legacy of Vasantdada Patil. Unfortunately, a completely misleading picture is being painted that the Swabhimani Paksha is responsible for the 'injustice' to the scions of the house of the late Chief Minister," Mr. Shetty said. He said the Congress ought to offer him the Sangli seat only if internal dissensions within the party are satisfactorily resolved.

From the start of their seat-sharing talks, Mr. Shetty's party has been demanding the Buldhana or the Wardha constituencies from the Congress. He has expressed dismay at being made an unwitting catalyst in a factional fight within the Congress.

"If we do not get the Sangli seat, the Congress is expected to give us the Shirdi LS seat. We have a candidate, Santosh Roham, who is an influential Ambedkarite leader in Ahmednagar," said Swabhimani Paksha leader Anil Pawar.

Mr. Pawar said, in a spirit of reconciliation, Mr. Patil would be participating in Mr. Shetty's election campaign, which will kick off from Sangli on Wednesday.

Rajendra Gavit joins Shiv Sena, will contest from Palghar

Party fields Narendra Patil from Satara constituency to take on Udayan Raje Bhosale

TANVI DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

The Shiv Sena on Tuesday put an end to ambiguity over its candidate for the Palghar constituency. Sitting Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Rajendra Gavit joined the Sena on Tuesday and his candidature from Palghar was announced soon after.

The Sena had initially promised the candidature to Srinivas Wanga, son of late BJP MP from Palghar Chintaman Wanga. However, Mr. Wanga has allegedly agreed to contest the Assembly election now. With this, the Sena has announced candidates for all 23 seats it is contesting.

The Sena and BJP are contesting the Parliamentary elections together, with the BJP contesting 25 seats and Sena 23 seats in Maharashtra. The Sena had announced its list of 21 candidates from Maharashtra last Friday in a press conference at Matoshree.

Happy family: Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray welcomes Rajendra Gavit into the party on Tuesday. ▪ RAJESH WARADKAR

Of the two remaining seats, the Sena has fielded Navi Mumbai MLC and Mathadi workers leader Narendra Patil from the Satara constituency. Mr. Patil will take on local NCP leader Udayan Raje Bhosale.

Meanwhile, the Palghar constituency had been a bone of contention between the two parties before the alliance. After Mr. Wanga's father's demise in 2018, BJP nominated Mr. Gavit, who had defected from the Congress, for the by-elections. Sena had nominated Mr. Wanga. Mr. Gavit defeated Mr. Wanga by a slim margin of around 29,000 votes. However, with the alliance in place, the parties did not want to upset either of their candidates.

Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray, while addressing the media on Tuesday, said, "While campaigning [for the by-election], I had publicly announced that I will send Mr. Wanga to the Parliament. But he has also taken stock of the situation and wants to work in the Assembly... Though Mr. Wanga has not asked for it, I give him my commitment, I will send him to Assembly."

Mr. Thackeray, welcomed Mr. Gavit into the family, and said that the candidate has done good work as an MP. "This must be the only alliance where we took the seat and the candidate. A saffron family has come together happily. We will win all seats in Maharashtra," he said.

Mr. Gavit is likely to contest against Baliram Jadhav of the Hitendra Thakur-led Bahujan Vikas Aghadi. Mr. Jadhav's candidature, which is yet to be announced, is supported by Congress, NCP and CPI (M).

ECI stays proposal to appoint UPS Madan as next Chief Secretary

SHARAD VYAS
MUMBAI

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has put on hold Maharashtra government's proposal to appoint serving Finance Secretary UPS Madan as the next Chief Secretary.

Sources said Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis had forwarded Mr. Madan's name after incumbent D.K. Jain was appointed as judicial member, Lokpal, last week. However, the ECI has raised queries in the State proposal and asked why Mr. Jain was given an extension in the first place. The Presidential assent to Mr. Jain's name came last week, after which Mr. Madan, who is serving as Additional Chief Secretary, Finance, was recommended.

D.K. Jain

However, the ECI clearances did not arrive until Tuesday evening, forcing the outgoing Mr. Jain to relinquish charge without an acting Chief Secretary place. The additional charge of the CS was given to UPS Madan.

Earlier, Mr. Jain, who was set to retire on January 31, was given a six-month extension by the Chief Minister citing the drought-like condition in the State and the 2019 elections. The two names tipped to replace Mr. Jain were Municipal Commissioner Ajoy Mehta and Mr. Madan. Mr. Madan refused to comment until the ECI cleared the appointment.

42 transfers impending

Senior officers said a total of 42 transfers are impending in the State bureaucracy before March 31. However, not all may require ECI clearances as they would likely result from Mr. Madan vacating his chair, resulting in a wide shuffle.

IN BRIEF

Solar scam accused moves HC in rape case

KOCHI

A woman accused in a solar scam on Tuesday filed a petition in the Kerala High Court seeking a directive to the State government to hand over the probe into her rape charge against MLA Hibi Eden (in photo) to an officer not below the rank of DySP, Crime Branch. The woman also sought a directive to the State government to take steps to arrest Mr. Eden.

Girl 'abducted' from Kerala found in Mumbai

KOLLAM

A 15-year-old girl, who was allegedly abducted from Oachira near Kollam, and Mohammed Roshan, 19, the first accused in the case, were found at Panvel in Mumbai on Tuesday. The Kerala police have secured a transit warrant and are expected to return by Tuesday night. Mr. Roshan claimed that he and the girl were in a relationship for the last two years and it was not a case of abduction. According to his statement, the girl is 18 and hence not a minor. He said they had decided to elope as both the families were against their relationship.

Gastroenteritis claims three in Telangana

NIZAM SAGAR

Three persons, including two children, died and 68 fell ill following an outbreak of gastroenteritis in Komalancha, Galibpur and Magdoompur villages in Telangana's Nizamabad district. The affected were being treated at health camps in the villages. They were stated to be out of danger. Primary reports indicated that the villagers consumed contaminated water, ice cream and food.

With Farooq in tow, Naidu invokes Godhra to woo Muslims

Flays intolerance on food, triple talaq Bill; promises 'namaz' room, Imam college

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday reached out to the substantial number of Muslim voters in Kadapa district, by invoking memories of the post-Godhra carnage. In his day-long road show in Kadapa and Kurnool districts, he targeted the NDA government as 'anti-minority.'

Accompanied by former Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minister and MP Farooq Abdullah, considered a pan-Indian Muslim face, Mr. Naidu tried to wipe away the wrath, if any, he had incurred by being part of the ruling dispensation till recently.

Having fielded a Muslim party worker Ameer Babu in the Kadapa Assembly constituency, Mr. Naidu promised a college for Imam training and a 50 sq. yard room for performing 'namaz'.

Winning them over: Former J&K Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah at a rally in Allagadda, Kurnool, on Tuesday. ▪ U. SUBRAMANYAM

'Pre-election stunts'

He also offered to rename the Almaspet Circle after Tipu Sultan and develop the famed Ameen Peer dargah as a tourist attraction.

Terming the airstrike on Pakistan and raking up of the Ram Mandir issues as NDA's 'pre-election stunts', Mr. Abdullah said present day India was not the truly pluralistic one envisioned by Mahatma Gandhi.

Mr. Naidu said Muslims were increasingly feeling insecure after the BJP-led NDA came to power. He flayed the growing intolerance on individual food habits, shrinking personal space for religion and increased vulnerability in the name of the Triple Talaq Bill. "When 2,500 Muslims were killed in Godhra, the TDP was the first party to raise it with Atal Bihari Vajpayee and I was the first to demand the dismissal of the Modi government in Gujarat. That is the reason behind his vengeance over me and my State," he said.

Terming the 'tacit nexus' between the YSRC and the TRS as 'unholy', Mr. Naidu said the people would never back any 'traitor' supporting the TRS, which "had publicly shamed Andhras ahead of the bifurcation and shunted us out."

Coming soon — a robot to clean septic tanks

Situation poses multiple challenges, says IIT-Madras group

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN
CHENNAI

A group in IIT-Madras is developing a robot to clean septic tanks. After mock trials in the lab scheduled for April and May, the robot will undergo site trials in July through August.

The dire need for such an invention is starkly obvious with six persons killed on Tuesday near Chennai while cleaning a septic tank.

Deepthi Sukumar, national co-convener of the Safai Karamchari Andolan (SKA), points out, "From January 2019 alone, some 15 deaths have taken place."

The number of septic tanks in India runs into hundreds of thousands, and though it is illegal, sending a person down to clean the chamber is not uncommon. According to the 2011 Census, about 400 million people in India use septic tanks.

"The liquid on top can be pumped out, but the bottom layer has thick sludge. It is to remove this that people are sent in," said Ms. Sukumar.

Technical obstacles

Propelling a robot in this environment is a major challenge, explains Prabhu Rajagopal of the Centre for Non-Destructive Evaluation at IIT-Madras, who has been working on the project for about four years.

To move in the fluid, a robot needs to have a propeller but the conditions in a septic tank pose specific problems.

> **Many toilets are built in remote areas with narrow streets where the pumps cannot enter**

Dr. Rajagopal explains, "If you use a rotary propeller, like in an aircraft, the blades will get congested within this fluid."

The group hence opted for bio-inspired fins. Three master's projects later, they now have a standalone six-fin propeller, which was developed by Srikanth, an M.S. student.

To simulate the tank liquid, they are now trying to procure sludge from the oil and gas sector, whose properties are similar and are working with Professor Indumathi Nambi of the Environmental Engineering group at IIT-Madras in this regard.

Sludge suckers

As a first step, the group has developed a cutter that can homogenise the sludge, which can then be sucked out.

Initially working with a simplistic cutter model, they now they have an umbrella-like cutter. "It is retracted, put into the septic tank, then it opens again; we rotate it and the contents of the septic tank are cut up. Then it can be sucked out using vacuum pumps," explains Dr. Rajagopal.

Talking to the SKA members, who work with sanitary workers involved in cleaning drains and septic tanks, added a sense of responsibility to the group. "We met two women who had lost their husbands when they entered septic tanks," Dr. Rajagopal recalls.

The group is in close talks with the SKA for a partnership.

It is not that cleaning solutions do not exist, but these are expensive. Dr. Rajagopal cites a cost for the IIT robot of ₹10-30 lakh, admitting that even that is expensive.

But the engineering challenges remain. For instance, the robot has to be spark-proof, because the septic tank environment includes gases that are inflammable.

Stand alone solution

However, using the cutter alone is less expensive and can be a stop-gap solution. Eventually, a complete robot will be needed that moves inside the septic tank, and that is what the group plans to develop.

"This is excellent work. Now, under the Swachh Bharat scheme, many toilets are being built in remote areas with narrow streets where the pumps cannot enter. This invention will be very useful for these cases," says Ms. Sukumar.

The funding for the project was met partly by IIT-Madras Socially Relevant Project on Compact Robotic Vehicle for Sewer lines and Septic tank inspection, 2017-2018, and by 2018 Carbon-Zero National Energy and Environment Innovation Challenge.

Mohan Babu joins YSRCP

Actor says he is not for any posts

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

Actor-politician Manchu Mohan Babu has joined the YSR Congress Party, claiming that the Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy-headed party is capable of alleviating the problems faced by people.

Mr. Mohan Babu, who was with the TDP since its inception and also a one-time Rajya Sabha member from the party, called on Mr. Reddy at his residence here on Tuesday.

He was accompanied by his son and actor Manchu Manoj. Mr. Mohan Babu exuded confidence that the YSRCP would sweep the election in Andhra Pradesh.

He told reporters later that he did not join the YSRCP for any posts or power and he would campaign for the victory of the party's candidates.

Manchu Mohan Babu

A long-time associate of TDP founder N.T. Rama Rao, Mr. Mohan Babu said though he was invited by various parties, including the TDP and the BJP, he preferred to join the YSRCP.

Revanth takes selfie route to win voter support

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

To catch the attention of young voters, Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee working president and Malkajgiri candidate A. Revanth Reddy chose a novel mode of campaign: inviting people to take selfies with him and getting an assurance that they would vote for him and in turn he would work to turn Malkajgiri into a smart town.

Given the craze he has generated by constantly attacking Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao's working style, there were a lot of youngsters who joined his programme taking selfies and assuring him that they would work for his victory. Several girl students too competed to get clicked with him. Mr. Reddy not only used the occasion to promote his candidature but also explained plans to develop Malkajgiri.

Revanth Reddy with youth in Malkajgiri.

The games people play to evade election duty

Govt. employees are coming up with strange excuses

M.P. PRAVEEN
KOCHI

Ever since election was declared earlier this month, Joseph (name changed) has been meeting 'friends' he never knew existed.

Having been associated with the election wing in the district for over a decade, Joseph's friendship is much sought after by government employees looking for exemption from election duty.

One such 'friend' asked for Joseph to the man himself. "I asked him whether he knew Joseph and he said their friendship goes back a long way," chuckles Mr. Joseph.

With elections round the corner, government employees in Ernakulam district have begun to come up with excuses ranging from the outrageous to the ludicrous to evade election duty. A flight ticket for a foreign trip booked long before the election dates were announced or a marriage fixed way back are some of the most tried ploys. "To make it look more authentic, some even come up with a wedding invitation card, which is not difficult in this digital age," said an election official.

Election also seems to be a time when people suddenly become anxious about the well-being of their aged parents. Some plead that they cannot leave their parents alone at home. However, there are some genuine cases, like a terminally-ill child. In such cases, the employee concerned needs to produce a letter recommending exemption from the head of his institution.

Polling officials for 2,251 polling booths in the district are drawn from among the employees of 3,332 offices. Each booth will be manned by a team of four - presiding officer and first, second and third polling officers.

"We have received lists of employees from most of the offices. Notices are being issued to those who have not yet done that," said the official.

The names will be fed into an Election Commission-approved software, which will deploy the team of officials at polling booths after three levels of randomisation. This ensures that that no officials are posted in a booth within the limits of their residence or work place.

Array of leaders

A party worker wears Congress president Rahul Gandhi's mask while others raise slogans as Bengaluru South Lok Sabha constituency candidate B.K. Hariprasad filed his nomination on Tuesday. ▪ K. MURALI KUMAR

In Kerala, a war of ideas against Maoists

G. ANAND
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

In the run-up to the Lok Sabha election, the Kerala police are pushing forward with a Winning Hearts and Minds (WHAM) programme to defeat an embryonic but potent left-wing extremist movement that is striving hard to make inroads into tribal settlements in Wayanad.

The densely forested district, perched high on the Western Ghats in north eastern Kerala, had shot into national focus recently following unconfirmed reports that Congress president Rahul Gandhi might contest the 2019 Lok Sabha election from there.

District Police Chief, Wayanad, R. Karuppu Swamy told *The Hindu* that the police were waging a war of ideas against Naxalite insurgents who appeared to be intent on stirring up cynicism about the political process.

Extortion of money

Two Naxalite Dalams, numbering not more than 20 heavily armed irregulars, have repeatedly appeared in tribal settlements in Wayanad recently to extort money from resort owners and also distribute pamphlets disparaging the electoral system. Their activity had led to a shoot out in which the police killed one suspected Maoist in Vythiri.

Assistant Superintendent of Police Vaibhav Saxena said the police were investigating more than 22 UAPA cases registered in 2018-19 in connection with the sighting of Maoists.

The police were pursuing a two-pronged strategy to deny Maoists operating space in the district. It entailed countering misinformation dished out by Maoists and instilling trust in tribal youths whom Maoists hoped to convert to their cause.

Stubble burning menace emerges in Kuttanad

The practice, common in Punjab and Haryana, is a major threat to environment

SAM PAUL A.
ALAPPUZHA

Paddy fields in Kuttanad, the rice bowl of Kerala, look black these days with some of them emitting plumes of smoke. Relatively a new phenomenon in this part of the region, setting paddy fields on fire after harvest by 'padashekhara samitis' and farmers is emerging as a major cause for concern.

It is posing serious health and environmental hazards. After the harvest of the puncha crop (first crop) began last month in Kuttanad, Fire Services and Rescue personnel and fire tenders have been pressed into action several times after the blaze went out of control, threatening to engulf even houses, life and property.

In Punjab or Haryana, residue burning is rampant after harvest, resulting in heavy smog choking the region every year.

A burning problem: A file photo of a paddy field being burnt after harvest near Thrissur in Kerala. ▪ K.K. MUSTAFAH

'Unaware of danger'

This season, farmers have undertaken paddy cultivation in more than 30,000 hectares in Alappuzha district, a major portion of which is in Kuttanad.

"The rampant burning of fields started only a few years ago. The smoke from stubble contains carbon monoxide and other toxic chemicals, which adversely affect human health and environment. However, the farmers are yet to be aware of the dangers. In 2017, a farmer died after inhaling the smoke while burning his field in the region," says Jayan Champakulam, district convener, Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad environment subject committee.

In Kuttanad, the farmers are burning fields to destroy stubble, to check the germination of weedy rice and prevent diseases, as part of preparing their fields for the next crop season. They believe setting the fields on fire will improve the soil fertility.

Experts, however, say the burning impacts the quality of soil as it robs the soil of vital nutrients.

"We are not recommending burning of stubble. There was a time when Kerala Agricultural University recommended burning of paddy straw following a pest attack. However, with global warming and scientifically speaking, we can no more justify it," a scientist at the Rice Research Station, Moncompu, told *The Hindu*.

No respite from heat as mercury continues to rise in Kerala

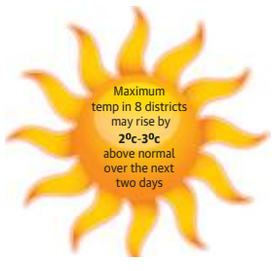
Two suffer heatstroke, 35 seek treatment for sunburn

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Large parts of Kerala continued to sizzle in the scorching summer heat on Tuesday, with the temperature crossing 39 degrees at Vellayani, near Thiruvananthapuram, and hovering around 38 degrees in Palakkad and Kottayam districts and Punalur in Kollam.

Heatstroke and sunburn cases were reported from several places even as the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority sounded a warning that the maximum temperature in eight districts could rise by 2 to 3 degrees above normal over the next two days.

Two persons in Ernakulam district suffered heatstroke on Tuesday, while 35 persons sought treatment for sunburn at various hospitals in Ernakulam, Thrissur, Pathanamthitta, Kannur, Malappuram, Kottayam, Kollam, Palakkad, Kozhikode and Kasaragod districts.



Another 23 cases of heat rash were registered in Thiruvananthapuram, Alappuzha, Ernakulam, Idukki, Pathanamthitta, Kannur, Kottayam, Kollam and Kozhikode districts.

An advisory has been issued for people in Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Ernakulam, Thrissur, Malappuram, Kannur and Kasaragod districts to avoid going out in the sun and working outdoors from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Policemen, journalists and party workers involved in the election campaign in particular have been advised to be cautious to avoid heat stroke, sunburn and dehydration.

School authorities and parents have been directed to take special precaution to keep children safe during the examination season.

The rising temperature is also taking a toll on public health, with 6,300 seeking treatment for fever across the State on Tuesday.

IN BRIEF

Bangladeshi nationals with terror links arrested

PATNA,

Two Bangladeshi nationals with alleged links to terror outfits have been arrested near Patna Junction railway station and documents related to deputation of Central forces in J&K have been found from them, officials said onTuesday. The duo, Khairul Mandal and Abu Sultan from Jhenaidah district of Bangladesh, are associated with the terror outfit Jamiat-Ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh and Islamic State Bangladesh, it said. PTI

Militant escapes from hospital in Imphal

IMPHAL

A militant of the proscribed outfit Kangleipak Communist Party escaped from a State-run hospital here on Tuesday, where he was undergoing treatement, police said. Th Nando was arrested in 2003 in connection with the murder for ransom of eight--year-old Lungila Elizabeth, daughter of ex-Minister Francis Ngajokpa. PTI

Two dead after car hits motorcycle, pedestrians

BHADOHI (U.P.)

A speeding car hit a motorcycle killing two persons, police said. Awadhesh Dubey, 55, and his grandson Khushaal, 5, were on the motorcycle, when they were hit by the vehicle on Monday night, they said. Khushaal died on the spot. A pedestrian also died in the accident, they said. PTI

Two killed in jeep-bus collision near Ambala

AMBALA

A bus and a jeep collided on Tuesday near a village on Ambala-Jagadhri highway, killing two persons, police said. Surender Singh and Angoori Devi died and five passengers were seriously injured. They were all travelling in the jeep, police said. PTI

Welcoming spring

People celebrating the traditional 'Fag Festival' to welcome the spring season at Rampur in Shimla on Monday. ▪ ANI

Kanhaiya takes a jibe at Giriraj Singh

'Minister's 'reluctance' to contest LS poll from Begusarai is comparable to a kid's refusal to attend school'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PATNA

Union Minister Giriraj Singh's "reluctance" to contest the Lok Sabha poll from Begusarai was comparable to a kid's refusal to attend school in the event of failing to complete his homework, the CPI candidate from the seat, Kanhaiya Kumar, has said.

"Watched the news on TV and learnt that the BJP Minister known for sending off people to Pakistan on free of cost tours is not ready to come to Begusarai for contesting the poll," Mr. Kumar said in a Facebook post late on Monday night wherein he did not mention Mr. Singh's by name.

A firebrand BJP leader, Mr. Singh had caused a stir ahead of the 2014 Lok Sabha poll when he said, "those opposed to Narendra Modi should go to Pakistan."

He has continued with similar outbursts since then, the latest instance being his threat that those not coming out in support of the Prime Minister's Patna rally on March 3 would be deemed "anti-national" even though he himself ended up remaining absent on account of ill-health.

Kanhaiya Kumar

"I have a nephew who, similarly, refuses to go to school whenever he fails to do his homework. But even he never thinks of sending the teacher to Pakistan. Neither does he hate anybody nor he wants to get anybody expelled from the school", Mr. Kumar added sarcastically in the post.

"This is the real India, vastly different from the shrill debates one watches on news channels," the former JNU Students' Union president, who first came into the limelight upon being booked for sedition in connection with alleged raising of anti-national slogans at a function held inside the varsity premises.

Mr. Kumar's remarks came in the backdrop of Mr. Singh expressing unhappiness over his Nawada seat going to ally LJP this time. On Monday, he camped in New Delhi where he is believed to have tried to apprise the BJP's top leadership of his sentiments.

Mr. Singh is at present the BJP MP from the Nawada Lok Sabha seat.

Both Mr. Singh and Mr. Kumar belong to the Bhumihar caste which dominates Begusarai, and if the "Mahagathbandhan" comprising the RJD, the Congress and other smaller parties fails to field a strong candidate, the debutant may end up posing a formidable challenge to the BJP veteran.

Three dead, 54 injured as bus falls into gorge

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHHINDWARA

Three persons were killed and 54 injured after a bus overturned and fell into a deep gorge at Dulhadev Ghati in Chhindwara, the police said on Tuesday.

The incident happened near Harrai town in the district late on Monday night, said Superintendent of Police Manoj Rai.

"A family from Chui village under the Amarwada police station limits, accompanied by villagers, was returning after immersing the ashes of a kin in the Narmada river near Barman when their bus driver lost control and the vehicle overturned," he said.

The SP identified the dead as Tan Singh Patel (70), Bhikam (60) and Sadaram (60). "Fifty-four persons suffered injuries of which 43 are still admitted to the district hospital.," the official said.

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 Wednesday: Thunderstorm accompanied with gusty winds & lightning likely at isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, coastal Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. Heat wave conditions likely at isolated pockets over south Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and coastal area of Saurashtra and Gujarat

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	–	35.2	19.2	Kozhikode	–	36.0	27.0
Ahmedabad	–	38.0	22.6	Kurnool	–	40.2	26.9
Aizawl	–	30.0	17.0	Lucknow	–	32.1	19.2
Allahabad	5.5	34.2	19.5	Madurai	–	38.0	24.2
Bengaluru	–	35.0	21.5	Mangaluru	–	35.2	25.4
Bhopal	–	35.1	20.8	Mumbai	–	39.5	23.4
Bhubaneswar	–	37.8	23.1	Mysuru	–	35.9	20.6
Chandigarh	–	28.2	12.0	New Delhi	–	30.3	16.2
Chennai	–	35.0	26.4	Patna	3.2	28.6	20.0
Coimbatore	–	37.0	23.7	Port Blair	–	33.0	25.3
Dehradun	3.4	28.6	12.1	Puducherry	–	33.0	25.0
Gangtok	0.5	12.8	11.9	Pune	–	39.3	18.8
Goa	–	33.0	26.0	Raipur	–	37.4	22.7
Guwahati	–	32.2	18.2	Ranchi	–	28.6	18.6
Hubballi	–	36.0	25.0	Shillong	–	23.4	11.6
Hyderabad	–	38.2	25.8	Shimla	5	18.0	5.7
Imphal	–	31.2	10.1	Srinagar	–	21.4	3.6
Jaipur	–	34.0	19.1	Trivandrum	–	35.0	24.4
Kochi	–	33.8	26.2	Tiruchi	–	39.0	24.4
Kohima	–	25.0	12.2	Vijayawada	–	36.5	24.8
Kolkata	–	35.1	24.0	Visakhapatnam	–	33.2	26.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO_2	NO_2	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	74	92	35	124	–	Moderate
Bengaluru	9	60	72	–	141	Moderate
Chennai	15	58	26	134	–	Moderate
Delhi	23	36	28	205	215	Poor
Hyderabad	3	85	40	133	123	Moderate
Kolkata	12	114	18	266	202	Poor
Lucknow	16	30	50	247	–	Poor
Mumbai	2	36	74	74	134	Moderate
Pune	37	18	36	147	165	Moderate
Visakhapatnam	10	41	27	43	68	Good

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Guwahati, Assam recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 269 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh recorded a healthy AQI score of 48

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

SO_2: 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_2: 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

IN BRIEF

After bomb threat, F-16s escort flight

SINGAPORE/NEW DELHI

A Singapore Airlines flight from Mumbai to Singapore with 263 passengers on board on Tuesday received a bomb threat, prompting the Singapore Air Force to send two F-16s to escort the aircraft. The flight landed safely at Singapore's Changi International Airport on Tuesday around 8 am (local time), the airline said. "We are assisting the authorities with their investigations and regret that we are unable to provide further details," a statement issued by the airline said. PTI

2 women among 4 Naxals killed in Chhattisgarh

RAIPUR

Four Naxals, including two women, were gunned down in a fierce encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district Tuesday, the police said. Of the deceased, two Naxals, including a woman, were members of the military wing of Maoists and were carrying cash rewards of ₹8 lakh each on their heads, they said. PTI

Narayanasamy hails income scheme

PUDUCHERRY

Puducherry Chief Minister V. Narayanasamy on Tuesday hailed Congress president Rahul Gandhi's promise of ₹72,000 per annum to the 'poorest of the poor' category as ground breaking and most progressive measure to eradicate poverty. He said the scheme was aimed at alleviating poverty and the plight of the poor families in the country would be addressed effectively by this.

Former block chairman hacked to death

KEONJHAR (ODISHA)

A former block chairman who contested the last Assembly elections was hacked to death in Odisha's Keonjhar district, triggering tension in the area on Tuesday, police said. Rama Chandra Behera, who had fought as an independent candidate from Ghasipura in 2014, died after being attacked near his house in Dhakotha village on Monday night. PTI

India's carbon dioxide emissions up 5%

IEA report shows China, U.S. & India together accounted for nearly 70% of the rise in energy demand

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India emitted 2,299 million tonnes of carbon dioxide in 2018, a 4.8% rise from the previous year, according to a report by the International Energy Agency (IEA).

India's emissions growth was higher than that of the United States and China – the two biggest emitters in the world – and this was primarily due to a rise in coal consumption. China, the United States, and India together accounted for nearly 70% of the rise in energy demand.

India's per capita emissions were about 40% of the global average and contributed 7% to the global carbon dioxide burden. The U.S., the largest emitter, was responsible for 14%.

Dark trend

The consumption of coal saw a significant rise in India, compared to the United States and China

	Coal primary energy demand (Mtce)	Growth rate (%)
	2018	2017-2018
United States	451	-4.5%
China	2,771	1%
India	600	5%
Europe	462	-2.6%
Rest of the World	1,113	1.4%
WORLD	**5,397**	**0.7%**

Source: IEA

As per its commitments to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, India has promised to reduce the emissions intensity of its economy by 2030, compared to the 2005 levels. It has also committed to having 40% of its energy from renewable sources by 2030 and, as part of this, install 100 GW of solar power by 2022.

However the IEA report, made public on Tuesday, showed that India's energy intensity improvement declined 3% from the previous year even as its renewable energy installations increased 10.6%.

Global energy consumption in 2018 increased at nearly twice the average rate of growth since 2010, driven by a robust global economy and higher heating and cooling needs in some parts of the world. Demand for all fuels increased, led by natural gas, even as solar and wind posted double digit growth. Higher electricity demand was responsible for over half of the growth in energy needs. Energy efficiency saw lacklustre improvement. As a result of higher energy consumption, carbon dioxide emissions rose 1.7% last year and hit a new record, the authors of the report said in a press statement.

The United States had the largest increase in oil and gas demand worldwide. Gas consumption jumped 10% from the previous year, the fastest increase since the beginning of IEA records in 1971.

India says it will cost at least $2.5trillion (₹150 trillion approx.) to implement its climate pledge, around 71% of the combined required spending for all developing country pledges.

Phone calls of Doval, Asthana not tapped: CBI

'Never did it on any telephone number'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Ajit Doval

The Central Bureau of Investigation has informed the Delhi High Court that phone calls of National Security adviser Ajit Doval and former CBI Special Director Rakesh Asthana were not intercepted at any point of time by the CBI Special Unit.

Responding to a petition filed in the court seeking probe into alleged illegal phone tapping, the CBI said it "never put any telephone number under surveillance illegally." The court had in January issued notices to the Centre and the CBI on the petition by lawyer and social activist Sarthak Chaturvedi.

Security of state

The Centre, in its response, said, "the interception by the law enforcement agencies is carried out in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states or public order or preventing incitement to the commission of an offence as defined in Section 5(2) of the Indian Telegraph Act." It additionally submitted that "Rule 419A of the Indian Telegraph (Amendment) Rules 2007 adequately provides for constitution of a Review Committee by the Central government and the State government, as the case may be, to review the directions for interceptions."

"The contention of the petition with respect to exercise of the right to speech and expression under Article 19 of the Constitution and protections guaranteed under the Constitution of India is not absolute," the Centre said, adding that Article 19(2) specifically provides for reasonable restrictions.

The day CJI dealt with over 700 cases

They are all defective, says Justice Gogoi; gives petitioners 2 weeks to clear mistakes

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Chief Justice of India's lists of cases showed an unusual spike in numbers on Tuesday. A total of over 750 cases were listed before the Bench led by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi and Justices Deepak Gupta and Sanjeev Khanna.

Later, in the post-lunch session, the Chief Justice explained the reason for listing so many cases before his Bench.

The CJI said the cases numbering from 12 to 751 were all defective. They have been lying in the Supreme Court registry, gathering dust, for almost nine years. Neither the litigants involved nor the lawyers who had signed on to represent them had bothered to cure the mistakes in the filing of these petitions. They remain literally abandoned.

CJI Ranjan Gogoi

The CJI just wanted to lay bare how such cases form the bulk of the backlog in the Supreme Court.

"They are all defective. Petitioners have not cleared the defects. These cases are pending since 2010, 2011, 2012," Justice Gogoi said.

The cases were identified and brought to fore by the Supreme Court Registry.

"You [petitioners and lawyers concerned] get two weeks to clear the defects, or all these cases are out of here," the Chief Justice declared. A lawyer urged four weeks' time to clear the mistakes in a case. "No, two weeks, that's it," Justice Gogoi firmly replied.

Pending cases

As of March 2019, the Supreme Court has 57,785 pending cases. Of these, 13,257 are either "incomplete" or "not ready" cases. That means these cases, both miscellaneous and regular ones, have defects which make them unfit to be listed for hearing before a judicial Bench.

China destroys maps showing 'wrong' border

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BEIJING

China has destroyed 30,000 world maps printed in the country for export for not mentioning Arunachal Pradesh and Taiwan as part of the Chinese territory, the official media reported on Tuesday.

China claims Arunachal Pradesh as part of south Tibet, and routinely objects to Indian leaders visiting the State to highlight its stand. The two countries have so far held 21 rounds of talks to resolve the border dispute covering the 3,488-km-long Line of Actual Control.

The maps were meant for export to an "unspecified country", state-run *Global Times* reported on Tuesday. Almost 30,000 "incorrect" world maps, showing Taiwan as a separate country and wrong depiction of the Sino-Indian border, were destroyed by the customs authorities in Qingdao in eastern Shandong province, it said.

ED arrests another accused in chopper case

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Sushen Mohan Gupta

The Enforcement Directorate has arrested Sushen Mohan Gupta, an alleged defence agent, in connection with the AgustaWestland VVIP chopper deal case. The agency has got his four-day custody for questioning.

Mr. Gupta has been arrested on the basis of disclosures made by another accused, Rajiv Saxena, who was recently deported from the United Arab Emirates. Mr. Saxena has now turned approver, expressing willingness to assist the Directorate in identification of others involved in allegedly bribing public servants for swinging the ₹3,700-crore deal in favour of AgustaWestland.

The alleged defence agent was instrumental in the routing of funds through several overseas and domestic companies.

The Directorate suspects his links with another accused Gautam Khaitan, who has been accused of floating companies in several countries to facilitate laundering of the funds received from AugustaWestland.

Govt. notifies new rules for drugs, clinical trials

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

The Union Health Ministry has notified the Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules, 2019, with the government stating that the move is aimed at promoting clinical research in the country.

The rules will apply to all new drugs, investigational new drugs for human use, clinical trials, bio-equivalence studies and ethics committees.

Time reduction

The highlights of the notification include reduction in time for approving applications, which has now come down to 30 days for drugs manufactured in India and 90 days for those developed outside the country. "Also, in case of no communication from Drugs Controller General of India, the application will be deemed to have been approved," the notification said.

As per the new rule, the requirement of a local clinical trial may be waived for approval of a new drug if it is approved and marketed in any of the countries (EU, U.K., Australia, Japan and U.S.) specified by the Drugs Controller General with the approval of the government.

"The new rules will ensure patient safety and an ethics committee will monitor the trials and decide on the amount of compensation in cases of adverse events," the Ministry said.

Is death by mosquito bite insurable?

It can't be called death due to accident in malaria-prone Mozambique: SC

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Is death by mosquito bite insurable as a 'personal accident'?

Well, not if the mosquito bit the insured person in the Republic of Mozambique, the Supreme Court held on Tuesday in a judgment.

The case concerns Debhashis Bhattacharjee, who died of multiple organ failure after being diagnosed with encephalitis malaria contracted from a mosquito bite he sustained while working in Mozambique in 2012.

His insurance policy covered personal accidents. Both the State and the National Consumer Dipsutes Redressal Commissions dismissed the plea made by the insurance company, National Insurance Limited, that the man died as a result of an infection. The company argued that a mosquito bite cannot be classified as a 'personal accident' covered under the policy.

The patient died after being diagnosed with encephalitis malaria.

The insurance company, represented by advocate Madhavi Divan, said death due to malaria was a common occurrence in Mozambique. Ms. Divan referred to the World Health Organisation's World Malaria Report 2018, which showed that an estimated ten million cases of malaria in Mozambique and an estimated 14.7 thousand deaths in 2017.

A Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud disagreed with the conclusions of both the Consumer Disputes Commissions.

The National Commission too had agreed that if the insurance company could cover events like snake bite, frost bite and dog bite then why not mosquito bites.

In his 16-page judgment, Justice Chandrachud acknowledged that being "bitten by a mosquito is an unforeseen eventuality."

However, the mosquito bit Mr. Bhatacharjee in Mozambique, which according to World Health Organisation has a population of 29.6 million people and accounts for 5% of the cases of malaria globally.

"It is on record that one out of three people in Mozambique is afflicted with malaria. It was not a peril insured against in the policy of accident insurance," Justice Chandrachud said and set aside the decisions of the Consumer Disputes Commission.

Sharp rise in H1N1 cases

R. PRASAD
CHENNAI

In a matter of three weeks, the number of influenza A (H1N1) cases and deaths in India has risen sharply by about 6,200 and over 225, respectively. From 14,803 cases and 448 deaths till February 24 this year, the number of cases and deaths till March 17 has touched 20,977 and 677, respectively.

The figures have been collated by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme, NCDC, Delhi, based on data from the States.

The number of cases reported till March 17 this year is far more than what was reported in the whole of 2018 (14,992).

Rajasthan continues to report the most number of cases and deaths, followed by Gujarat. In Rajasthan, the number of cases has increased from 3,964 (February 24) to 4,720 (March 17), while in Gujarat the increase has been from 2,726 to 4,296. Deaths from H1N1 in Rajasthan have increased from 137 to 178, while in Gujarat the increase as been from 88 to 125.

Delhi has the third most number of cases; the number increased from 2,738 to 3,484. However, the number of H1N1 deaths in Delhi has remained constant at seven.

The number of cases in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka has nearly doubled in three weeks. Uttar Pradesh had 905 cases and nine deaths till February 24 but the numbers increased to 1,680 and 21, respectively. In Maharashtra, the increase in the number of cases has been from 423 to 849. The number of deaths in the State has increased from 27 to 61. In Karnataka, the number of cases has increased from 554 to 959; the number of deaths has increased from zero till February 24 to 14 till March 17.

Maximum gambit

The Congress's minimum income pledge is high on ambition but low on detail

It would be easy to dismiss the Congress party's promise of transferring ₹6,000 a month to poor households as just a pre-poll gimmick by an Opposition party seeking to be one up on the ruling regime's minimal cash transfer scheme in the form of PM-KISAN. For now, the party has not fully spelt out the details of its minimum income guarantee scheme, Nyuntam Aay Yojana (NYAY), and has limited itself to saying this would be a flat transfer of ₹6,000 a month to identified poor households. There has been little word on how the Congress expects to finance NYAY. A ballpark estimate of the fiscal expenditure, to transfer ₹72,000 every year to the poorest 20% of the approximately 25 crore Indian households, would be ₹3.6 lakh crore. This is twice the estimated amount set aside for food subsidy and five times that for fertilizer subsidy in the 2019-20 Union Budget. It is not clear whether the Congress, should it come to power, will cut back on other subsidies and programmes in order to finance NYAY. There is also the additional problem of the identification of the poor – the Socio-Economic and Caste Census of 2011 is the most comprehensive exercise for this, but it has been riven by reliability and authenticity issues and has only been partially released to the public as yet. By having an inbuilt provision of targeting the beneficiaries, NYAY can fall short as other programmes have, such as the targeted public distribution system.

The devil in the detail and the financing of the scheme apart, the idea behind NYAY is not entirely unsound. An unconditional transfer of a specified minimum income support to the poor will go a long way in helping address immediate needs related to health, education and indebtedness. A large section of the targeted poor would include landless workers and marginal farmers in rural areas, and unemployed youth in families engaged in menial labour in urban areas. Besides shoring up income to meet such basic needs and pushing wages upwards, the transfer scheme can help spur demand and consumption in rural areas in particular. There are disincentives inherent in the scheme as well. A section of the beneficiaries could withdraw themselves from employment but this could be mitigated by the expected overall spur in demand in the economy through consumption, and by the rise in real wages consequent to the shrinking of the labour market. Limited cash transfers in the form of direct farm income support in States such as Telangana and Odisha have helped ameliorate agrarian crises. This was the reason why the BJP-led government came up with the PM-KISAN Yojana as a countrywide scheme. A massive programme such as NYAY, however, has no precedent. It might give a fillip to the Congress election campaign, but much more homework is required for its implementation. A dole is not a magic bullet; it can only be one among a clutch of robust and prudent welfare policies.

Barring arms

In banning semi-automatic guns, New Zealand has set an example for other countries

Just days after a terrorist attacked two mosques in Christchurch, gunning dead 50 worshippers and injuring dozens in a hail of bullets, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced a ban on military style semi-automatics (MSSA) and assault rifles. The terrorist, a self-avowed white-supremacist, had wielded more than one semi-automatic weapon during his murderous assault, heightening the lethality of the attack. "On 15 March our history changed forever. Now, our laws will too," Ms. Ardern said, explaining that the changes to the gun laws were aimed at making the country a safer place. That it took the lives of 50 people for New Zealand to tighten its gun laws is tragic, but the alacrity with which Ms. Ardern reacted in imposing the ban on MSSA and assault rifles has deservedly won her global acclaim. While New Zealanders don't enjoy a constitutional right to bear arms – like the U.S. Second Amendment protection – the island nation of just under five million people has traditionally had a high level of gun ownership, with estimates putting the figure upwards of 1.2 million firearms. In a clear reflection of the national mood and the readiness of the political class to take rapid and resolute action against the deadly weapons, the government won bipartisan agreement ahead of the ban, and the Opposition National Party leader endorsed it. New Zealand joins its neighbour across the Tasman Sea, Australia, in outlawing semi-automatics.

In Australia's case too, the 1996 National Firearms Agreement and buyback programme followed a deadly massacre in Tasmania's Port Arthur earlier that year. A lone gunman had used a semi-automatic rifle to shoot and kill 35 people, and wound 18 others, in a rampage across multiple locations in the popular tourist area. The fact that MSSA are almost twice as deadly in killing and maiming victims at the far end of a violent shooter's sights was affirmed by a study published last September in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*. The researchers found that given their ease of use, capacity to accept large magazines and fire high-velocity bullets, the semi-automatics were significantly more lethal. Both nations, however, allow licensed ownership of firearms, especially by farmers who need them for "pest control and animal welfare", and Ms. Ardern has now vowed to move on tightening the licensing rules in New Zealand. That the terrorist, an Australian, chose Christchurch to carry out his rampage shows Canberra's strict licensing and registration norms have had a deterrent effect. It should be a prompt for the U.S. to proactively move to tighten its gun laws, before more innocent lives are lost in preventable mass shootings.

A bridge to nowhere

Poor people are running from pillar to post as the Aadhaar payment bridge routinely obstructs their welfare benefits

SAKINA DHORAJIWALA, JEAN DRÈZE & NIKLAS WAGNER

Perhaps you will remember "l'affaire Airtel" – the mass diversion of LPG subsidies to Airtel wallets that came to light in 2017. Many of the wallets were unwanted, or even unknown to the recipients. Those affected, fortunately, included millions of middle-class Airtel customers who protested when the goof-up emerged. The subsidy money was returned, Airtel was fined by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), and the world moved on.

This is an instance of what might be called "diverted payments" – bank payments being redirected to a wrong account, without the recipient's consent or knowledge. What has escaped attention is that diverted payments have become a widespread problem in recent years, not so much for the middle class as for powerless people such as old-age pensioners and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) workers. The main culprit is the Aadhaar Payment Bridge System (APBS).

Shaky foundations

The basic idea of the APBS, an offspring of the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), is that a person's Aadhaar number becomes her financial address. Instead of having to provide multiple account details (say, her name, bank account number and IFSC code) to receive a bank transfer, she only has to provide her Aadhaar number.

Induction of a bank account into APBS involves two distinct steps, both of which are meant to be based on informed consent. First, the account must be "seeded" with the customer's Aadhaar number. Second, it must be connected to the NPCI mapper – a step known as "mapping". In cases of multiple accounts for the same person, the APBS automatically sends money to the latest-mapped account.

To understand the dangers of this "bridge", we must rewind to 2014, when the Jan Dhan Yojana (JDY) was launched. In the frantic drive that followed, millions of bank accounts were opened and seeded with Aadhaar in a haphazard manner, under relentless pressure from the Central government. Some JDY accounts certainly served a purpose, but many others were superfluous and created a confusing multiplicity of accounts. More importantly for our purpose, Aadhaar numbers were seeded into these accounts without proper verification.

Given short shrift

Haphazard seeding continued well beyond 2014 because the government wanted to bring all direct benefit transfer (DBT) payments – pensions, scholarships, subsidies, MGNREGA wages, and so on – under the Aadhaar payments umbrella. Government departments started sending bulk lists of bank accounts and Aadhaar numbers to the banks for accelerated Aadhaar seeding. Meeting the seeding targets was the top priority and due verification, once again, took the back seat.

Thus the groundwork required for APBS to work – reliable seeding of bank accounts with Aadhaar – had simply not been done when the APBS was rolled out. The seeding mess, it seems, was sought to be cleaned up by making "e-KYC" compulsory. This essentially means that account holders were required to go through biometric authentication to verify their Aadhaar number and identity information. To enforce e-KYC, many banks used the "ultimatum method": a deadline was set, and people's accounts were blocked when they missed the deadline.

Compulsory e-KYC became a nightmare for poor people, for a

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number of reasons: some did not know what they were supposed to do, others had problems of biometric authentication, others still struggled with inconsistencies between the Aadhaar database and the bank database. Among the worst victims were old-age pensioners. To this day, in Jharkhand, many pensioners are struggling to understand why their pension was discontinued after e-KYC was made compulsory.

A risky bridge

So far so bad. But there is worse: without waiting for the seeding mess to be cleaned up, the APBS was forced on millions without consent. Mapping (the induction of an Aadhaar-seeded account into the APBS), according to NCPI and UIDAI guidelines, should be based on an explicit request from the customer. This gives a measure of protection to educated middle-class customers. It ensures, for instance, that they know which account their money is being directed to by the APBS. For poor people, however, consent is a fiction. In Jharkhand at least, bank accounts have been mass-mapped onto the APBS without any semblance of consent, with or without e-KYC being completed – in other words, without necessarily verifying that an account has been correctly seeded with Aadhaar.

Recent discussions with local managers of 10 different banks spread across Ranchi district revealed that they make no clear distinction between seeding and mapping. The two steps are essentially conflated, based on default options and symbolic consent – sometimes just a signature on a photocopy of the account holder's Aadhaar card, or below a consent line printed in English.

The result of this premature and coercive imposition of the APBS is that diverted payments have become a serious problem in Jharkhand. For example, recent victims include Premani Kunwar, an elderly widow in Garhwa district who died of hunger on December 1, 2017, two months after her pension was diverted by the APBS to someone else's account.

Others affected are MGNREGA workers. Already discouraged by delays in wage payments, they have to contend now with diverted payments and other pathologies of the APBS. A recent study of the Indian School of Business (ISB), based on an analysis of more than 10 million payments in 2014-18, concludes that 38% of all the APBS payments of MGNREGA wages in Jharkhand "redirect wages to a completely unrelated account". This study should have set alarm bells ringing, but little has been heard of it so far.

Even if the ISB study's estimate (38%) is on the higher side, we do know from numerous ground reports that MGNREGA workers in Jharkhand often have great difficulty tracing or withdrawing their wages. For example, hundreds of workers in Boram block were mystified, a few years ago, when their wages stopped being credited to their Bank of India accounts. It turned out that wages had been redirected by the APBS to ICICI accounts that had been opened by business correspondents on their behalf without proper intimation. This is a precise analogue of the Airtel-wallet mix-up.

Lack of accountability

We end with a few overarching remarks. First, diverted payments are not the only problem associated with the APBS. There are others, discussed elsewhere, such as rejected payments – another nightmare for powerless DBT recipients.

Second, these problems are magnified by a pervasive lack of accountability. The ABPS is a very opaque payment system and few people have a clear understanding of it. When people have problems of diverted or rejected payments, they have no recourse. More often than not, they are sent from one office to another. Even with the best of intentions, a bank manager may be unable to help them. Guidelines for resolving payment problems are conspicuous by their absence. Some cases of diverted payments we have personally dealt with took days to understand and weeks to resolve.

Third, none of this seems to perturb the agencies that are promoting the APBS and related financial technologies. Last month, we tried to draw the attention of the NPCI and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to some of these issues. They gave us a patient hearing but their response was far from reassuring. Nobody seems to be responsible for monitoring the sort of problems we have discussed, let alone resolve them. Similarly, nobody appears to be in charge of enforcing the consent norms and other "guidelines" issued by the NPCI. The RBI may be the nominal regulator, but the real action is at the NPCI, the UIDAI and other strongholds of the Aadhaar lobby.

The UIDAI did take cosmetic damage control measures from time to time in the last two years. Judging from Jharkhand's experience, however, the pathologies of the APBS continue to cause havoc on the ground. An independent and participatory review of the system is long overdue.

Sakina Dhorajiwala is a researcher at LibTech India, based in Jharkhand; Jean Drèze is Visiting Professor at the Department of Economics, Ranchi University; Niklas Wagner studies at the Free University of Amsterdam

An own goal for Britain?

No one, in Parliament or in government, is still clear on what Brexit means

PRIYANJALI MALIK

The Brexit slogans have returned like a boomerang in the U.K. "Take back control," the Brexiteers had demanded. Parliament has now wrested control of the Brexit process from Prime Minister Theresa May and will indicate the type of exit from the European Union (EU) that might be acceptable to it, having earlier rejected both her withdrawal agreement and her threat of leaving without an agreement. Though it is now abundantly clear that no one can quite agree on what Brexit means, let alone how to achieve it.

A new deal?

Ironically, the European Council had to take control of the Brexit time-line last week to offer Ms. May a reprieve until April 12 to decide how Britain wishes to exit the EU. Until then, Britain had been in very real danger of chaotically crashing out of the Union on March 29. Without a transition agreement, Britain will lose all current arrangements for 49.5% of its total trade; EU laws that govern its industry, banking, agriculture and influence national laws will cease to apply. Until a new arrangement is negotiated, seamless exchanges in goods and services will collapse. The EU, however, is not known for speedy negotiations.

At the heart of the current crisis is a 585-page draft on an interim trading relationship. Much of this could have been avoided if Ms. May had consulted widely on what Brexit meant before triggering Article 50 to take Britain out of the EU. Instead, she chose to negotiate with 27 other countries in a bloc by first putting down red lines, as if she held all the cards. When hemmed in by the extreme right of her Conservative Party, she prioritised party unity by calling an election where she lost her slim majority and then, astonishingly, carried on in Parliament as if she commanded a majority and was not at the mercy of the equally hard-line DUP of Northern Ireland.

In pandering to the Tory extreme right, Ms. May increased divisions between those who saw their future as best provided for within the EU and those who wanted to shed the perceived overweaning powers of Brussels and regain control of immigration. Alternative visions of Brexit were

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never seriously debated even though the referendum itself was completely silent on what sort of exit was envisioned in the Leave option in the 2016 referendum.

Parliamentary turmoil

This weakness of the referendum process left Parliament in a bind. Convention has tasked Parliament with consulting on, debating and legislating for the country's future. Quite simply, MPs are voted into Parliament to use their judgment. A referendum turns this convention on its head because it hands MPs a decision that has not been arrived at through proper parliamentary procedure, leaving Parliament unsure of how to treat that decision. There is no precedent for this – the Brexit referendum was only the third ever held, and the first where the majority of parliamentarians voted in opposition to the referendum result. Parliament chose to treat this as a binding instruction even though most MPs disagreed with the result. This then is the genesis of the current impasse.

Most parliamentarians voted Remain to safeguard Britain's future. London's attractiveness as a financial hub owes less to its soggy climate than to its position as a gateway to the rest of Europe; Britain imports a quarter of all its food from the EU; most large industry depends on complex just-in-time supplies from mainland Europe; and Britain imports medicines ranging from insulin to medical isotopes for cancer treatment to scalpels and syringes. Any regulatory, tariff or logistical barriers to imports could potentially cost lives. For those MPs to vote for or even acquiesce in a 'hard' or no deal Brexit which endangers prosperity and health is unthinkable. And yet, this is what a group of deeply Eurosceptic Conservative MPs are pushing Britain towards. They have threatened to break up the Conservative Party over Europe, and Ms. May has, time and again, caved into their demands, prioritising party over national interest.

And yet, her government cannot be sacked because of the Fixed Term Parliaments Act of 2011, which makes it very difficult to remove a government mid-term. So Britain is stuck with a government that remains in power without wielding any power. The constitutional 'firsts' over Brexit continue. This is the first time Parliament has voted to take control of Parliament business; this is the first government to have been held in contempt of Parliament over its withholding of the Attorney General's advice on elements of the withdrawal agreement; it is the first to lose a vote on the main business of the House of Commons by an overwhelming margin, twice; and it is the first in living memory on whose watch party discipline has disintegrated so completely that Cabinet Ministers can vote against their government and still retain their jobs.

In the meantime, the clock is ticking to April 12, when Britain has to tell the EU whether it wants to leave with the current unloved deal, no deal or needs more time to reconsider Brexit altogether. The gift of that extension which could safeguard Britain's prosperity now lies in the hands of the 27 remaining EU member states, any one of whom could exercise their veto. It is indeed an odd way for Britain to take back control.

Priyanjali Malik is an independent researcher focussing on politics and nuclear security in South Asia

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.

Promises and promises

All political parties, both regional and national, are on a promise-making spree and with the poor in mind. Every day there seems to be a new announcement on freebies either as doles or or as loan waivers (Page 1, "Garibi Hatao 2.0: Rahul promises to wipe out poverty", March 26). The political class appears hell-bent on making people dependent on them. They are only making people lazy. And whose money are they distributing? It is the middle class which works hard and pays taxes.
If our politicians want to alleviate poverty, they can do so by providing the masses with better education and health. They can turn around farming with better farming techniques. India is a young country and we should make best use of our young population, providing them with education and skill development and taking care of their communities. Instead all our politicians want immediate results, their only aim being to win the elections by hook or by crook. No political party talks extensively about the development of the nation.

LALITHA VISWANADHA,
Nellore, Andhra Pradesh

■ This is not the first time that leaders of political parties make hollow slogans especially at the time of elections. There was Indira Gandhi with "Garibi Hatao", Atal Bihari Vajpayee with "India Shining" and Narendra Modi with "New India".
There are still millions affected by starvation, without health care (which is the primary need of people) and agrarian distress. Voters need to be cautious, alert and vote carefully.

S.K. KHOSLA,
Chandigarh

■ How will funds be generated for this scheme? And what about corruption or pilferage of money? The fact is that a huge chunk of our population is still poor without even a nutritious square meal a day. The gap between the rich and the poor is widening every day while the wealth of politicians across the spectrum multiplies every five years. Political parties should be advised and warned by the judiciary not to misuse tax-payer money especially during election time.
Sops only end up making people lazy. Instead the money can be put to use for industrialisation and creating the infrastructure that will give jobs to our unemployed youth.

SRAVANA RAMACHANDRAN,
Chennai

■ For decades we have had several catchy political slogans, from the famous "Garibi Hatao" to "Achhe Din". This has been followed by massive public investments and planning, but can it be said that these steps have ensured a better life for the poor and the illiterate masses? The rich have their own agenda and the middle class just about manages to survive. Why is our country still lagging behind even smaller nations as far as social indices are concerned? Politics in India is such that the leaders once elected forget about the people who voted for them.

A. MICHAEL DHANARAJ,
Coimbatore

'Mankaded' at Jaipur

What R. Ashwin did at the IPL match at Jaipur, running out Jos Buttler, has opened up the debate of 'fairness' and 'gentlemanly behaviour' in the game of cricket ('Sport' page, "Royals lose the plot after Buttler's controversial dismissal" and "An incident that will be discussed for a long time", both March 26). What surprised me was why Ashwin never tried this in his earlier overs. I do not think Buttler was well within the crease on these occasions. Those who defend Ashwin, citing rules, should understand the point that the bowler's sole intention is to play a 'positive game' with a 'positive frame of mind' and with all 'positive means'. His mind is fully occupied with the batsman. I am not bringing 'fairness' into the discussion at all. A 'genuine bowler' will never look to get the 'runner out' citing rules. He is bowler to the batsman and not to the runner on this end. So, I feel what Ashwin did was 'not a perfect display of rules', but a 'perfect display of desperation'.

MURLIDAR K.,
Mumbai

■ "The laws of cricket make it quite clear that a non-striker must keep within his ground until the ball has been delivered. If not, why is there a provision which enables the bowler to run him out? By backing up too far or too early, the non-striker is very obviously gaining an unfair advantage." Need we say more to what Don Bradman said? Being law-abiding is applicable everywhere.

K. RAMESH,
Chennai

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INTERVIEW | KAMAL NATH

'The Congress has always been for cow protection and shelters'

The M.P. Chief Minister on undoing 'saffronisation' of institutions, and the Congress's position on cow protection and loan waivers

VARGHESE K. GEORGE

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath is a key player in the Congress's comeback bid in the Lok Sabha elections. Having ended the BJP's 15-year rule in Bhopal, he says the priority of his government is to reverse the "saffronisation" of governance in the State. Excerpts from an interview:

A.M.FARUQUI

After the Congress's break of 15 years from power in Madhya Pradesh, you have become the Chief Minister. Is your government in part a continuation of the 15 years of BJP rule in the State?

■ Our government is in no way a continuation of the past. The previous government had different objectives. They were keen to saffronise every institution in the State. It has been 90 days since I took over. My efforts have been to do as much as possible to demonstrate that the policies of this government are based on our manifesto promises. Many items on our manifesto have already been implemented.

When you mention 'saffronisation', you are alluding to a turn towards Hindutva in governance? Have you identified areas or institutions where this has happened?

■ There are so many. Take our journalism university. Take the universities and the various bodies they formed. They were not doing that for the public good. They were using State funds for building a party organisation, which we are slowly dismantling.

The Jan Abhiyan Parishad (a government-funded network intended to improve governance) was used to propagate Hindutva?

■ Absolutely. The JAP has been used and misused to propagate their ideology, and for elections.

Are you determined to change its character?

■ We have to. Because it is a blatant misuse of State funds.

Are you looking at the school syllabus too?

■ Certainly. We have to correct all these things, so that what this country stands for, the ethos of this country, is maintained.

While you're striking a very strident pose on 'saffronisation', your government's decision to use the National Security Act (NSA) in cases of suspected cow slaughter was a continuation of the past, right?

■ It was not the government's policy. That was the policy of the past. It was done at the local level. I was surprised about it myself. This happened a few days after we took over. I strongly objected to it.

Have you given instructions that the NSA cannot be invoked in such cases?

■ Absolutely. In any case it cannot be. The objectives of the NSA are very clear. It was the previous government's policy to do this.

It was a misuse of that law?

■ Yes. It was misuse.

Cow protection has been a key component of BJP politics. Your government is also setting up cow shelters using public money. How does this square with your idea of change and good governance?

■ Of course it does. The Congress has always been for cow protection and shelters. The previous government did nothing. And they have been exposed on this. We are only continuing with what we have always believed in. We are promoting *gaushalas* (cow shelters). Cows are revered in Indian ethos, mythology and beliefs.

Cow protection is also linked to agrarian problems – stray cattle destroy crops, for instance. Don't you think that by bringing in this cultural component, the agrarian economy gets distorted?

■ I don't think so. If we build proper cow shelters, it does not disturb the agrarian economy at all. We respect the sentiments of the people. And at the same time, we protect their rural economy.

How long term do you think will be your relief to the agriculture sector through loan waivers?

■ A farmer is born into debt and dies in debt. Loan waiver is not the solution to the problem. Loan waiver is one of the ways to give him relief. We have to look at the agriculture sector in a completely different way. Seventy per cent of the people of M.P. are dependent on the agriculture sector, not all of them farmers. Twenty-thirty years ago, the problem of agriculture was the problem of shortage. Today, the problem is of excess. So, our policies will have to be attuned to this changed situation.

> **There will be convergence between the BSP and the Congress at some point, because our objective is the same.**

Do you have plans beyond loan waivers?

■ Yes, we are looking at a holistic plan on how to make the agriculture sector more remunerative so that farmers don't sink into debt again.

You decided to discontinue the pension scheme for MISA (Maintenance of Internal Security Act) detainees (people who were imprisoned during the Emergency). Why?

■ This was a political move made by the previous government. We dismantled it. Some of them were also fake. There was MISA in 1975. Many of them are not there any more. This is like saying, the BJP government was there for the last 15 years, and all those who felt victimised by them must get pension.

You have worked with all the members of the Nehru-Gandhi family barring Jawaharlal Nehru. How do you understand the family?

■ I have had the privilege of working with Sanjay Gandhi, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi and now Mr. Rahul Gandhi. They were all there in different periods. The world was different, the country was different, politics was different. So, each one has a different style of working. And in different circumstances and different periods, the challenges are also different, and so their styles are different.

How is Rahul Gandhi different from his family?

■ He is no different. As in, his heart is with the weakest always. He is very sharp. I admire his sense of understanding of so many diverse issues of this country.

Is there any point on which he is different from his mother and father?

■ I think he is far more impatient for results. He is impatient for achievements. That is good, he goads you on.

Is he impatient with people?

■ No, he is not impatient with people. He is impatient with the lack of progress.

While you have been vocal against Hindutva, some reports have suggested that you have made a tactical decision to not confront the RSS head on. Is that true? In the case of JAP, you seem to be giving a long rope.

■ Of course, I have to do the correct thing. I called a meeting with them and I told them that this is what you stand for. I have given them three months. Lot of people are involved, there are students in it. I have to ensure that those who are apolitical do not suffer in the process.

One long-term effect of Hindutva in politics is the progressive decline of Muslim representation in politics. Does your counter-politics to Hindutva account for this? And how?

■ Everything in society must be equitable. We cannot deny Muslims what are naturally their rights, their aspirations. Everyone, whether Hindu, Muslim, Christian or Sikh, is aspirational. When it comes to representation in a democracy, the question is, how will you win an election? Doing it symbolically can at times be hypocritical.

That is the sad part of our democracy, perhaps. Fielding a Muslim candidate is not the best way to win an election. As a political tactician, do you face that dilemma?

■ When we are fielding someone, we have to see to it that he wins. Because we are putting him up to represent the people. But if he goes through the motions of an election without winning, he will not be able to represent anyone, including his community.

How stable is your government? The Congress does not have a majority.

■ The government is very stable. We demonstrated it in the elections for the Speaker and Deputy Speaker. We got 121 against the BJP's 109.

So, there is no question on the longevity of your government?

■ The BJP is continuously trying to lure MLAs with all kinds of things. But I have complete confidence in all the MLAs.

Do you think the Centre has been trying to unsettle your government?

■ The BJP as a whole is trying to unsettle this government.

Would you expect the Governor to be more impartial?

■ The Governor must stay within the confines of the Constitution. Stepping out of that will not be acceptable.

The BSP's support is critical for your government in M.P., but Mayawati has been hostile to the Congress recently. How do you see BSP-Congress relations going forward?

■ The objective of the BSP is to oust the BJP and there will be convergence at some point, because our objective is the same. And everybody takes local situations into account. In U.P., they are dealing with the ground situation in the State. We have our own perceptions. That does not mean that our objectives are divergent.

After the NSA was used in cases of alleged cow slaughter in M.P., Ms. Mayawati said that the Congress and the BJP have the same character. Have you spoken to her after that?

■ I talk to her from time to time on various issues. They are our supporting party in M.P. They have two MLAs.

You challenged Digvijaya Singh to contest from a difficult seat if he wanted to contest. And he is now contesting from Bhopal. Is this a return of friction between the two of you?

■ I have no friction with anyone, whether it is Mr. Singh, Mr. [Jyotiraditya] Scindia, or Mr. [Suresh] Pachouri. We all worked together for victory in M.P.

Then why did you challenge Mr. Singh?

■ Because he has been State party president and Chief Minister. It was not a challenge, but a suggestion. I told him that it would befit his stature if he contested from a seat that the Congress has not won for a long time. He accepted my suggestion.

The Lok Sabha election in the State is on Narendra Modi or Kamal Nath?

■ Both. The people of M.P. are poor, they are simple, but they are not stupid. Mr. Modi will have to explain to the people of M.P. what happened to all the promises he made in the past.

SINGLE FILE

The return of the rural

A clutch of new filmmakers is attempting to restore the rural to Hindi cinema

KUNAL RAY

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

A friend recently expressed his desire to watch Abhishek Chaubey's *Sonchiriya*, set in the once-dacoit-dominated Chambal region of Madhya Pradesh. More than the plot or the misdeeds of the dacoits, he was interested to encounter such a place through a film. Though part of popular folklore, places like Chambal have only recently been reappearing in mainstream Hindi films. My friend also mentioned how excited he is now to encounter small towns or rural areas in contemporary Hindi cinema.

Earlier, the rural always existed in Hindi films. It was a regular narrative trope: characters from rural areas would always be arriving in the city. Those films created a split between the rural and the urban: the rural was seen as pure and the urban as impure, the rural as innocent and the urban as corrupt. They created a binary between the village and the city.

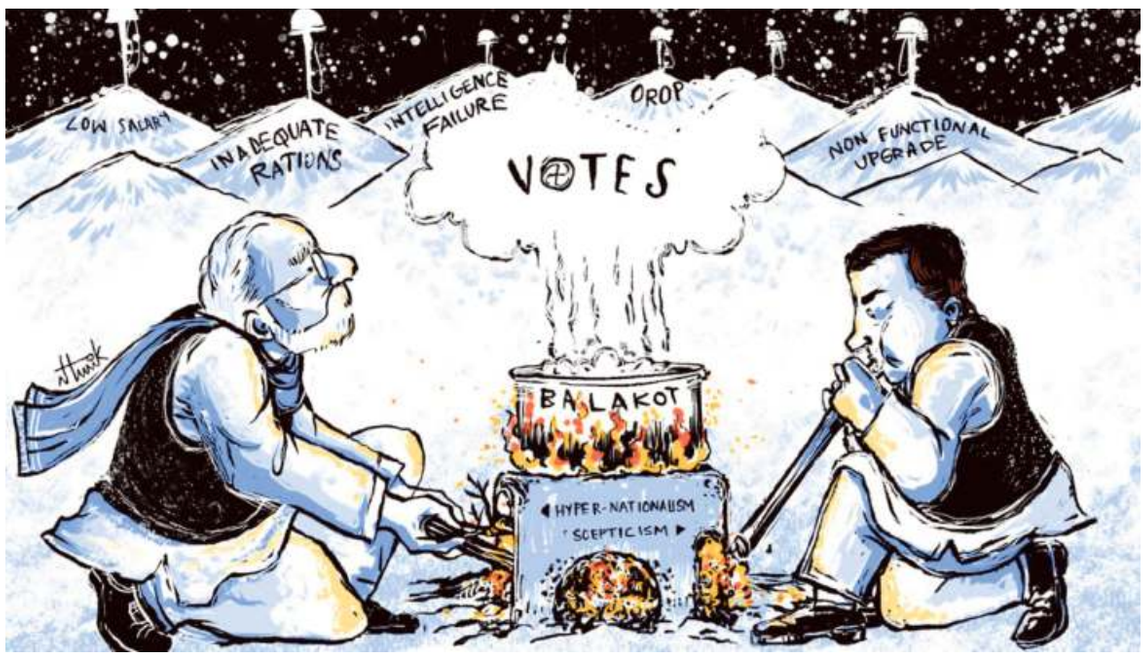
Manoj Kumar furthered this split through his nation-loving films, which cast the West invariably in a poor light, robbing people from the East of their principles. In the 1970s, the Hindi 'new wave' filmmakers also made films set in the rural. However, 1990 onwards, the rural gradually disappeared from Hindi films. The urban took centre stage and, slowly, so did the middle class and the rich.

A clutch of new films and filmmakers is attempting to restore the rural to Hindi cinema. And they are going beyond the idyllic hamlets of Punjab. But what does it mean to encounter a place through film? People make a place. We attribute an identity to a location vis-a-vis its people, who constitute its socio-cultural fabric.

Vishal Bhardwaj's *Omkara*, set in the badlands of rural Uttar Pradesh, added a new dimension of caste-based politics to the film, thereby rendering it contextually true. *Gangs of Wasseypur* was a trendsetter in this regard. It introduced a range of idiosyncratic characters to Hindi cinema. The rural does not appear as a caricature, as it did in Priyadarshan's *Malaamal Weekly*. *Anarkali of Aarah* took us to the by-lanes of the hinterlands of Bihar. *Newton* was a plunge into the Adivasi settlements in the forests of Chhattisgarh. *Bareilly Ki Barfi* showed us a free-spirited girl who refused to bow down to the pressures of marriage.

All these films have had myriad depictions of the rural – from the oppressed to the celebratory. Through them we recognise people as individuals with wants and desires and not case studies or objects of anthropological lust, as they were at one time.

The writer teaches literary and cultural studies at FLAME University, Pune



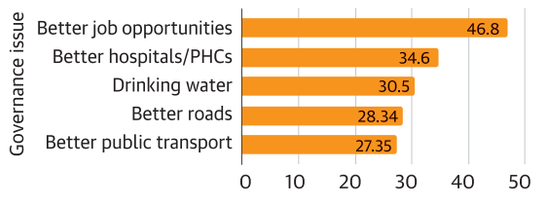
DATA POINT

Jobs on people's minds

A national survey of 2.73 lakh people across Lok Sabha constituencies found that getting better jobs was the top concern nationwide. Another recent, independent survey by Pew also came to the same conclusion. The other key concerns are access to better healthcare and drinking water. By **Varun B. Krishnan**

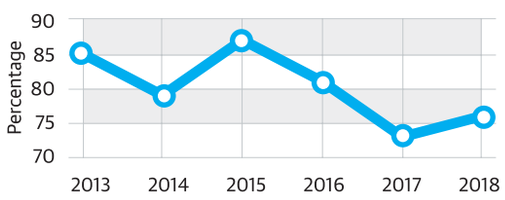
What do people worry about?

About 47% of respondents said getting better job opportunities was among their top five priorities. The graph shows the % of people who listed a particular issue as their top priority



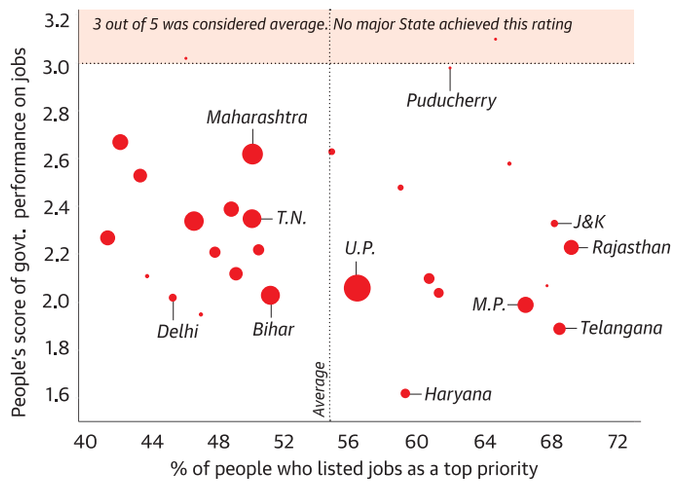
Corroborating survey

According to another independent survey by Pew, 76% of Indians surveyed said that the lack of employment opportunities was a "very big problem" in 2018



State-wise concerns

Getting better jobs was a big concern in the northern and central belt. People in these States also rated the current government as lowest on employment



A closer look

The size of each circle (●) represents the number of Lok Sabha seats in the State. The highest % of people who said jobs were a top priority were in Rajasthan, Telangana and J&K

Methodology

2.73 lakh voters were interviewed from 534 LS constituencies. 64.84% of the respondents were from rural areas. The survey was done between Oct. and Dec. 2018. Voters' priorities were recorded amongst 31 governance issues, and the performance of the govt. was rated by the respondents on those issues

Source: Association for Democratic Reforms

FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 27, 1969

Nijalingappa not for Telangana

The Congress President, Mr. S. Nijalingappa, has expressed himself emphatically against a separate Telengana State and the proposal for regional autonomy. He was, however, in favour of Telengana receiving "very high attention and preferential treatment" for its economic development. Mr. Nijalingappa, who was talking to Pressmen to-day [March 26] at Begumpet airport, on his way to Bangalore from New Delhi, appealed to the people to call off the agitation, now that the Centre and the State Government were taking up the matter of strict implementation of Telengana safeguards.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 27, 1919.

How Nations Sleep.

What seems indispensable to one nation for a good sleep, another considers the surest means of driving away repose. Europeans require, as a rule, a soft pillow, while the Jap stretches himself on his mat and puts a square wooden block under his head upon which he rests quite comfortably. To the Chinaman his bed is a very important affair. It is low and often adorned with precious carvings, but it never occurs to him that anything could be more comfortable than pleated mats. While the people of northern countries cannot sleep unless they have sufficient space to stretch themselves at full length, the natives of the tropics are often satisfied with a hammock. The inhabitant of Russia Minor loves to sleep on his hot stove, from which on awakening half roasted in the morning he will immediately plunge into cold water so as to re-establish his physical equilibrium. The Lapp sprawls into a sack made of reindeer skins, while the Hindu, who likewise uses a sack, though an airy and light one, does so for the purpose of protecting himself against the mosquitoes.

POLL CALL

Simultaneous elections

This refers to holding elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies simultaneously, once in five years. Simultaneous elections used to be held in India until 1967. The practice was disrupted when some State Assemblies were dissolved prematurely. Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for a widespread debate on holding simultaneous elections again. While supporters of the idea argue that such polls would reduce election expenditure and provide governments more time for development work, opponents say that there is no guarantee that it will reduce election expenditure, and that it may relegate local issues to the background. Such a framework also does not provision for legislatures in which no party or coalition commands the confidence of the House.

MORE ON THE WEB

Much ado about Mankading

http://bit.ly/2Ysmsp8

FROM PAGE ONE

Serious matters in CBI report, says SC

It rejected a plea by the West Bengal government counsel and senior advocate A.M. Singhvi to spare the State Chief Secretary and the DGP.

The Bench said it would hear the application in detail after the contemnors file their responses to the CBI's application.

"Suppose if some very, very serious matters come to light, should we close our eyes to all that? Something sufficiently serious has been brought to our knowledge... We will look into allegations and counter-allegations," Chief Justice Gogoi said, addressing Mr. Singhvi.

Checks affidavits

The court also perused separate affidavits filed by CBI Director Rishi Kumar Shukla, the agency's Joint Director Pankaj Kumar Srivastava whose Kolkata residence was allegedly surrounded by the West Bengal police, and finally Tathagat Vardhan, a Deputy Superintendent of Police with the CBI, who was part of the CBI team which was roughed up on February 3.

Mr. Shukla said the Saradha case itself involves the non-refund of over ₹1,983.02 crore of a total ₹2,459.59 crore collected from lakhs of investors. This is only the principal amount.

The CBI Director said the SIT took 14 months to share the call data records (CDRs) of five mobile numbers of Debjani Mukherjee, one of the promoters/directors of the Saradha group, for the period between 2012 and 2013.

The CBI was provided with a blank CD and then later given records for only a limited period. The complete CDRs were finally obtained from the service provider. It said there were discrepancies in the frequency and number of ca lls with regard to one of the mobile numbers of Ms. Mukherjee.

SP-BSP combine gains more OBC heft

Caste net widens as crucial regional parties in eastern U.P. announce support for the alliance

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

The SP-BSP-RLD alliance in Uttar Pradesh gathered strength on Tuesday with the formal support of three smaller OBC-based parties of Purvanchal – in particular the Nishad Party, which had trounced the BJP in the 2018 Gorakhpur byelection.

The Rashtriya Samanta Dal of Motilal Kushwaha and the Janwadi Party (Socialist) of Sanjay Chauhan are the other two regional players to throw their weight behind the alliance.

Though marginal players on their own, the parties command a substantial caste-based following, and their support will help the SP-BSP alliance shake off the Yadav-Jatav tag.

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav said the coming together of these parties with the SP-BSP-RLD alliance would usher in a "big change" in U.P.

"Those who spoke of 74 [seats] will now think where they will open their account from. Except for one, I don't think they can open their account," Mr. Yadav said at a press conference.

Team swells: Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav flanked by Sanjay Chauhan of the Janwadi Party (Socialist) and Sanjay Nishad of the Nishad Party in Lucknow on Tuesday. • RAJEEV BHATT

He was alluding to the BJP's regular claims that it would improve its tally of 73 and not lose any seats.

In the 2018 byelection in Gorakhpur, Phulpur and Kairana, the SP reached out to these parties to secure all three seats. In Gorakhpur, Pravin Nishad, son of Nishad Party chief Sanjay Nishad, contested and won on the SP symbol.

Mr. Sanjay Nishad said he had come together with Mr. Yadav to ensure there was no division of the "85% vote", a reference to the Dalits, Other Backward Classes and Muslims, and said the "historic win in Gorakhpur" would be repeated in other seats as well in 2019.

He said under the BJP government, the Constitution and the interests of the youth and farmers were in danger.

Sanjay Chauhan, president of the Janwadi Party (Socialist), said that after coming to power, the BJP was trying to finish off reservation for Dalits and OBCs. All OBCs have now understood their "conspiracy," he said. "BJP made most backward castes fight with one caste (Yadavs), and got votes of these castes, telling them that one caste is eating up all their share. But who is now eating up the share of the OBCs," Mr. Chauhan asked.

Wider vote pool

The support of the Nishad Party, which claims a significant presence among riverine castes including Mallah, Nishad, Kewat, Bind and Kashyap, and the Janwadi Party of Noniya Chauhans is expected to counter the BJP's two OBC-based allies in eastern U.P. – the Apna Dal of the Kurmis and the Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party of Rajbhars.

In the 2017 Assembly election, the Nishad Party secured over 5.4 lakh votes in the 72 seats it contested, mostly in eastern U.P. The JPS had extended support to the BSP in 2017.

Got offers from BJP, says Shinde

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

Veteran Congressman and former Union Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde has said that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had made offers to his daughter, Congress MLA Praniti Shinde, and to himself to join the saffron party.

"The BJP had tried to entice my daughter with many offers, but she remained unmoved. Likewise, a couple of top BJP leaders tried to woo me as well, but I firmly refused," Mr. Shinde said after filing his nomination in Solapur on Monday.

He, however, refused to reveal the names of the BJP leaders in question. Mr. Shinde said both he and his daughter would remain in the Congress till "the end of our lives." "My daughter and I have Congress blood in our veins...there is no question of us leaving our party," he said, when asked about the defections of scions of senior Congress and Nationalist Congress Party leaders to the BJP.

70% of fleet will be airborne in a month: Jet

The airline will hold discussions with the lessors in the next few days to arrive at a settlement, following which it will provide further details to the government early next week on availability of aircraft. The Ministry will then assess whether slots held by Jet Airways at various airports need to be distributed among others airlines to cater to demand in the market.

"As per slot allocation guidelines, if a slot is not utilised in a season, it can be withdrawn but we are thinking... if slots can be given for an interim period. But it all depends on [discussions with Jet Airways on] Monday or Tuesday " Mr. Kharola added.

The Ministry has also advised airlines to not indulge in predatory pricing given the mismatch in demand and capacity due to unavailability of a large chunk of Jet Airways' planes. Jet's financial distress, combined with the grounding of Boeing 737 MAX 8 planes, has resulted in as many as 60 planes being removed from the domestic market and an 8% fall in capacity.

BJP effecting a generational shift

But senior leaders are unhappy with the way the issue has been dealt with

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The BJP has effected a generational shift in its candidate list for the 2019 Lok Sabha election with a discernible nudge from the party leadership. It was clarified by the aides of former Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, former Union Minister Shanta Ram and senior leader Kalraj Mishra that they had been sounded out by general secretary (organisation), Ram Lal.

At a meeting of the parliamentary board of the party last month, the issue of whether or not candidates above the age of 75 were to be considered for ticket was discussed. The board decided that while there was no blanket rule excluding anyone, such candidates would not be considered for any role in the government or party even if they won.

While this decision was reported in the media, Mr. Ram Lal called up the senior leaders to give a not-so-subtle nudge towards stepping back from being considered for tickets. Mr. Advani conveyed privately that he would withdraw himself, while Mr. Mishra issued a statement giving up claims. In some cases like with Madhubani MP Hukumdev Narayan, his son, Ashok Yadav, has been fielded.

The aides of these senior leaders say that they don't have an issue with being denied ticket but do not like the manner in which it was done. Former Union Minister Murli Manohar Joshi cancelled a scheduled visit to Kanpur now that he is not in contention.

Advani dishonoured: Mamata

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said the BJP had "failed to honour" L.K. Advani by not nominating him in the Lok Sabha poll. "This is my personal feeling," said Ms. Banerjee, who has worked under Mr. Advani. "He is a leader who is respected in the party and has been there from the beginning," she said. She is known to share a cordial relationship with Mr. Advani and has often referred to him as one of the country's "most sensible leaders."

Maneka swaps her seat with Varun

Jayaprada to take on Azam Khan

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

The BJP has fielded Uttar Pradesh Cabinet Minister Satyadev Pachauri from Kanpur, replacing party veteran Murli Manohar Joshi for the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

Mr. Pachauri is an MLA from Govind Nagar seat.

Jayaprada, former Samajwadi Party MP, will contest from Rampur as a BJP candidate. The new BJP entrant and former cinestar replaces Nepal Singh, and is pitted against senior SP leader and her *bete noire* Azam Khan.

Former Samajwadi Party MP Jayaprada joined the BJP on Tuesday.

29 names out

Releasing a list of 29 names from U.P., the BJP also made changes in other seats, replacing incumbents or shifting them elsewhere.

Union Minister Maneka Gandhi, who was Pilibhit MP, has swapped seats with her son Varun Gandhi, who won Sultanpur in 2014.

Ashok Dohre was replaced by Ram Shankar Katheria in Etawah, a reserved seat. Mr. Katheria won from Agra in 2014.

Another State Cabinet Minister Rita Bahuguna Joshi has been fielded from Allahabad, where she was once Mayor.

In another reserved seat Bahraich, where BJP MP Savitri Bai Phule quit the party and joined the Congress, the BJP has fielded a sitting MLA Akshayvar Lal Gaud.

A sitting MLA Upendra Rawat from Zaidpur has also replaced Priyanka Rawat as the candidate in Barabanki, adjoining Lucknow.

Virendra Singh Mast, who won from Bhadohi in 2014, has been shifted to Ballia in place of Bharat Singh.

Union Minister Manoj Sinha will once again defend his constituency Ghazipur while BJP State president Mahendra Nath Pandey will contest from Chandauli this time too.

In Faizabad, the BJP has repeated incumbent Lallu Singh; Jagdimbika Pal in Doomariyaganj; Union Minister Niranjan Jyoti from Fatehpur, and Subrat Pathak, who lost in a close contest to Dimple Yadav, from Kannauj.

The SP announced former MLA Anand Sen Yadav as its candidate in Faizabad , while former MP and 2014 runner-up Devendra Yadav will contest in Etah and former MLA Hemraj Verma in Pilibhit.

Six choke to death after entering septic tank

They lifted them out only to find that all of them were dead. The bodies were sent to the Government General Hospital in Sriperumbudur.

"The victims succumbed to inhalation of toxic gas. We have registered a case of unnatural death," said Kanchipuram SP Santhosh Hadimani.

Ramachandran, a relative of Krishnamoorthi said, "After my brother who got into the tank fell unconscious, his older son first entered the pit. When both did not come out, my sister-in-law Latha rushed to the first floor where the younger one was sleeping and woke him up. He rushed to the pit and also fainted inside. A tenant, a person who came to the shop and a wayfarer, all who went to rescue them were trapped and died. The workers who came to clean were fine, and my brother just went to check if the work was done well. What a shocking tragedy!"

Parties allege fraud during note ban

Opposition releases video of 'BJP leader' exchanging old currency past deadline

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Opposition parties led by the Congress on Tuesday alleged that some BJP leaders had perpetrated fraud and money laundering during demonetisation, and released a video where a "BJP leader" from Gujarat was purportedly shown exchanging withdrawn notes past the deadline for exchange on a commission of 40%.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley hit back saying the Congress continued to rely on "fakery".

Congress leader Kapil Sibal, accompanied by senior party colleagues and leaders from the Rashtriya Janata Dal, Loktantrik Janata Dal, National Conference and the Telugu Desam, claimed that the video had been filmed by journalists from a news portal named Tricolour News Network (TNN) World.

RJD MP Manoj Jha and Congress leaders Ghulam Nabi Azad, Kapil Sibal and Mallikarjun Kharge in New Delhi. • R.V. MOORTHY

The video shows a person, allegedly a BJP leader according to Mr. Sibal, exchanging money purportedly after December 31, 2016, the deadline set by the Centre to exchange old notes. The amount exchanged is ₹5 crore according to the video. Mr. Sibal said "the *chowkidar* [watchman] has betrayed and snatched people's money."

Congress leaders Ghulam Nabi Azad, Ahmed Patel, Mallikarjun Kharge, besides the RJD's Manoj Jha, LJD's Sharad Yadav were present at the press conference.

Mr. Jaitley dismissed the allegations saying "the 'Fakery Caravan' of the UPA continues to move."

Why elections are great for stand-up artistes

"The anti-UPA sentiment, the caricaturing of RaGa as Pappu, and Manmohan Singh as Maun Mohan, came from stand-up comics," says Grover. "We were all abusing the Congress in chorus. We all wanted Congress out," recollects Kamra.

According to Santosh Desai, a brand specialist and social commentator, not only are there more comics this election season, they have also become compelling voices. With sharp political polarisation and ideological and identitarian differences, you have the ingredients for great satire. "So, the enabling circumstances are way more significant than in the past," says Desai.

Challenging times

Kamra is finding it more fun and challenging this year, especially the way "one man" is being aggressively defended. "Even my jokes are being fact-checked. This is a strange time, when the defending forces have become bigger than the dissenting ones," he says.

No wonder the *Aisi Taisi*... trio wanted 'The Azadi Tour 2019' to take place before the elections. "We felt it was important to make a comment at the end of the Modi 1.0 era," says Grover. Though the itinerary had been finalised much before the election dates were announced, in a coincidence, their tour runs parallel to the polls.

What makes the elections so special for the comics? "Elections are like the IPL final – max potential, max information, max interest," says comic Sorabh Pant. "You can put your edgiest content out there and no one will officially object. No one wants to engage with the artistes at this time," says Kamra.

The erosion of faith in mainstream news channels is another reason being cited for the popularity of comics on alternate platforms.

Kamra says, like other artistes, some comics too are getting more cautious. "Every opinion comes with a cost. It depends on how much you want to bear," he says. "You have to be smart or subtle," says Pant. "You have to prepare yourself for an army of people who would lose their sense of humour when it comes to jokes about their side."

Tamil Nadu sees highest seizure ahead of polls

₹112.47 cr. in cash, liquor, drugs seized

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The highest seizure of cash, liquor, drugs and other articles worth ₹112.47 crore has been made by the enforcement agencies in Tamil Nadu in the past two weeks, after the announcement of the Lok Sabha poll schedule. The overall seizure in the country is worth about ₹562 crore.

Uttar Pradesh stands second with a total seizure of ₹108.61 crore, which includes ₹10.84 crore in cash, precious metals valued at ₹59 crore and liquor worth ₹23.61 crore. In Andhra Pradesh, the agencies have seized the highest amount of cash – ₹55 crore – while the value of the entire seizure so far is ₹103.40 crore.

The seizure in Tamil Nadu includes ₹41.44 crore in cash and precious metals worth ₹68 crore.

According to the Election Commission, drugs and narcotics worth ₹85.56 crore, besides ₹5.44 crore in cash, have been seized in Punjab. Karnataka reported a seizure of ₹6.06 crore in cash and liquor worth ₹20.35 crore. In Maharashtra, the agencies intercepted ₹6.73 crore in cash and liquor worth ₹10.22 crore.

No seizures have been reported so far in Delhi, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana and Lakshadweep.

Countrywide, the agencies have seized ₹157.37 in cash, liquor worth ₹93.60 crore, drugs valued at ₹133 crore and precious metals worth ₹169 crore.

The Election Commission on Tuesday held a meeting with the second batch of more than 1,000 observers who are being deployed to check the use of money power by political parties to influence voters.

Assured income plan a surgical strike on poverty, says Rahul

Spell out stand on the scheme, Congress tells Modi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday described the minimum income guarantee scheme, a promise he made to electors on Monday, as a surgical strike on poverty. Separately, the Congress asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP to spell out whether or not they supported the plan.

"They did Demonetisation and Gabbar Singh Tax. We will give NYAY and a real GST. NYAY = Surgical Strike on Poverty = 72,000 Rs a year to India's poorest 20 per cent," Mr. Gandhi wrote on Twitter.

'Women-centric move'

At a press conference, Congress spokesperson Randeep Singh Surjewala said the Nyuntam Aay Yojana (NYAY) was not a "top-up scheme;" it would be women-centric: the annual income of ₹72,000 would be credited to the bank account of the woman of the household.

Rahul Gandhi

Accusing BJP Ministers of opposing the NYAY, Mr. Surjewala said it was "shameful that the pro-rich Prime Minister Modi is opposing the world's biggest anti-poverty scheme."

He responded to Finance Minister Arun Jaitley's remarks calling the proposal a "bluff announcement" and accusing the Congress of having "betrayed" India for 70 years in the name of poverty. "₹72,000 would be deposited to the bank account of the woman of the family. The government's Economic Survey for 2016-17 admitted that India under the Congress reduced poverty. Poverty, which was 70% during Independence, came down to just 22% in 2011-12. With the path-breaking NYAY, the Congress will now eradicate the remaining 20% poverty," Mr. Surjewala said.

"The anti-poor DNA of the suited-booted PM Modi and his incompetent Finance Minister stands exposed as they bitterly oppose the world's biggest anti-poverty scheme," he said.

SC to hear plea seeking stay on electoral bonds

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to hear on April 2 a petition to stay the Electoral Bond Scheme, 2018, under which bonds are being sold right before the Lok Sabha election.

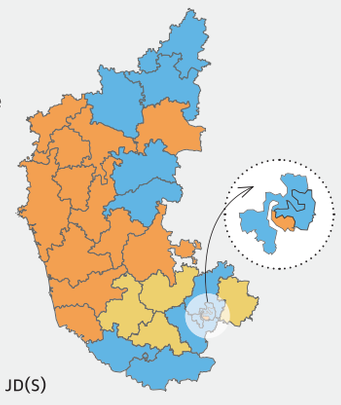
A Bench, led by CJI Ranjan Gogoi, agreed to examine the plea by the Association for Democratic Reforms, represented by advocates Prashant Bhushan, Neha Rathi and Pranav Sachdeva. It said 95% of the bonds sold so far had been in favour of one political party, "that is the ruling party, which are definitely in the form of kickbacks before polls."

Mr. Bhushan said "most bonds purchased since 2018 were in the denominations of ₹10 lakh and ₹1 crore, which indicate that it is not common citizens but corporates that have been buying the bonds."

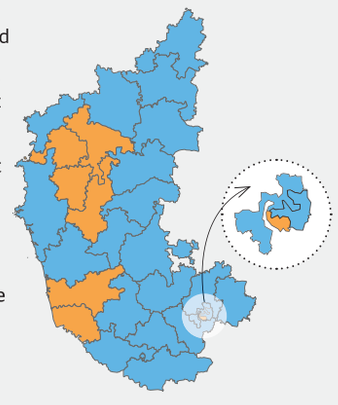
Alliance matters

The Congress-JD(S) combine poses a formidable threat to the BJP due to the individual strengths of the parties. The Congress' support base is even across the State while the JD(S)'s base lies in the south. The BJP is strongest in the coastal region.
By **Vignesh Radhakrishnan**

If the 2018 Assembly election results were aggregated for the Lok Sabha seats, the BJP would have led in 13 Lok Sabha seats, the Congress would have led in 11 and the JD(S) in four. Map shows the Lok Sabha seats based on the 2018 Assembly results



If the Congress and the JD(S) were in a pre-poll alliance and assuming that they managed to garner votes cumulatively what they individually received in the 2018 election, we find that the alliance would have won 21 of the 28 Lok Sabha seats



STRONGHOLDS
Table shows vote % in the last two State elections combined (2018 & 2013). While the BJP is stronger in the north western and coastal parts, the JD(S) performs well in the south. The Congress' vote share is more evenly spread across all regions

Region	BJP	INC	JD(S)
Bangalore	36.48%	39.94%	18.75%
Bombay Karnataka	41.30%	38.77%	8.60%
Central Karnataka	29.31%	34.05%	22.43%
Coastal Karnataka	44.46%	41.22%	6.25%
Hyderabad Karnataka	35.64%	38.74%	13.64%
Southern Karnataka	19.83%	34.16%	36.65%
Overall	**33.21%**	37.35%	**19.19%**

[**IN FOCUS:** KARNATAKA]

Cong., JD(S) still strange bedfellows; BJP eyes fault lines

Leaders of the ruling allies share little chemistry, casting doubt whether the two parties would ensure vote transfers

BAGESHREE S.
BENGALURU

There was no missing the optics at the oath-taking ceremony of H.D. Kumaraswamy as Chief Minister of Karnataka in May when an array of political leaders from across the country lined up in an apparent show of solidarity by parties opposed to the BJP.

Mr. Kumaraswamy described it as a precursor to "the big change in 2019".

The State's coalition government, comprising the Congress and the Chief Minister's Janata Dal (Secular), was to be a model for a similar but larger alliance of unity against the "common enemy" at the national level.

But 10 months later, with the Lok Sabha polls just weeks away, no one is any longer quite sure what the once 'heady' alliance will deliver in Karnataka, especially as headwinds buffet the coalition.

If politics were simply about arithmetic, the Congress-JD(S) combine, which in 2014 had polled 40.8% and 11%, respectively, against the BJP's 43%, ought to be a winning formation. But the chemistry between the leaders on both the sides has frequently gone missing casting doubts about whether they would work to ensure the transfer of votes to each other's parties.

While the partners, to their credit, have managed to keep the government afloat by warding off the external threat in the form of the BJP's unrelenting efforts to destabilise the coalition, it's the internal bickering, distrust and oneupmanship between the leaders that has kept the alliance in fire-fighting mode for most of its tenure. That they continue to do so, even so close to the election, is only likely to be to the advantage of their "common enemy".

The contradictions and trust deficit are most stark in southern Karnataka where the Congress and the JD(S) are traditional rivals, particularly in the Old Mysore region. For instance, in Mandya, where Mr. Kumaraswamy has fielded his actor-son Nikhil, many Congress workers have opted to back Sumalatha, actor and wife of former Union Minister M.H. Ambareesh, who is contesting as an Independent with the BJP support. And despite the Congress expelling some members, dissidence has refused to die down. With three members of JD(S) patriarch H.D. Deve Gowda's family, including the former Prime Minister, Mr. Nikhil and Mr. Gowda's other grandson Prajwal Revanna, contesting from this region, the stakes for the regional party are high. Mr. Kumaraswamy recently said there was a "conspiracy" afoot against his family, implying that some in the Congress were a part of it.

Old Mysore opening

The coaliton's troubles offer the BJP a rare opportunity to boost its hitherto tenuous presence in the Old Mysore region, where the Congress and JD(S) had assiduously built strong support bases over the decades and fought direct battles.

The BJP, which used to end up as an also-ran in many segments, finds itself elevated to the position of the principal rival this time. The BJP candidate in Hassan, where Mr. Revanna is contesting, was once a Congress Minister.

"The JD(S) and its leaders have created an identity for themselves by opposing the Congress; how can we work alongside them?" asked a JD(S) member of the Mysuru Zilla Panchayat, declining to be identified. It is this discontent that the BJP is likely to be banking on.

In northern Karnataka, where the JD(S) has a relatively marginal presence, the alliance could potentially prove significant. For instance, a transfer of JD(S) votes either way in places such as Chikkodi (39,992) or Raichur (21,706), where the Congress had won by wafer-thin margins, could prove decisive.

While the undivided Janata Dal held sway over the northern districts during the 1980s and 1990s, a large proportion of their voters turned to the BJP after repeated attempts to unite the splinters of the Janata Parivar in Karnataka failed.

Neither does the State unit of the BJP present a picture of strength and confidence, with its heavy reliance on the "Modi" factor.

The increasing grip of central leaders was seen in the choice of 28-year-old, RSS-moulded Tejasvi Surya for Bengaluru South, a key seat over which former Union Minister Ananth Kumar had held sway. The State unit had in fact backed Kumar's wife Tejaswini for the seat.

Less than a month ago, the State unit of the saffron party had appeared exhausted after repeated attempts to pull down the coalition government had proved unsuccessful. But, post-Pulwama, the national ruling party appears to have been re-energised.

And the bickering in the Congress-JD(S) coalition is a fault line that the BJP is going to do everything, it possibly can, to capitalise on.

(*With inputs from Laiqh A Khan in Mysuru and Girish Pattanashetty in Hubballi*)

[**FREE AGENT | PRAKASH RAJ**]

Murder most foul

After Gauri's killing, actor is taking on the establishment

MURALIDHARA KHAJANE
BENGALURU

It was the killing of his friend and journalist Gauri Lankesh by suspected Hindutva activists in September 2017 that made multilingual actor Prakash Raj a political animal in the true sense.

Following the cold-blooded murder, he started tweeting a series of posers – under the hashtag #justasking – many of them directed at Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Among the first in the series were questions on Mr. Modi's silence over his supporters "celebrating" Gauri's assassination. Mr. Raj has since faced an army of trolls.

Months later, to everyone's surprise, he announced his decision to fight the Lok Sabha election. More surprising was his choice to fight as an Independent rather than join the anti-Modi Opposition formation. Long before the Election Commission announced the election, the actor-director-producer began criss-crossing his chosen constituency, Bangalore Central, which has eight Assembly segments. The Aam Aadmi Party, which has not fielded any candidates in Karnataka, is supporting him.

Soon after Mr. Raj filed his nomination papers last Friday, he was greeted with pro-Modi slogans by supporters of P.C. Mohan, the incumbent BJP MP who has been renominated. There was tension for a while as his supporters responded with anti-Modi slogans.

The actor-turned-politician strongly defends his decision to contest as an Independent, saying there is a need to "raise the rational voice of citizens" in Parliament, adding that the decision came after much contemplation and discussion.

About his choice of constituency, Mr. Raj says he was born there and it "truly represents the Indian spirit" with a demographic mix of communities and cultures. "My fight is not against anybody. It is essentially against communal politics and for democratic, constitutional values," he insists.

A barrel of laughs

In uniform: A Border Security Force jawan strikes up a conversation with schoolboys during a route march for the Lok Sabha election in Kolkata on Tuesday. • ANI

INTERVIEW | SAM PITRODA

'The Congress party's idea of India is rooted in inclusion'

In India today, democracy, freedom and development have been compromised, says telecom guru and policy-maker

SANDEEP PHUKAN

After the political row last week over his comments on the air strikes on Balakot in Pakistan, **Sam Pitroda**, *telecom innovator, entrepreneur and chairman of the Indian Overseas Congress, said he was not disrespectful to anybody. He says this Lok Sabha election is one of the most critical elections in the modern history of India.*

Your comments questioning the Balakot strikes and stating that 'entire Pakistan cannot be blamed for the Mumbai terror attacks' have been attacked by the Prime Minister himself...

■ First of all, everything that had to be said on this has been said and it is there in public domain. There isn't much to add. I was also flabbergasted that the Prime Minister, head of the party (BJP), Cabinet Ministers had to respond. I come from a Gandhian background. I felt in a democracy, it is my right to question. It doesn't mean disrespect to anybody.

But I would request the Prime Minister to watch the entire tape. And tell me if there is anything in that tape which is disrespectful of anybody. If there is anything disrespectful, I will say sorry but I don't think there is.

The BJP has always boasted of a muscular approach and attacked the Congress for a soft approach.

■ Look, at the end of the day, the Congress party is the party of Mahatma Gandhi. This is again a personal view but the Congress party's idea of India is rooted in inclusion, respect for everyone. And that idea is embedded in democracy, freedom, human rights and equality. It is also rooted in Gandhian ideas of non-violence.

> **I felt in a democracy, it is my right to question. It doesn't mean disrespect to anybody.**

How important are these elections for you to defend this Congress idea of India?

■ Congress president Rahul Gandhi has time and again said that this election is one of the most critical elections in modern history of India. It is about the Soul of India. What is being challenged bothers us. When I look at India of today, I find that democracy has been compromised, freedom has been compromised, development has been compromised. We have not created enough jobs for our people. We have not created enough opportunities for our people.

Then, there is farmer distress, demonetisation impact, GST (goods and services tax). Ultimately, we will have to look at the governance structure which facilitates entrepreneurship and job creation.

You say this is the most critical election, but the Opposition has failed to come together?

■ Ultimately, everybody who believes in a broader idea of India, who believes in inclusion, will have to align. It will be nice if they can align before but it's okay if they do afterwards.

But regional leaders don't consider Rahul Gandhi as the leader of the Opposition camp and each one has prime ministerial ambitions!

■ We don't have a presidential system and Indian elections are not about Modi versus Gandhi. Whosoever wins the highest number of seats will get to decide.

So where is the problem? Rahul does not see this as a problem.

How has Rahul Gandhi changed as Congress president now from the time he started in politics?

■ Rahul Gandhi has learned a lot, is much more mature. People don't give him credit for one thing which I really admire in a man – he has been beaten up by this massive machine called the BJP, ridiculed, attacked in a very wrong way, but this young man has been able to take in all this criticism year after year. And he is still rising. He has inner strength to rise against all this humiliation, personal attacks, calling names.

Now Priyanka, has formally joined the party and she is seen as more charismatic.

■ I think she augments Rahul's efforts. The skill sets that she has are a little different. They complement each other and they have been close friends while growing up because they only had each other. Priyanka is a good sounding board for Rahul.

(Full interview on bit.ly/PitrodaInterview)

POLL POURRI

Not welcome in his hometown

PATNA
On his first visit to the city after being named the BJP candidate from Patna Sahib, Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad was on Tuesday shown black flags by alleged supporters of another leader. A resident of the Bihar capital, Mr. Prasad's late father was a State Minister and leader of the Jana Sangh. Supporters of R.K. Sinha, a Rajya Sabha member who was hopeful of ticket for the seat which is currently held by the dissident party MP and actor Shatrughan Sinha, were allegedly behind the protest. PTI

Sinha to join Cong. tomorrow

PATNA
Bollywood actor-turned-politician Shatrughan Sinha, who has been associated with the BJP for about three decades, will join the Congress in New Delhi on Thursday, a senior party leader said here on Tuesday. "Shatrughan Sinha will be our candidate from Patna Sahib," Akhilesh Prasad Singh, chairman of the State Congress election campaign committee, told presspersons here. Mr. Sinha has been openly critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president Amit Shah. Speculation was rife for some time that he would join the Congress. PTI

BJP wins a seat in Arunachal

GUWAHATI
The Bharatiya Janata Party got a head start in the Arunachal Pradesh Assembly election when one of its 60 candidates was elected unopposed on Tuesday. "BJP party in Arunachal has made a good start. Shri Kento Jini, @BJP4India candidate from 31-Aalo East Assembly constituency is elected unopposed. Many congratulations to him and all BJP parivar," tweeted Chief Minister Pema Khandu, who is contesting in the Mukto constituency in Tawang district.

EC to seek views on PM's biopic

NEW DELHI
The Election Commission will seek comments from the producers of a biopic on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, following demands from the Opposition parties to postpone its release until the last phase of voting for the Lok Sabha election is over. The biopic, *PM Narendra Modi*, is scheduled to be released across the country in early April, while the first phase of elections in 91 Lok Sabha constituencies starts on April 11. Terming the film's release a violation of the model code of conduct, the Congress said that it would influence voters.

Another day, another seat

PUNE
A day after he filed his nomination for the Solapur Lok Sabha constituency, Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi leader Prakash Ambedkar filed his papers from the Akola seat as well. Mr. Ambedkar has a sizeable base in Akola, once considered his stronghold. He won the seat in 1999, but has since lost to BJP's Sanjay Dhotre successively in the next three general elections.

So happy that under the NYAY scheme, women will be the ones who receive the annual amount of ₹72,000 directly into their accounts. Empower a woman, empower a family.

PRIYANKA GANDHI VADRA
CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY

POCKET | SATWIK GADE

Elections and IPL! I don't think I can take so much mansplaining!!!

IN BRIEF

China ex-internet czar sentenced for graft

BEIJING

China's former internet censor Lu Wei has been sentenced to 14 years in prison on corruption charges on Tuesday. In its ruling, a court said Mr. Lu had abused his authority in various positions, including as a Deputy Propaganda Minister and as head of a government internet security advisory body, accepting gifts in return for favours. AP

Gaza tense after Israel, Hamas exchange fire

JERUSALEM

The Gaza border region was tense on Tuesday after a night of heavy fire as Israeli aircraft bombed targets across the Gaza Strip and militants fired rockets into Israel, just two weeks before the Israeli election. Schools and colleges in southern Israel were closed even as the military imposed restrictions on civilian public gatherings. AP

Pakistan shelters 2 Hindu girls after conversion

ISLAMABAD

A Pakistani court on Tuesday placed two teenage sisters from the minority Hindu community in a government shelter even as authorities launched an investigation into whether they were abducted and forced to convert and marry two Muslim men. AP

Pentagon approves $1 bn for Trump's border wall

WASHINGTON

Acting Pentagon chief Patrick Shanahan has authorized $1 billion to build part of the wall sought by Donald Trump along the U.S.-Mexico border, the first funds designated for the project under the President's emergency declaration. AFP

MPs wrest control of Brexit process from government

To give indicative votes to chart alternative routes for U.K.'s exit from the EU

VIDYA RAM
LONDON

British MPs are set to debate and take part in a series of indicative votes on Wednesday to help chart a course that could command support in the Parliament.

This came after the government suffered a major political defeat on Monday night, as MPs voted to wrest control of the Brexit timetable from the government, to hold the votes, despite assurances from the government that it would be willing to hold a series of such votes itself. Three ministers resigned in order to be able to vote for the amendment.

It also comes as the government continues to struggle to rally MPs behind the Prime Minister's controversial withdrawal deal. While some hard line Brexiteers – notably European Research Group chair Jacob Rees-Mogg – have indicated their willingness to support the deal if it means avoiding no Brexit at all, the Democratic Unionist Party and other Conservative MPs have held fast in their opposition, a day after the Prime Minister acknowledged she didn't have the majority in Parliament but warned that the alternatives included no Brexit at all or a "slow Brexit".

Following another lengthy debate on Monday night, MPs voted by 329 to 302 in favour of an amendment to a motion – introduced by Conservative MP Oliver Letwin – to enable the series of unspecified votes to take place.

The precise system that will be used – and what the options offered to MPs – will become clear on Wednesday itself, when a business of the House is set to be put to MPs and debated between 2pm and 3pm U.K. time, and then voted on, setting the course of how these votes would take place and what the MPs will have to answer. The indicative votes could take place later that day.

In unison: Anti-Brexit protesters hold flags while demonstrating outside the British Parliament in London on Tuesday. AP

Tricky move

Striking the right note in the indicative votes will be crucial and tricky, to avoid any suggestion that the ordering of the questions compromised or predetermined the way that MPs answered the questions. A process along these lines has only ever been used by MPs once before – in 2003, to identify the best way to reform the House of Lords. However, at that time, it failed to provide clarity as MPs rejected all the options before them.

Even if MPs were able to agree to a particular route ahead in the indicative votes, there is no guarantee that the government will abide by them. "I cannot commit the Government to delivering the outcome of any votes held by the House, but I do commit to engaging constructively with the process," Theresa May told MPs on Monday ahead of the vote on the Letwin amendment.

The government is continuing to attempt to rally support behind the withdrawal deal, despite clear indications from many – including the DUP – that they would not change their mind. However, Jacob Rees-Mogg, a vocal critic of the Prime Minister indicated, in a podcast interview on the website Conservative Home, that he could be persuaded to back the beleaguered Withdrawal Agreement as the options facing the U.K. dwindled.

Ms. May on Monday appeared to rule out a no-deal Brexit, and instead pointed to other options, including a "slow Brexit" that would require the U.K. to take place on European parliamentary elections on May 23.

After the EU agreed to delay Brexit last week beyond March 29 if no withdrawal deal is agreed this week, the U.K. will have time till April 12 to come up with alternative routes forward. If it were accepted, then the U.K. will leave the EU on May 22.

Mr. Letwin, setting out his amendment on Monday, had told the House that a compromise would be needed if MPs were to be able to find the road ahead. "We need not just a majority for something but a majority for something that will continue to persist as the various stages have to be carried through."

While Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn hailed Parliament for "taking control", the government warned that the vote upended "the balance between our democratic institutions and sets a dangerous, unpredictable precedent for the future".

However, some EU politicians welcomed the actions taken by Parliament. Guy Verhofstadt, the European Parliament's Brexit coordinator, said Parliament taking control was an "opportunity to build a cross-party cooperation leading to an enhanced political declaration and close future relationship."

Hand over full Mueller report, not summary, say Democrats

Trump says release of the report 'wouldn't bother me at all'

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

House Democrats pressed the Justice Department to provide the full report from special counsel Robert Mueller even as Republicans gleefully called for them to "move on" from the Russia investigation. President Donald Trump accused those responsible for launching Mr. Mueller's probe of "treasonous things against our country" and said they "certainly will be looked into".

Mr. Trump said the release of Mr. Mueller's full report "wouldn't bother me at all", and Democrats quickly put that statement to the test, demanding that his administration hand over the entire document and not just Sunday's four-page summary from Attorney-General William Barr.

Six House Democratic committee chairmen wrote to Mr. Barr that his summary is "not sufficient" and asked to have Mr. Mueller's full report by April 2. They also want to begin receiving the underlying evidence the same day. The information is "urgently needed by our committees to perform their duties under the Constitution", they wrote, implying that the information would be subpoenaed if it is not turned over by the deadline.

U.S. President Donald Trump slammed the supporters of the Russia probe.

Mr. Barr said in his letter to Congress that Mr. Mueller did not find that Mr. Trump's campaign "conspired or coordinated" with the Russian government to influence the 2016 presidential election.

No conclusion

But he also said Mr. Mueller reached no conclusion on whether Mr. Trump obstructed the federal investigation, instead setting out "evidence on both sides" of the question and stating that "while this report does not conclude the President committed a crime, it also does not exonerate him". Absent a recommendation from Mr. Mueller, Mr. Barr stepped in and decided there wasn't sufficient evidence to establish that the President obstructed justice. Democrats said Mr. Barr's judgment is not the final word.

"All I'm interested in is them releasing the full report, the full Mr. Mueller report," said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif.

Amid U.S. tensions, Xi says China, EU 'advancing together'

Chinese President urges EU leaders to overcome suspicions

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Tuesday stressed the growing convergence between Beijing and the European Union on global issues from climate change to trade, urging the two sides to overcome their "suspicions."

At a meeting in Paris between Mr. Xi, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker, the leaders declared their desire to work together.

"Of course there are differences and competition, but it's positive competition," Mr. Xi said. "We are advancing together. We shouldn't let suspicions lead us to be constantly looking backwards."

European and Chinese leaders have both faced challenges from U.S. President Donald Trump's "America-first" nationalism and his attacks on international agreements covering global warming, trade or Iran's nuclear programme.

Working together

In a joint statement at the end of Mr. Xi's three-day trip to France, Mr. Xi and Mr. Macron committed to working together to promote a rules-based international order.

Nawaz Sharif granted bail for six weeks on health grounds

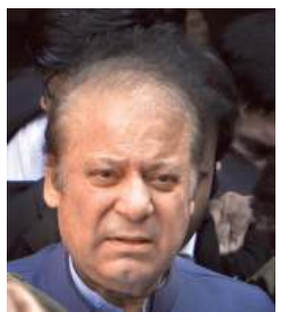
But former Pakistan PM is not allowed to leave the country

MEHMAL SARFRAZ
LAHORE

Former Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has been granted bail for six weeks by the Supreme Court on health grounds. The terms of the bail include that Mr. Sharif "shall not leave or be allowed to leave the country". He can now be treated anywhere in the country.

The leadership of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) hailed this decision. Mr. Sharif's daughter Maryam Nawaz and younger brother Shehbaz Sharif "thanked God" in their tweets for this temporary relief.

Ahsan Iqbal, a senior leader of the PML-N, told *The Hindu* that this decision by the Supreme Court validates their position that Mr. Sharif has serious health issues. "It also negates what the [PTI] government was doing, such as making fun of his health, making statements to that effect and playing politics with Mian *sahib's* health. The court has given him bail because he has serious health issues. We will now focus on his treatment as Mian *sahib* is an asset for the country."



Former Pakistan PM Nawaz Sharif has been battling poor health for long. AP

Pakistan's Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry told *The Hindu* he hopes that this relief will lessen Mr. Sharif's tensions. "He [Mr. Sharif] should get the required medical treatment in these six weeks and get well so he can go back to jail after these six weeks are over. He should either complete his sentence or return the looted money in a plea bargain if he wants his freedom," added Mr. Chaudhry.

A win-win situation

Senior journalist Suhail Warraich thinks it's a win-win for all parties. "Both the establishment and the judiciary don't want to look cruel. The PML(N) got relief. The PTI, which was under pressure due to Mr. Sharif's health, will also come out of pressure now."

Anchorperson Gharidah Farooqi said Mr. Sharif might continue to remain silent on the issue let Shahbaz Sharif's mediation continue.

Reporters quit over Vatican call

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
VATICAN CITY

The all-female editorial team behind the Vatican's women's magazine have resigned over what they describe as attempts to stifle their reporting and bring in more "obedient" journalists, its founder said Tuesday.

"We are throwing in the towel because we feel surrounded by a climate of distrust and progressive de-legitimisation," *Woman Church World* founder Lucetta Scaraffia wrote in an editorial published by Italian religious news blog *Il Sismografo*.

Ms. Scaraffia said the new editor of *L'Osservatore*, Andrea Monda, was attempting to "weaken" the monthly by bringing in external collaborators in a bid to control the editorial line.

"They are returning to selecting women who ensure obedience," she said.

U.S. upset as Russian planes land in Venezuela

A reckless escalation of situation in South American nation, says State Dept.

REUTERS
WASHINGTON/CARACAS

The United States on Monday accused Russia of "reckless escalation" of the situation in Venezuela by deploying military planes and personnel to the crisis-stricken South American nation that Washington has hit with crippling sanctions.

The Russian planes and military personnel arrived outside the Venezuelan capital Caracas on Saturday, according to local media reports, two months after the Trump administration disavowed President Nicolas Maduro.

Washington has recognized opposition leader Juan Guaido as the country's legitimate President and demands that Mr. Maduro leave power, which Russia has described as a U.S.-backed coup against the socialist government.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the U.S. won't remain idle on Venezuela.

"The United States condemns Russia's deployment of military aircraft and personnel to Caracas, which is another contradiction of both Nicolas Maduro's and Russia's calls for non-intervention in Venezuela and is a reckless escalation of the situation," a State Department spokesman said.

The Vice-President of Venezuela's Socialist Party, Diosdado Cabello, confirmed that two planes had flown in from Russia.

"The planes from Russia landed in Venezuela because they were authorized by the only government that there is in Venezuela, and it's called the government of Nicolas Maduro," Mr. Cabello said in a speech broadcast on state television.

The Kremlin declined to comment on the planes on Tuesday or to the accusations from the U.S. State Department.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov in a phone call on Monday that Washington would "not stand idly by" as Russia backed Mr. Maduro, who has overseen a dramatic collapse of a once-bustling economy.

Russia has warned the United States against a military intervention in Venezuela.

MARKET WATCH

	26-03-2019	% CHANGE
Sensex	38,233	1.12
US Dollar	68.86	0.15
Gold	33,170	-0.15
Brent oil	68.02	1.63

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	368.60	7.25
Asian Paints	1485.05	27.50
Axis Bank	757.10	11.40
Bajaj Auto	2952.80	-5.15
Bajaj Finserv	6987.85	70.60
Bajaj Finance	2934.35	84.55
Bharti Airtel	327.80	0.80
BPCL	383.90	0.20
Cipla	529.30	2.45
Coal India	236.45	-0.75
Dr Reddys Lab	2782.35	1.40
Eicher Motors	21382.00	230.65
GAIL (India)	359.35	7.70
Grasim Ind	836.70	21.30
HCL Tech	1034.60	16.95
HDFC	1946.30	0.65
HDFC Bank	2311.35	30.05
Hero MotoCorp	2574.45	-1.25
Hindalco	208.50	3.05
HPCL	277.05	2.80
Hind Unilever	1683.80	9.95
Indiabulls HFL	729.70	16.35
ICICI Bank	394.10	10.60
IndusInd Bank	1714.65	31.10
Bharti Infratel	312.85	6.25
Infosys	727.75	-7.50
Indian OilCorp	161.80	-2.55
ITC	293.40	-1.65
JSW Steel	281.35	2.55
Kotak Bank	1342.95	34.30
L&T	1372.80	-3.95
M&M	669.60	5.00
Maurti Suzuki	6585.70	63.10
NTPC	140.80	5.45
ONGC	160.05	1.40
PowerGrid Corp	202.85	0.85
Reliance Ind	1367.25	42.80
State Bank	303.50	9.50
Sun Pharma	469.80	5.15
Tata Motors	173.10	1.80
Tata Steel	519.35	4.20
TCS	1982.65	-1.60
Tech Mahindra	770.75	-18.85
Titan	1115.75	15.65
UltraTech Cement	3925.60	54.55
UPL	903.30	-9.40
Vedanta	173.60	5.35
Wipro	255.00	-1.50
YES Bank	253.70	6.45
Zee Entertainment	421.00	4.55

EXCHANGE RATES

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on March 26

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	68.66	68.98
Euro	77.57	77.93
British Pound	90.95	91.38
Japanese Yen (100)	62.19	62.49
Chinese Yuan	10.23	10.27
Swiss Franc	69.06	69.39
Singapore Dollar	50.83	51.07
Canadian Dollar	51.21	51.45
Malaysian Ringitt	16.85	16.95

Source:Indian Bank

BULLION RATES CHENNAI

March 26 rates in rupees with previous rates in parentheses

Retail Silver (1g)	41.3	(41.3)
22 ct gold (1 g)	3064	(3067)

Will Naresh Goyal stage a comeback?

A pact with Jet's lenders allows him to participate in the auction, but will he have financial backing?

LALATENDU MISHRA
MUMBAI

Lenders may have forced Naresh Goyal and his spouse Anita Goyal to resign from Jet Airways' board to make way for a new investor who could turn the airline around, but going by the clauses of an agreement between the lenders and Mr. Goyal, the erstwhile aviation baron may still stage a comeback.

Though the agreement has several clauses that make it difficult for Mr. Goyal to have an easy ride so that the airline can be sold as a going concern to a new investor, the return of the Goyals cannot be ruled out.

As per the agreement, Mr. Goyal, whose holding has been reduced to 25.5% (including the 16% pledged with lenders), can still participate in the auction process. He can seize control by bidding aggressively, an analyst said.

Master plan: Mr. Goyal may utilise the two-month window to turn the tide in his favour, it is said. ▪REUTERS

'Legally qualified'

"Legally, he is qualified to participate in the bidding process. But whether he has the financial resources to join the race is not known," the analyst added. According to a person familiar with the development, Mr. Goyal is still camping in London and is possibly mobilising resources and may be trying to rope in a partner for a bid.

"Now that Jet Airways has got a new lease of life, Mr. Goyal will utilise the two months' window to turn the tide in his favour. He is someone who will not give up so easily," the person said.

However, most analysts disagree. "Mr. Goyal has virtually no chance to come back. First, there is a presumption in the IBC against the promoter who does not meet obligations. Lenders do not want to get such promoters back. And secondly, who will now fund him to participate in the bid? I don't see anyone coming forward and he has no chance," Shailesh Haribhakti, chairman DHC, a leading accountancy and advisory firm, said.

Tarun Bhatia, managing director, Kroll South Asia, said, "Banks have set a 60-day deadline to sell the company. Though the current promoters can participate in the bidding process, it is not that easy for them to be the winning bidder."

"Removing the promoter from the board is a positive decision rather than no resolution at all. Banks would like to sell their entire holding to the new investor rather than selling a portion to Mr. Goyal. So, if he is able to acquire 50.1% and give banks an exit, then it could be possible. But does he have the money and the financial backer who could help? I don't think so," he said.

Since Mr. Goyal is now out of Jet's board, Etihad Airways may decide to increase stake from 12% to possibly 49%. But going by its current financial condition, this seems unlikely. However, a final decision will be made by the end of this month.

"The auction process can [help] discover the best price for Jet," Mr. Haribhakti said.

Jet Airways gears up to restore suspended flights

Plans to re-induct 1-2 planes daily

LALATENDU MISHRA
MUMBAI

A day after its lenders agreed to sanction a fresh loan of ₹1,500 crore, Jet Airways kick-started a plan to get its grounded flights back on track.

The entire fleet of over 100 aircraft, most of which is grounded due to various reasons, is expected to become operational in three to four weeks in a phased manner, airline officials said.

Though the money is yet to transferred to Jet's accounts, the airline, as a first step, has decided to restore more than 50 domestic flights which were suspended for April.

"We are restoring these flights immediately and bookings can be made for these flights," an airline official said. The airline has also decided to re-open four domestic stations which did not receive a single flight in the past few weeks as lessors insisted on grounding of the planes due to non-payment of dues. These stations include Bhopal, Mangaluru and Bhuj. "These stations were open, but there was not a single flight. Now we are re-opening these,"the official said.

Due process

"We can't deploy the whole fleet instantly. Due procedure has to be followed to get the grounded planes back into deployment. Our plan is to re-induct one or two planes every day to achieve normalcy," the official added.

To begin with, the airline will give priority to high-density sectors. In the summer schedule starting April, the airline will try to restore most of its flights.

"An airline's assets are the network it has, the landing slots it is allotted, the flights it operates and the market share it commands. These are critical for the turnaround and Jet must restore them at the earliest possible," Jitender Bhargava, former executive director, Air India, and author of the book 'The Descent of Air India', said.

So, to make the airline attractive for prospective investors, lenders are also in favour of getting all the planes off the ground. Out of the 50-odd planes grounded by lessors for non-payment of lease rentals, about six have been flown out and the rest can be back in action soon.

The fresh loan will help pay the wages, clear some dues to lessors and make part payments to vendors.

The threat of the pilots' strike has fizzled out as they are expected to get most part of their dues. They have been only paid 12.5% of December salary. Salaries for January, February and March are due.

The Jet stock rose 6.48% to ₹271 on the BSE.

RBI receives aggressive bids, infuses ₹34,500 cr. liquidity

Bids for swap auction thrice as much as what was on offer

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The first dollar-rupee buy/sell swap auction by Reserve Bank of India (RBI), which was aimed at infusing primary liquidity, saw aggressive bidding by banks, data released by the central bank showed.

The RBI received $16.31 billion in bids for the auction for a notified amount of $5 billion. In turn, RBI infused ₹34,561 crore rupee liquidity.

Market participants said the auction was successful as RBI got bids three times more than what it had intended to purchase, adding that both domestic and foreign banks participated in the auction. "There was aggressive bidding for the auction, almost three times of what was on offer. Cut-off came in line with the market expectation," said Madhavi Arora, Economist, FX and Rates, Edelweiss Securities.

Fewer OMOs

There is expectation that RBI would conduct more such auctions as there is an appetite in the market, and reduce dependence on open market purchases of bonds. RBI has infused a significant amount of liquidity in the current fiscal through open market operations (OMOs).

"This would be one of the ways RBI would be continuously evaluating. This swap window could be used as and when needed to infuse liquidity," Ms. Arora said.

'PSBs made Kingfisher Airlines fail ruthlessly'

Mallya hits out at 'double standards'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Embattled liquor baron Vijay Mallya on Tuesday lashed out at public sector banks (PSBs) for adopting 'double standards' under the current NDA regime for their intervention to bail out Jet Airways, while the same lenders made his Kingfisher Airlines "fail ruthlessly."

In a series of tweets, Mallya said, "Only wish the same was done for Kingfisher.

"Happy to see that PSU Banks have bailed out Jet Airways saving jobs, connectivity and enterprise," he said.

He further said, "the same PSU Banks let India's finest airline with the best employees and connectivity fail ruthlessly. Double standards under NDA."

Vijay Mallya

Mr. Mallya lamented that his efforts to save Kingfisher Airlines were "not recognised and instead slammed in every possible way."

Indices gain over 1% mirroring global trend

FPIs' net buy at ₹1,000 cr.; rupee gains

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Mirroring a strong global trend, the Indian benchmark equity indices staged a smart recovery to gain more than 1% on Tuesday to reverse a two-day losing streak that saw indices fall below psychological levels.

The 30-share Sensex rose 424.50 points, or 1.12%, to close at 38,233.41, led by strong gains in constituents like NTPC, State Bank of India, Vedanta, Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank and Yes Bank, among others. The broader Nifty ended the day at 11,483.25, up 129 points, or 1.14%.

The gains were primarily led by the recovery rally in global equities that registered significant losses on Monday on concerns related to a global economic slowdown. Barring the benchmark of China, all Asian indices gained ground on Tuesday.

"Broader market indices bounced back smartly led by positive global cues and continued strong foreign inflows," said Gaurav Dua, head of Research, Sharekhan. "However, market breadth was not impressive. We expect volatility to continue owing to global geopolitical and macro issues, coupled with upcoming general election uncertainties," he added.

Foreign portfolio investors continued their buying spree in Indian equities, with provisional figures pegging the net buy at nearly ₹1,000 crore. The rupee also appreciated 10 paise to end at 68.86 against the U.S. dollar.

L&T makes an open offer to buy 31% stake in Mindtree for ₹5,030 cr.

Acquisition aligned with strategy to boost revenue, profit of asset-light services

PIYUSH PANDEY
MUMBAI

Engineering and construction major Larsen and Toubro (L&T) on Tuesday made an open offer to acquire up to 5.13 crore equity shares of Mindtree, representing 31% of the voting share capital, for ₹980 a share or ₹5,030 crore.

The offer will open on May 14 and close on May 27, the company informed Mindtree shareholders.

As per the terms of the offer, L&T does not have any intention to dispose-off or otherwise encumber any assets or investments of Mindtree or any of its subsidiaries, through sale, lease, encumbrance, reconstruction, restructuring or otherwise, other than in the ordinary course of business.

Lock, stock and barrel: L&T will also buy up to 15% of Mindtree's shares from the market at ₹980 apiece. ▪REUTERS

Special resolution

"If the acquirer intends to alienate any material asset of the target company or any of its subsidiaries within a period of two years from the date of completion of the offer, a special resolution of the shareholders of the target company or any of its subsidiaries, as applicable, would be taken before undertaking any such alienation of any material asset," said the offer document.

"The object and purpose of the acquisition of a controlling stake in the target company is aligned with the acquirer's strategy to grow the revenue and profit of its asset-light services, business portfolio, thereby increasing the consolidated return on equity and further diversifying the consolidated group revenue and profits into the information technology and technology services areas," L&T said.

Last week, L&T had agreed to buy 20.32% stake in Mindtree for ₹3,269 crore from Indian coffee baron V.G. Siddhartha. L&T had also placed an order with its broker for an on-market purchase of up to 15% of Mindtree's shares at ₹980 a share.

Mindtree not to go ahead with share buy-back

Panel to examine L&T's open offer

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The board of Mindtree Ltd. on Tuesday decided not to go ahead with its proposed buy-back of equity shares amid a 'hostile' attempt by Larsen & Toubro to acquire a majority stake in the Bengaluru-based IT firm.

Additionally, the board has formed a committee of independent directors (IDC) to look into and provide recommendations on the "unsolicited" open offer by L&T to buy 5.13 crore Mindtree shares (about 31% stake) at ₹980 apiece. The committee has time till May 10 to give its recommendation to the company's shareholders on the open offer.

"The board, in its meeting today, decided to immediately constitute the IDC in the interest of all stakeholders to provide their reasoned recommendation in respect of the unsolicited offer by L&T for the consideration of the shareholders," Mindtree said in a communiqué to the stock exchange.

All the independent directors will be members of the IDC. Apurva Purohit, lead independent director, has been elected as the chairperson of the IDC.

'Let Finance Commission function the way it does now'

No need to tamper with its structure, says former RBI chief

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

The Finance Commission should be allowed to function in the same manner as it is doing currently, according to former Reserve Bank Governor Y.V. Reddy.

"Let [the] Finance Commission do whatever it is supposed to do. There is no need to tamper with the structure," he said in a speech on 'New approaches to fiscal federalism in India' as part of Madras Institute of Development Studies' Founder's Day lecture.

Asked about various views on the need for, and against, a permanent structure for the Commission, he said, "Currently, the Finance Commission has a five-year term. The system of appointing a Finance Commission once in five years is fine. Let it continue. The way forward is to stick to the old approach.... New approach is not warranted. What is warranted is to behave more faithfully, with honesty and integrity," he said.

Y.V. Reddy

Pointing out that the proposal for making the Finance Commission a permanent body could evolve in two ways, he said: "First, the government would abdicate its discretion currently available in designing and implementing the specific purpose transfers. Second, it would dilute the neutrality of the Finance Commission between the Union and the States through a process of continuous association with the government."

Dr. Reddy said that in his view, there was considerable merit in having one apolitical body that provided stability and predictability primarily to share taxes that ensured fiscal balance and another forum of transfers involving continuous political bargaining with a broader mandate.

IN BRIEF

SWIFT norms: RBI slaps ₹2 crore penalty on PNB

NEW DELHI

The RBI has slapped a penalty of ₹2 crore on Punjab National Bank (PNB) for non-compliance of regulatory directions with regard to SWIFT, the State-run lender said.The ₹14,000-crore fraud perpetrated by jeweller Nirav Modi and his uncle Mehul Choksi at the PNB was a case of misuse of this messaging software. The PNB said the Reserve Bank had informed the lender about the penalty. PTI

Banks on govt. business to stay open this Sunday

MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Tuesday directed banks to keep open their branches dealing with government business on the last day of the financial year (March 31), which happens to be a Sunday. "The Government of India has advised that all Pay and Account Offices will remain open on March 31, 2019 (Sunday) to facilitate government receipt and payment transactions," the RBI said in a circular. PTI

Nirav Modi case: Ex-PNB chief approaches NCLAT

NEW DELHI

Former Punjab National Bank (PNB) MD and CEO Usha Ananthasubramanian has approached the NCLAT against the NCLT Mumbai-bench order, which made her a respondent in the PNB-Nirav Modi fraud case. A two-member bench headed by Chairman Justice S J Mukhopadhaya issued notice to the Ministry of the Corporate Affairs over her plea. The NCLAT had directed to list the matter on April 29 for next hearing. PTI

'Shift to formal trade slower than expected'

GST focused on ease of doing business, but procedural issues made transition phase tough: report

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Goods and Services Tax (GST), which was introduced about 20 months ago, has seen the total number of returns filed increase, though the shift in trade towards a formal economy has been slower than anticipated.

In a report by Motilal Oswal Financial Services, the brokerage highlighted that though the collections had increased, it was still below the target as deferment of anti-evasive measures for a smooth roll-out of GST impacted collections.

In the GST regime, the manufacturing sector witnessed an increase in working capital requirements, while the services sector has had to comply with increased state-level compliances and higher tax rates, the domestic brokerage said.

Numbers speak: The average monthly GST collection in FY19 was ₹97,400 crore, higher than FY18's average. ▪ NAGARA GOPAL

"GST collections have increased year-on-year in FY19 [until February], but the monthly average collection is lower than the target, slimming the prospects of achievement of the full-year target. However, in our view, collections should improve once the anti-evasive measures are put in place," the report said. The average monthly GST collection in FY19 till February was ₹97,400 crore, higher than the FY18 monthly average of ₹89,900 crore, it added.

> **GST collections rose in FY19, but monthly average is lower than the target, the Motilal Oswal report says**

Scope for improvement

"We believe that GST collection should improve going forward, led by the rising compliance level from the broadening tax base and the government's increased focus on implementing anti-evasive tax measures," the brokerage report said.

Meanwhile, the total number of returns filed increased from 6.5 million in July 2017 to about 7.8 million in recent months. Further, while the GST revenue collection trend has been improving over the past 20 months, the monthly average revenue collection of around ₹97,300 crore (until February) in this fiscal is below the target of ₹1.06 lakh crore.

According to the brokerage, the FY19 revenue collection may fall short of the target by close to ₹1 lakh crore if the same revenue trend continues for the last month of FY19. "GST is certainly a move focused on ease of doing business. However, the lack of preparedness, the technology glitches in the GST platform and the non-clarity over certain procedural issues have made the transition phase tough," the report highlighted.

Farm loan waivers kill credit culture, says Rajan

'Focus on resolution of farm distress'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

India needs to focus on resolution of farm distress rather than loan waivers which kill the credit culture, former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan said on Tuesday.

"First we need to worry about why people are so distressed and angry. There is a lot of agriculture distress. I personally believe that farm loan waivers are not the answers. But there are other answers," he said.

Raghuram Rajan

Creation of jobs

The other focus area should be creation of jobs which the people want, he said here at the launch of his book – 'The Third Pillar - How Markets and the State leave the Community Behind'. "I do worry about waiving loans because it is only targeted at those farmers who have taken loans from the system, not the poorer farmers who have loans from the money lenders or an agricultural worker who never got a loan in the first place. So, I would rather have a better targeted system," Dr. Rajan said.

ITC sells John Players brand to Reliance Retail

Move part of rejig plan for lifestyle retailing business

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Diversified conglomerate ITC has sold its John Players apparel brand and related trademarks and intellectual property to Reliance Retail.

An ITC spokesperson said that as part of the strategic review of the lifestyle retailing business, a restructuring plan is underway. In line with this ongoing restructuring, ITC had sold the brand 'John Players' and related trade-marks and intellectual property, and the goodwill related to it, to Reliance Retail Limited. ITC declined to disclose the deal size.

Launched about 2002, the apparel brand started with men's shirts and was later extended to jeans, tees and trousers. ITC's lifestyle business covered the mass John Players brand and the premium WLS brand (erstwhile Wills Lifestyle.

> **ITC's lifestyle business covered the mass John Players brand and the premium WLS brand**

Challenge from e-com

However, ITC faced challenges in its branded apparel business due to aggressive discounts offered by e-commerce players and GST transition, which triggered premature end of season sales. It responded by making structural interventions including store rationalisation.

In August 2018, ITC said in a regulatory clarification that it was undertaking a "routine business review of its apparel business."

Abneesh Roy, research analyst and senior vice-president – institutional equities – research at Edelweiss Securities, said the business was hit by competition for three years. "ITC will now focus on the premium-end through its WLS stores. It also said the sale would improve ITC's consumer business margins but impact sales from this business.

Laurus Labs in pact with The Global Fund

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

Drug maker Laurus Labs has entered into a strategic partnership agreement with The Global Fund, a three-and-a-half-year pact that will fetch the company volume commitments from the fund for treatment of HIV/AIDS.

Announcing the agreement, the company on Tuesday said it had also received and executed an order for the fund that involved supplies to the high disease-burden countries in the sub Saharan African region.

It was the first order for the company's fixed dose combination drug Tenofovir/Lamivudine/Dolutegravir 300/300/50mg (TLD).

Oberoi Hotels to highlight new logo via campaign

'Brand re-discovery after guest survey'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Oberoi Hotels & Resorts is planning a global campaign to highlight its new logo. The new logo presents the 'Oberoi Sun' which is reflective of the warmth and sense of well-being that the hospitality group offers to its guests.

Brand strategy

A press release said that the word 'Heart Felt' had been added to explain guest experience and would form the central pillar of the brand strategy and communication programme.

The revamped website seeks to capture the Oberoi experience across all its hotels and resorts through a film. The brand re-discovery followed a survey and a research which showed that guests admired the care they experienced during their stay, the release said.

Executive chairman of the Oberoi Group P.R.S. Oberoi said that putting guests above everything had been the foundation of the group's existence for over 85 years and "holds true in our hearts and minds today as it did when the first Oberoi hotel was established by my father Rai Bahadur M.S. Oberoi in the 1930s."

Oberoi Hotels & Resorts operates 22 hotels and resorts in six countries.

The newest resort at Marrakech, Morocco, is set to open this year.

Rail Vikas Nigam IPO opens Mar. 29

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

State-owned Rail Vikas Nigam Ltd. (RVNL) has fixed a price band of ₹17-19 per equity share for its upcoming initial public offering, which would run from March 29-April 3, to raise about ₹481 crore.

The IPO comprises up to 25,34,57,280 equity shares of the company through an offer for sale by the President of India, acting through the Ministry of Railways, Government of India, a company statement said on Tuesday.

The offer includes a reservation of 6,57,280 equity shares for eligible employees for allocation and allotment on a proportionate basis.

A capital show from Super Kings

Bravo's triple strike and Watson's initial onslaught do it for Dhoni's men

RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI

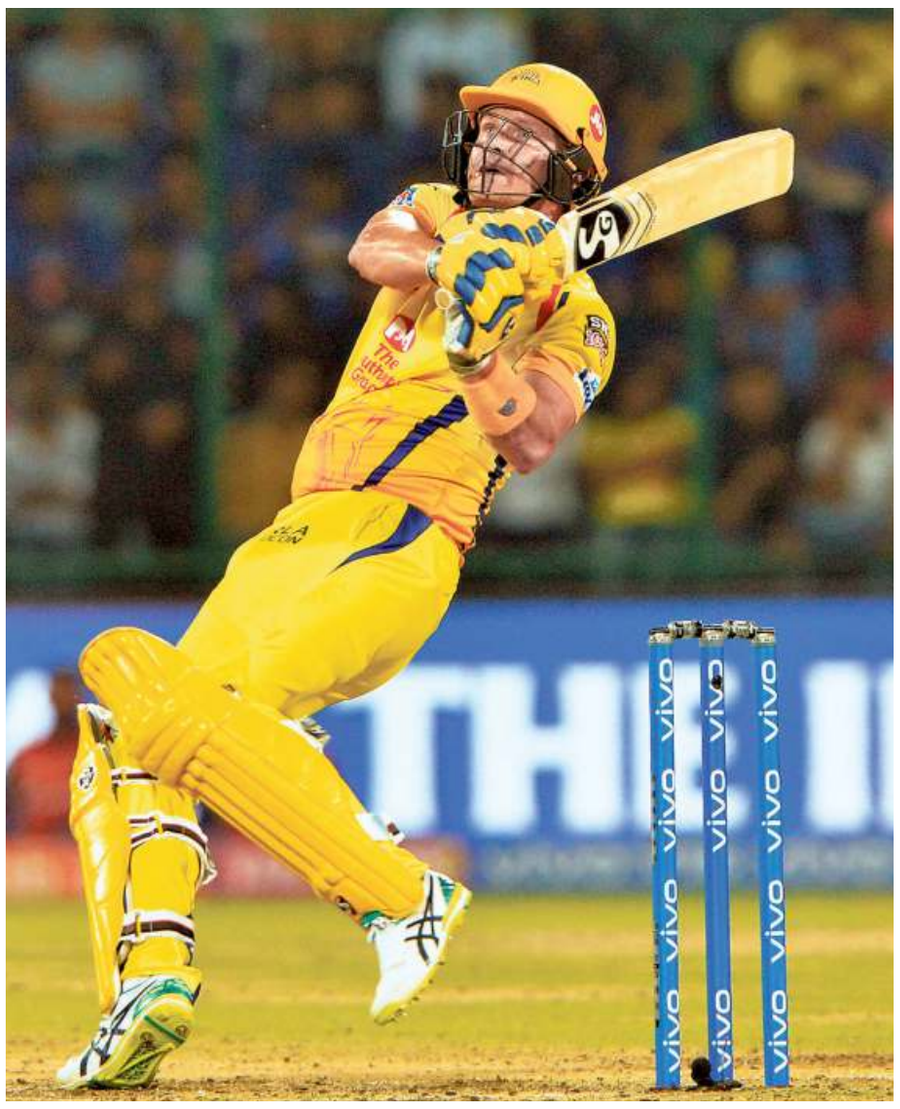
More often than not, the side that bounces back in the closing overs leading to the innings break wins in a T20 contest. And who knows the importance of seizing that timely, psychological edge better than M.S. Dhoni and his gallant men.

Effectively, Tuesday's battle was won and lost when Chennai Super Kings stuck four times – thrice by Dwayne Bravo – between the 16th and 18th overs. This led to Delhi Capitals tumbling from a healthy 120 for two after 15.2 overs to a grossly inadequate 147 for six in 20!

The host was right in believing the target was around 15-20 runs short of what it sought to set. Having won half the battle, Chennai went on to put the finishing touches with six wickets and two deliveries to spare.

With it, CSK gave its huge fan-presence at the Kotla just what it had come for.

The early fall of Ambati Rayudu did not hurt Chennai as Shane Watson and Suresh Raina counter-attacked in style.



Setting it up: Watson sends one soaring over the ropes during his 26-ball 44. ▪R.V. MOORTHY

The first 50 came in the fifth over – with the Power-Play producing 58 runs – as the two found the ropes almost at will.

By the time leg-spinner Amit Mishra managed to get rid of Watson and Raina by the 11th over, the match was already over as a contest.

Thereafter, Kedar Jadhav, out in the last over, and Dhoni chose a lower gear to cover the distance.

Unchanged combination

At the start, Chennai's decision to opt for an unchanged combination appeared strange. After all, the pitch here at the Kotla was quite different to the spin-friendly surface in the team's campaign opener in Chennai.

Not surprisingly, Harbhajan Singh and Imran Tahir went for 50 runs for a lone wicket in their six overs, while Ravindra Jadeja saved the day for the spinners after Delhi opted to bat.

But for Bravo's timely strikes, to go with Deepak Chahar's economical offering, Chennai would have been chasing a far more challenging target.

The West Indian all-rounder struck thrice in two overs, sending back the two dangerous local left-handers – Rishabh Pant and Shikhar Dhawan – to pull back things.

The actors in Delhi's starcast played the roles one has come to expect.

Prithvi Shaw's boundary-count stopped at five off 16 deliveries, after he smashed three in-a-row to end Shardul Thakur's first over.

Sedate Dhawan

Dhawan stuck to the job of holding one end up as long as he could and sent the ball across the ropes seven times during his otherwise sedate 47-ball 51.

Shreyas Iyer could not get going and Pant perished before he could get into the top gear. With Colin Ingram and Keemo Paul falling cheaply, Chennai denied Delhi flourish at the finish.

Bravo. ▪R.V. MOORTHY

Innings scan

DC		CSK
46	Dots	48
16	Fours	14
2	Sixes	5
43/1	PP	58/1
7.35	RR	7.62

CSK continues to rule

3 For only the third time, an IPL match featured only six overseas players

CSK (**4**) vs KKR (**2**), Chennai, 2011

DD (**3**) vs RCB (**3**), Delhi, 2017

DC (**3**) vs CSK (**3**), Delhi, 2019

5/2 Chennai's win-loss record against Delhi at the Ferozeshah Kotla

51 Number of wickets taken by Amit Mishra at this venue in the IPL

Points table

Team	M	W	L	NR	PTS	NRR
Chennai Super Kings	2	**2**	0	0	**4**	0.495
Delhi Capitals	2	**1**	1	0	**2**	0.782
Kings XI Punjab	1	**1**	0	0	**2**	0.700
Kolkata Knight Riders	1	**1**	0	0	**2**	0.255
Sunrisers Hyderabad	1	**0**	1	0	**0**	-0.255
Royal Challengers	1	**0**	1	0	**0**	-0.519
Rajasthan Royals	1	**0**	1	0	**0**	-0.700
Mumbai Indians	1	**0**	1	0	**0**	-1.850

*after the DC-CSK match on March 26

SCOREBOARD DELHI CAPITALS VS SUPER KINGS

DELHI CAPITALS

Prithvi Shaw c Watson b Chahar 24 (*16b, 5x4*), Shikhar Dhawan c Thakur b Bravo 51 (*47b, 7x4*), Shreyas Iyer lbw b Tahir 18 (*20b, 1x6*), Rishabh Pant c Thakur b Bravo 25 (*13b, 2x4, 1x6*), Colin Ingram c Raina b Bravo 2 (*2b*), Keemo Paul b Jadeja 0 (*4b*), Axar Patel (not out) 9 (*9b, 1x4*), Rahul Tewatia (not out) 11 (*9b, 1x4*); Extras (lb-2, w-5); 7; Total (for six wkts. in 20 overs): 147.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-36 (Shaw, 4.3 overs), 2-79 (Shreyas, 11.4), 3-120 (Pant, 15.2), 4-122 (Ingram, 15.4), 5-123 (Paul, 16.3), 6-127 (Dhawan, 17.1).

SUPER KINGS BOWLING

Chahar 4-0-20-1, Thakur 2-0-19-0, Harbhajan 4-0-30-0, Jadeja 4-0-23-1, Tahir 2-0-20-1, Bravo 4-0-33-3.

CHENNAI SUPER KINGS

Shane Watson st. Pant b Mishra 44 (*26b, 4x4, 3x6*), Ambati Rayudu c Shreyas b Ishant 5 (*5b, 1x4*), Suresh Raina c Pant b Mishra 30 (*16b, 4x4, 1x6*), Kedar Jadhav c Pant b Rabada 27 (*34b, 2x4*), M.S. Dhoni (not out) 32 (*35b, 2x4, 1x6*), Dwayne Bravo (not out) 4 (*3b, 1x4*); Extras (lb-5, nb-1, w-2): 8; Total (for four wkts. in 19.4 overs): 150.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-21 (Rayudu, 2.4 overs), 2-73 (Watson, 6.4), 3-98 (Raina, 10.2), 4-146 (Jadhav, 19.1).

DELHI CAPITALS BOWLING

Ishant 3-0-28-1, Axar 4-0-16-0, Rabada 3.4-0-26-1, Mishra 4-0-35-2, Tewatia 2-0-20-0, Paul 3-0-20-0.

Toss: Delhi Capitals.
MoM: Shane Watson.

CSK won by six wickets with two balls remaining.

Ashwin did the right thing: Kapil

Upholding 'spirit of the game' should apply to batsmen too

VIJAY LOKAPALLY
NEW DELHI

Kapil Dev strongly supported R. Ashwin in the run out episode involving Jos Buttler on Monday.

"Ashwin did the right thing. You can argue if it was ethical or not. He did it within the rules of the game and that's it. Why blame the bowler when the batsman was trying to steal a run? I will see how many people blame Ashwin if these two points help his team qualify," Kapil told *The Hindu*.

Kapil was livid that Ashwin was being targeted.

"I know one thing. It is fine to say that he should have warned the batsman. That may have been an ethical thing to do in a gentleman's game. It is not so any more. The game has become professional. The IPL is a very intense competition and what Ashwin did was to ensure the opponent stuck to the rules," said Kapil, who had pulled off a similar run out in an ODI at Port Elizabeth in 1992.

"At that time I thought I was ethically wrong but then I had warned him three times. The explanation he gave was that he was trying to match the speed of Jonty Rhodes at the other end. Was it fair? Don't you call no-ball when the bowler oversteps? Why should the batsman then not be penalised?" asked Kapil.

"Do the batsmen 'walk'. Hardly any. Is it not unethical? Do they say don't count the extra run/runs when the ball gets deflected (by their bat or body) from a throw? They don't! Would any batsman refuse to accept such gifts when the team stands to win? He won't.

"Let this 'spirit of the game' business apply to batsmen too. Why should only bowlers take the responsibility of maintaining the spirit of the game when they are not breaking any rule."

Kapil concluded by insisting that Ashwin was not cheating. "It is the batsman who was trying to steal. Such a batsman, in my opinion, is a thief."

What is 'Mankading'?

'Mankading' is a way of running out the non-striker when he is backing up and leaves the popping crease before the ball is bowled.

The term is derived from the legendary Indian all-rounder **Vinoo Mankad** who dismissed Bill Brown twice (once in a warm-up game and then in the second Test) by clipping the bails at the non-striker's end before delivering the ball during a series in Australia in 1947. Mankad received quite some flak for his action, but siginficantly got huge support from Sir Donald Bradman.

Bradman wrote in his autobiography: "For the life of me, I can't understand why [the press] questioned his sportsmanship. The laws of cricket make it quite clear that the non-striker must keep within his ground until the ball has been delivered. If not, why is the provision there which enables the bowler to run him out? By backing up too far or too early, the non-striker is obviously gaining an unfair advantage."

What the MCC says

Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), the custodian of the Laws of Cricket, said on Tuesday that Ashwin's 'Mankading' of Buttler was within the rules of the game.

▪ "This Law is essential. Without it, the non-strikers could back up at liberty, several yards down the pitch and a Law is needed to prevent such action," it said in a statement on its website.

▪ "...with batsmen now being deemed in or out by millimetres by TV replays on quick singles, it is right that they should remain in their ground at the non-striker's end until it is fair for them to leave.

▪ "To clarify, it has never been in the Laws that a warning should be given to the non-striker and nor is it against the Spirit of Cricket to run out a non-striker who is seeking to gain an advantage by leaving his/her ground early."

Rule or spirit? A vertical split

P.K. AJITH KUMAR
JAIPUR

It was never going to be the usual, predictable post-match press conference after the Rajasthan Royals-Kings XI Punjab contest on Monday night.

Around midnight, it was the Royals coach Paddy Upton who first addressed the media.

"I will leave it for the IPL fans to decide if that is the kind of things that they want to see and judge R. Ashwin's actions," he said. "I will leave it to the cricket world to judge Ashwin's actions."

The jury is still out on that. Even on Tuesday, the issue continued to trend on Twitter.

Not surprisingly, some of the sharpest words came from the men most affected by the incident – the Rajasthan Royals players. Jofra Archer tweeted: "You show no confidence in yourself or your bowlers to get the job done, so you resort to that?"

There were also players who supported the Kings XI captain.

Former India spinner Murali Kartik, said in a tweet, reacting to Kevin Pietersen who had been quite critical of Ashwin: "MCC is in your country. Go change it (the rule)... don't vindicate stealing, as that is what it is plain and simple... keep crying till the cows come home."

Asked about the Courtney Walsh incident in the 1987 World Cup – the West Indian quick had refused to run out Pakistan's Saleem Jaffar in a similar situation – Ashwin said: "What applies for one man doesn't apply for everyone else. Neither was Jos Buttler playing then, nor I. It is pertinent not to compare two people."

Ashwin's act, and why players must be given the ethical choice

BETWEEN WICKETS

SURESH MENON

The charm of cricket has always been its illogicality and complexity. Matches last for five days with no result guaranteed. What is legally fair is often ethically unacceptable. What was unacceptable in one generation is commonplace in another. It is a game of nuance and varying shades, making it difficult for those who think in black and white to understand or appreciate.

There are written laws of the game, and then there are the unwritten rules. The latter have greater power and purpose. A bowler over-stepping is no-balled, a player overstepping is black-balled, sometimes by his own teammates. In an era when international players have been caught cheating on the field, it might seem precious, even pretentious to criticise a bowler for running out a non-striker backing up too much.

Yet, if you don't understand that this is not cricket, then you don't understand what cricket is.

Ravichandran Ashwin can argue – as many have done before him – that in their IPL clash, Jos Buttler was attempting to gain an unfair advantage by stepping out before the ball was bowled; he can also claim that the law allows him to run out such a batsman.

True, and true. And since he himself was leading, there was no call for the captain to interfere, as skipper Virender Sehwag did, recalling Sri Lanka's Lahiru Thirimane when Ashwin ran him out similarly during a one-day international. "If that was soft," Sehwag was quoted as saying then, "that's the way we are."

Follow both laws and conventions

When Vinoo Mankad did it in Australia, or Kapil Dev in South Africa, they each warned the batsman first. The law does not require this – yet convention does. And sport has to follow both laws and conventions.

There was an element of entrapment about Ashwin's move; it appeared as if he checked his bowling action and waited that split second till the batsman moved out before whipping off the bails. If bowlers did that, about 90% of all dismissals would be run out in this 'Mankading' fashion. Especially in the white ball game.

We confuse morality and convention in sport, thus leading to much sound and fury. The philosopher David Papineau distinguished between the two thus: "Morality is universal, independent of authority, and has to do with genuine welfare, while convention varies across societies, depends on decree, and governs matters of no intrinsic importance."

Sport is of no intrinsic importance, and seen in perspective, it is quite meaningless. But it is this artificiality that makes us infuse it with the kind of ethics that we do not expect in other areas of human endeavour. This is our way of giving sport meaning.

There are those who feel – and this includes players past and present – that too much is made of such incidents, and that ethics have no role to play in sport. Thus you wait for the umpire's signal even if you know you have edged the ball to the 'keeper, or claim a catch despite knowing it wasn't a clean one. The justification is that this is done in the team interest. That's is a slippery slope. There are a number of things you can do – injuring a rival player for instance – that can be justified thus.

Trying to bluff the umpire might be a legitimate tactic in some sports, but in cricket it is looked down upon. Yet it is now accepted that batsmen are under no obligation to 'walk', and the DRS has taken the moral weight off the catcher's shoulders.

Most teams are happy to leave such calls to the individual players. To walk or not is a batsman's choice, bringing with it no ethical opprobrium. Most batsmen are satisfied if the fielder taking a close catch confirms that it was clean.

Unwritten contract

There is an unwritten contract between rival teams: we will not do certain things even if the law allows us to, so long as you follow the same rules. In soccer, when a player is injured, a teammate kicks the ball out of play so their rivals get a throw-in. There is no law which says that the player taking the throw-in must conceded it to the rival team; yet, that is the convention.

Perhaps we can avoid some of the ambiguity of the 'Mankading' situation if the law lays down that a batsman must be warned once or twice. Yet, what is gained in clarity is lost in sportsmanship. When conventions become law, it suggests a lack of moral strength. Something is done or not done because the law demands it, not because that is the way the game ought to be played. Players must be given the ethical choice so we can see what they are made of.

There are some things you don't do on a cricket field, because that is the nature of the game. The laws of the game tell us what we should do; the spirit tells us what we should aspire to.

KXIP needs to raise its game against KKR

Y.B. SARANGI
KOLKATA

R. Ashwin 'Mankanding' Jos Buttler reflected the cut-throat competition and high stakes involved in the IPL.

Kings XI Punjab will want to take the field at the Eden Gardens against Kolkata Knight Riders on Wednesday with the same killer instinct.

Kings' biggest strength is skipper Ashwin, who is astute and fiercely competitive. The India off-spinner knows how to mobilise his resources and survive in the heat of the battle.

While the in-form Chris Gayle and young Sarfaraz Khan inspire confidence, the trio of K.L. Rahul, Mayank Agarwal and Mandeep Singh ensures enough firepower in the batting line-up.

Match-winner: Andre Russell unleashing his muscle power early has given KKR a lot of confidence. ▪K.R. DEEPAK

By fielding five bowlers and rotating them well during crunch situations against Rajasthan Royals, Ashwin was able to stifle the opposition's chase.

KXIP, however, will have to raise its game against KKR which is on a high after the sensational victory against Sunrisers Hyderabad. Andre Russell unleashing his muscle power early has given the hosts immense confidence.

KKR also has Chris Lynn, Nitish Rana, captain Dinesh Karthik and Shubman Gill in its ranks.

The presence of a few all-rounders gives KKR the edge in the eventuality of a close finish.

Today's match

KKR Vs KXIP

KOLKATA, 8 P.M.

HEAD-TO-HEAD
Played: 23
KKR 15 | KXIP 8

Live on Star Sports 1, 2 & Select 1 (SD & HD), 8 p.m.

Bumrah warms up

No official comment from MI camp on whether he is available for selection

ASHWIN ACHAL
BENGALURU

Mumbai Indians (MI) fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah joined the team's training session at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium on Tuesday. There are concerns surrounding Bumrah's fitness, after the gun pacer injured his shoulder during MI's match against Delhi Capitals.

MI takes on Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) on Thursday, though there was no official comment from the MI camp if Bumrah is fit and available for selection.

Bumrah warmed up and took catches, but did not bowl in the nets. The 25-year-old was warmly greeted by RCB and India skipper Virat Kohli, after which he spent time talking to MI Director of Cricket Operations Zaheer Khan and other members of the MI contingent.

The Indian team management, meanwhile, will hope that Bumrah is back to peak fitness for the World Cup, which begins on May 30.

Delightful news: Kohli and Zaheer look pleased to see Bumrah back on the field. ▪G.P. SAMPATH KUMAR

TV PICKS

NBA: Sony ESPN (SD & HD), 5.30 a.m.
IPL: Star Sports 1, 2 & Select 1 (SD & HD), 8 p.m.
Miami Open tennis: Sony ESPN (SD & HD), 12.30 a.m.

IN BRIEF

Nurkic injury mars Blazers' thrilling win

LOS ANGELES

Jusuf Nurkic suffered a horrific leg injury while helping Portland Trail Blazers to a 148-144 victory over Brooklyn Nets in double overtime in the NBA on Monday. Nurkic led the scoring for Blazers with 32 points while adding 16 rebounds and five assists. But the Bosnian's evening ended in despair when his left leg buckled beneath him as he landed after attempting to tip in a shot. AFP

France and England on a goal-scoring spree

PARIS

Mesmerising Kylian Mbappe led France's rout of Iceland in Euro 2020 qualifiers on Monday, but Cristiano Ronaldo hobbled off in Portugal's disappointing draw with Serbia and racist abuse overshadowed five-star England in Montenegro.

The results: Group A: Montenegro 1 (Vesovic 18) lost to England 5 (Keane 30, Barkley 39, 59, Kane 71, Sterling 81); Kosovo 1 (Zeneli 61) drew with Bulgaria 1 (Bozhikov 39).
Group B: Portugal 1 (Danilo 42) drew with Serbia 1 (Tadic 7-pen); Luxembourg 1 (Turpel 34) lost to Ukraine 2 (Tsygankov 40, Rodrigues 90-og).
Group H: Andorra 0 lost to Albania 3 (Sadiku 21, Balaj 87, Abrashi 90); France 4 (Umtiti 12, Giroud 68, Mbappe 78, Griezmann 84) bt Iceland 0; Turkey 4 (Kaldirim 24, Tosun 26, 54, Ayhan 70) bt Moldova 0.

Sheeraz misses final, other Indians misfire too

ACAPULCO

Sheeraz Sheikh shot 119 and missed the men's skeet final by three points in the shotgun World Cup that concluded on Monday. Sheeraz had a series of 24, 24, 23, 24 and 24. Olympian Mairaj Ahmad Khan (116) was placed 51st while Asian and National champion Angad Vir Singh Bajwa (111) was 78th. Two-time Olympic champion Vincent Hancock of the United States won his 11th World Cup gold in style, not missing a single bird in the 60-shot final and the 125-bird qualification.

Ajay makes it to junior Davis Cup team

NEW DELHI

Ajay Malik has been named in the Indian junior Davis Cup team for the Asia/Oceania final qualifying matches in Thailand. Divesh Gahlot and Sushant Dabas are the others in the squad. Udit Gogoi is the reserve member. The selection panel, led by Anil Dhupar, also picked the girls' squad which has three playing members in Bhakti Shah, Sudipta Senthil Kumar and Sanjana Sirimala. Gargi Pawar is the reserve. PTI

'Never miss training, and never give up'

Swimmer extraordinaire Michael Phelps says Rio exploits gave him the most satisfaction

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

Michael Phelps, who has won 23 Olympic golds and 27 gold medals in World Championships, regaled the gathering at the launch of Under Armour in India, here on Tuesday.

Notwithstanding a long flight, Phelps was relaxed and cheerful as he mentioned that the Rio Olympics gave him the most satisfaction, as he came back from retirement to win five gold medals.

"In terms of stats, obviously it had to be Beijing because I won eight gold. But, Rio was the climb of the mountain. One of the most enjoyable rides for me. I felt like a 16 or 17 year old all over again. I loved the process," said Phelps.

He did win four gold medals in London, but observed that he was not at his best form. "It was challenging to come back after the success of Beijing. It was hard to find the motivation. That and coming back for Rio, it made the journey so much better," he said.

He had announced himself to world with six gold medals at Athens in 2004.

No comebacks!

"When I get into the pool, I don't have the same feel. I have lost it! No comeback guys. So, Don't ask that question," said Phelps laughing, as he emphasised that his fascinating journey as a swimmer, when he set 39 World records apart from winning all the medals, was over.

Addressing the young sporting India, Phelps said that it was important to dream big. "Never give up on anything you dream. If you truly want it, you can make it a reality. My life is an example. It was not easy, it was not fun. Never miss training, and never give up. I had no opportunity to give up on training. Listen to your coaches. Train well. Hope to see you in Tokyo," he said.

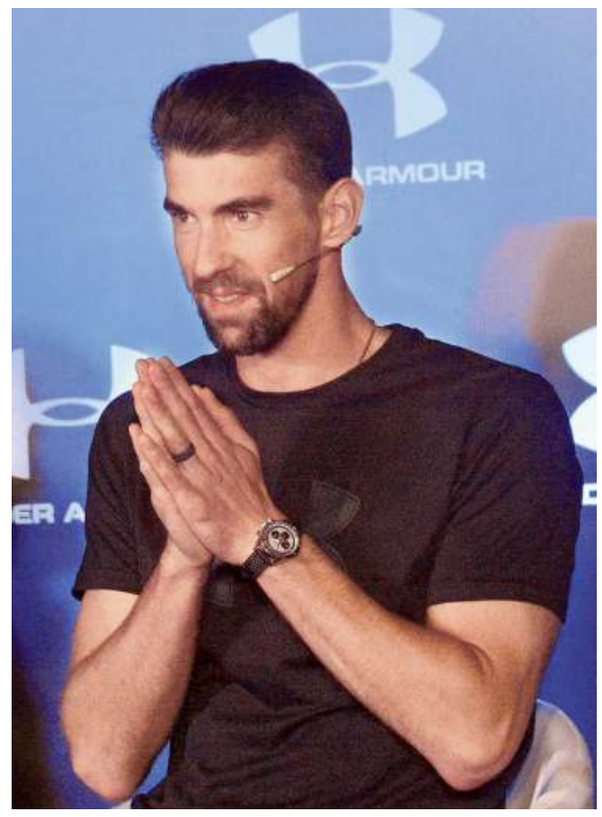
"It is all in the six inches between the two ears, whether it is golf, tennis, basketball, cricket, soccer, football. Performing at that one moment is the challenge," said Under Armour founder Kevin Plank.

When Kevin queried, Phelps admitted that 'he hated losing' more than anything else, but was "not afraid of losing."

Recalling the most common question about what was in his mind when he was ready to jump into the pool for the races, Phelps said that there was 'nothing'.

"You can't change anything. It is what it is," said Phelps as he pointed at the need to stay cool while jumping into the pool, focusing on the process and executing to the best of one's ability.

Phelps stressed that training was everything, and that if he missed one day, it meant two days of training to get back to the same level. "I did it for 16 years, six days a week," he said.



Practice and perseverance pays: The legendary Michael Phelps stressed there were no shortcuts to success. ▪ KAMESH SRINIVASAN

India swamps Malaysia

Shares the top spot with Korea

AZLAN SHAH CUP

SPORTS BUREAU
IPOH

India went to the top of the table of the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup 2019 with a dominating 4-2 win against host Malaysia on Tuesday at the Sultan Azlan Shah Stadium, Ipoh.

After sharing points with Republic of Korea in a 1-1 draw in its second match, India put in a strong performance against an error-prone Malaysia to keep have one foot in Saturday's final.

Fine save

India started with reserve keeper Krishan B. Pathak and the 22-year old made a fine save in the first quarter to deny Malaysia from its first penalty corner.

Simranjeet Singh and Sumit had chances to open the scoring for India but missed out on scoring due to poor ball control inside the circle.

After an entertaining but goalless first quarter, India took the lead in the 17th minute through Sumit after India worked its way from a free hit just outside the circle.

Malaysia pushed for an equalizer winning two consecutive short corners and dragflicker Razie Rahim scored in the 21st minute to restore parity. However, Sumit Kumar's field goal in the 27th minute helped the men in blue go into the break leading 2-1.

Varun Kumar made it 3-1 in the 36th minute after India won three consecutive PCs in the third quarter. Malaysia won three consecutive corners with the third quarter winding down, but poor trapping and mis-hits took the steam out of the home team.

In the 57th minute, Tengku Tajuddin pulled one back for Malaysia with a field goal, but Mandeep Singh scored in the next minute to end the match 4-2.

India leapfrogged Korea and Malaysia to the top of the points table with seven points after the win.

The result: India 4 (Sumit 17, Sumit Kumar 27, Varun Kumar 37, Mandeep Singh 58) beat Malaysia 2 (Razie Rahim 21, Tengku Tajuddin 57).

Dominating show: Surender Kumar tries to get past a Malaysian player in the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup hockey match. ▪ COURTESY TWITTER.COM/AZLANSHAHCUP

Picture perfect and challenging

A special one! The Gary Player-designed course has left many golfers spellbound. ▪ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

GOLF

RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI

For some, the 7438-yard DLF Golf and Country Club course here is almost intimidating.

One of the longest courses on the European Tour, the facility is highly challenging. The presence of a large number of water bodies demands accuracy off some tees and fairways. But it is the picturesque setting of this Gary Player-designed course that leaves most first-timers truly mesmerised.

When the $1.75 million Hero Indian Open tees off on Thursday, many from the European tour visiting this property for the first time, will have to produce something very special to conquer the course. For Brandon Stone, winner of last year's Scottish Open with a breathtaking tally of 10-under 60, the first sight of the course left him awe-struck.

"It's my first time in India. (Gary) Player has come up again with another unique design. My first look at the 17th hole and I wasn't disappointed. The course is in spectacular condition and I think it's going to be a fun week. There is a strong field."

New experience

For Austrian Bernd Wiesberger, it will be the first time on the re-designed course. "I haven't been to India for five to six years (after the 2014 Avantha Masters) so it's nice to be back and I am looking forward to coming to a golf course that has been described as somewhat challenging, and something different to what we see on a regular basis."

Shiv Kapur's experience on this course has been a little different, having missed the 'cut' in the past two years.

"Tee to green, I've played it well the past two years but haven't been able to do well on the greens. This year, the greens are playing different and so my focus will be on them.

"It's the kind of golf course where you can get quite defensive just knowing there is trouble everywhere," said Kapur.

Ashwini and Sikki stun Chinese pair

The Indians enter pre-quarterfinals with hard-fought win

INDIAN OPEN

RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI

Ashwini Ponnappa and N. Sikki Reddy drew from their vast experience, and raised the bar when needed, to stun sixth-seeded Chinese Li Wenmei and Zheng Yu for a place in the women's doubles pre-quarterfinals of the Indian Open badminton that began here on Tuesday.

The unseeded Indian pair saved a game-point on way to a hard-fought 22-20, 21-19 triumph in 47 minutes. The third strongest Chinese pair is ranked 18th, compared to the home combination, placed 22nd in the world.

On a day when the several singles qualifying matches witnessed all-India affairs, Ashwini and Sikki posted a psychologically important victory.

The Indians trailed for the major part of the first game, the biggest lead for the Chinese being 11-7. Ashwini controlled the rallies well from the back-court while Sikki took time to get her act right upfront.

After reeling off four straight points to draw level, the local players stayed within two points of their rivals until the game-point was reached. Undeterred, Ashwini attacked relentlessly, with apt support from Sikki and the duo reeled off three points to take the first game.

In the second, the home pair led 17-14 to raise visions of victory but dropped the next three points, erring in its hurry to finish off the rallies.

Squandering

The Indians squandered a two-point lead at 19-17 before regaining control to seal the match. In the the other upset of the day, in men's doubles, Chinese Taipei's Lee Yang and Wang Chi-Lin accounted for fourth-seeded Russians Vladimir Ivanov and Ivan Sozonov 19-21, 23-21, 21-19.

The action will truly warm up on Wednesday with the commencement of the singles main draw.

Brun stuns Denim

RAIPUR: Qualifier Thomas George Brun of Switzerland knocked out top seed Denim Yadav 1-6, 6-4, 6-3 in the boys' first round of the ITF grade-5 juniors' tennis tournament at the VIPS Club on Tuesday.

The results (first round):

Boys: Thomas George Brun (Sui) bt Denim Yadav 1-6, 6-4, 6-3; Eshaan Lumba bt Gourav Gulia 6-3, 6-2; Aditya Vardhan Roy Chowdhury bt Ansh Kapoor 7-6(4), 6-1; Anurag Agarwal bt Nathan Jattavapornvanit (Tha) 6-4, 6-2.

Girls: Bhakti Parwani bt Vidihsa Reddy 6-1, 6-1; Shradha Chhabra bt Maitree Diksha Rout 7-5, 6-1; Archita Agarwal bt Hetvee Chaudhari 3-6, 6-3, 6-4; Tanvikhaa Saravanan bt Ishita Singh 2-6, 6-3, 6-2; Shria Atturu bt Chavana Shree Mallela 6-0, 6-1.

Tough time for Federer and Medvedev

MIAMI MASTERS

REUTERS
MIAMI

Roger Federer overcame a sluggish start to defeat Filip Krajinovic 7-5, 6-3 and Russian Daniil Medvedev defeated qualifier Reilly Opelka in a 7-6(5), 6-7(5), 7-6(0) slugfest as the big names advanced to the fourth round of the Miami Open on Monday.

Serb Krajinovic broke Federer to jump to an early 2-1 lead and it looked like an upset could be in the works against the 20-times Grand Slam champion.

But fourth seed Federer broke back the next game and seized the momentum when he blasted a cross-court forehand winner to break Krajinovic again and take the closely fought first set. The 37-year-old Swiss coasted after that, thanks to an overpowering serve that Krajinovic struggled to read.

Daniil Medvedev... gosh it's over. ▪ AFP

Meanwhile, Bianca Andreescu's hopes of extending her 10-match winning streak was brought to an end by injury when the Canadian teenager retired with a shoulder problem while trailing 6-1, 2-0 in her fourth-round clash with Estonia's Anett Kontaveit.

The results: Men (fourth round): Kevin Anderson bt Joao Sousa 6-4, 7-6(6); Jordan Thompson bt Grigor Dimitrov 7-5, 7-5; Daniil Medvedev bt Reilly Opelka 7-6(5), 6-7(5), 7-6(0); Roger Federer bt Filip Krajinovic 7-5, 6-3; Denis Shapovalov bt Andrey Rublev 6-3, 7-6(5); David Goffin bt Marco Cecchinato 6-4, 6-4.

Women (fourth round): Hsieh Su-Wei bt Caroline Wozniacki 6-3, 6-7(0), 6-2; Anett Kontaveit bt Bianca Andreescu 6-1, 2-0 retd.; Petra Kvitova bt Caroline Garcia 6-3, 6-3; Ashleigh Barty bt Kiki Bertens 4-6, 6-3, 6-2; Simona Halep bt Venus Williams 6-3, 6-3; Wang Qiang bt Wang Yafan 7-5, 6-4.

Ankita enters second round

SPORTS BUREAU
KOFU

Ankita Raina outplayed Mana Kawamura of Japan 6-0, 6-1 in the first round of the $25,000 ITF women's tournament on Tuesday.

Other results:

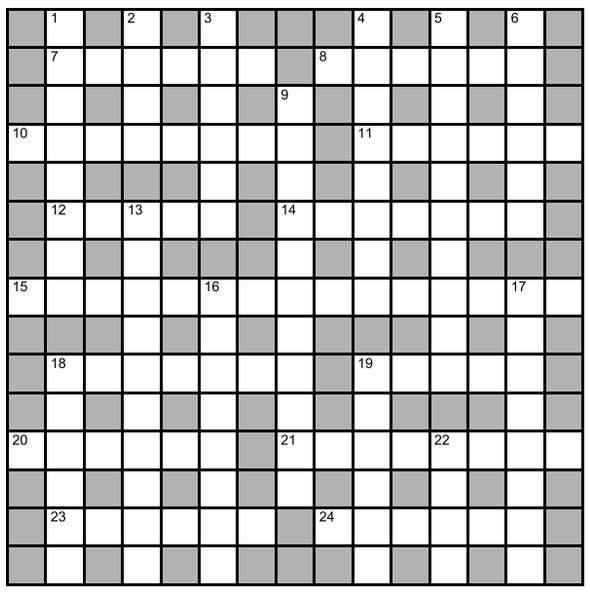
$15,000 ITF Sharm El Sheikh: Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Men: Marat Deviatiarov (Ukr) & Jakub Paul (Sui) bt S.D. Prajwal Dev & Adil Kalyanpur 6-2, 6-4; Daniel Michalski & Kacper Zuk (Pol) bt Robert Strombachs (Ger) & Aryan Goveas 7-6(4), 6-7(11), [10-6].

$15,000 ITF men, Antalya: First round: Nitin Kumar Sinha bt David Juras (Svk) 6-1, 6-1.

$15,000 ITF women, Tel Aviv: First round: Zeel Desai bt Liauw Fong (Ned) 6-4, 6-4.

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12584

(set by xChequer)



ACROSS

7 Playful man leaves present for one with a bow (6)
8 Flue designed to carry exhausted nitrogen in chimney (6)
10 Two hundred grams had created a shift in ship? (8)
11 Pilot downed through splinters (6)
12 Chess champion's time showing form (5)
14 The gods beginning to get really crazy (7)
15 Result of ore man processed, without iron ultimately? (3-7,5)
18 Protocol on elevating commanding officer (7)
19 Doctor needs money order after bringing down temperature (5)
20 Riff-raff make fun of dog (6)
21 This does set out fine house design! (4,4)
23 Civil staff possessing desirable quality (6)
24 About to be dead, reportedly die showing grief (6)

DOWN

1 Mounted doctor left in anguish over a horse (8)
2 Lower docking line in barge (4)
3 Condition of celebration crossing timeline (6)
4 Obligations to keep saving going up with loans primarily for consumer appliances (8)
5 Really filled with anger when finally desperate (2,4,4)
6 Outright cunning curbed at length (6)
9 One in extremes of delight revelling in luxurious existence (3,4,4)
13 Fluid tutti – all performing like the clappers? (2,4,4)
16 Charge to protect a gun-running fugitive (8)
17 Extremely chic to wear a shocking dress (8)
18 Vices of student-hosted parties (6)
19 Limited time at this time for inconsequential person (6)
22 Arrest section head (4)

SUDOKU

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

No.SS4305 Distribution: www.knightfeatures.com

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to puzzle 12583

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

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Azhvan's determination

Jnanis live by taking bhiksha from others. Giving bhiksha takes away our sins. So, it is for the good of others that jnanis ask for bhiksha, said P.T. Seshadri in a discourse. Kooratazahvan, a disciple of Ramanujacharya, was a king in Kooram, near Kanchipuram. But he and his wife Andal, gave away all their possessions and decided to move to Srirangam, where Ramanujacharya lived. On the way, Kooratazhvan noticed that Andal was fearful about something. She said she was afraid that they might be attacked by robbers. Kooratazhvan said that those who owned nothing need not fear thieves. Andal had brought with her the golden bowl in which Kooratahzvan used to eat and that was the reason for her fear. Hearing her husband's words, she threw it away and now the couple owned nothing.

Settled in Srirangam, Kooratzhvan ate only what he got through bhiksha. One year it rained heavily for many days and Kooratazhvan was unable to go for bhiksha. Given his determination to never eat anything except through bhiksha, he was starving. In the temple, different kinds of food offerings were made to Lord Ranganatha. Andal thought to herself, "The Lord partakes of delicacies, but my husband is starving." The Lord at once ordered His priests to take all the prasada to Kooratazhvan.

Kooratazhvan wondered why the Lord had given this order to the priests. Andal told him that she had worried about his not having food, while the Lord was served food. Kooratazhvan told her one should never ask the Lord for anything. She said she had not asked the Lord for food, but merely expressed her worry. Kooratazhvan divided the prasada and gave his wife two portions. And, she was blessed with two scholarly sons – Parasara Bhatta and Vedavyasa Bhatta.

THE HINDU

OPPORTUNITIES

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WEDNESDAY • MARCH 27, 2019

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT • JOBS • TECHNOLOGY

‘Only 1.7% of them fit into new-age jobs’

This is one of the findings of a recent study on the employability of engineers in India

Eight out of 10 Indian engineers are not employable in any position in the knowledge economy, says the national employability report released by Aspiring Minds.

The report says that there is no significant improvement in employability skills of Indian engineers in the last seven years, with a huge gap in new-age skills.

According to the report, only 3.84% of the engineers have the technical, cognitive and language skills required for software-related jobs in start-ups. Additionally, a mere 3% of the engineers have new-age technological skills in areas like Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Data Science and Mobile Development.

The average employability percentage for new-age jobs is 1.7%. While it is three times ahead of China in coding, India is way behind the United States. Around 18.8% of the engineers applying for IT jobs in the United States can write correct code, while only 4.7% can do so in India. Commenting about engineering education that is largely theory-based, the report says micro-interventions have helped create isolated pockets of competence, but they do little for higher education or the larger economy as a whole.

Students participate in a hackathon.
PHOTO USED FOR REPRESENTATIONAL PURPOSE

Only 40% of the students take up internships and 36% of them undertake projects beyond their required course work.

Industry exposure

The study found that 60% of the faculty do not discuss how engineering concepts apply to industry. Only 47% of them attend industry talks. Lack of counselling and direction is a key hurdle to students in finding a job.

More than 1.7 lakh engineering students from over 750 engineering colleges were part of the study. India has 940 females for every 1000 males, making the male-to-female ratio (mfr) 1.06. In engineering colleges, the mfr is 1.79. But the good news is that this marks a slight improvement, as the mfr calculated in the previous edition was 1.68.

Employability percentage based on different metrics shows that Delhi (North) has the highest employability, followed by Kolkata. The lowest employability percentage was found among college students in southern cities.

Factors determining employability include student initiatives, technical project and talks.

The report has suggested that employability assessments and training programme be conducted on a periodic basis.

“In the first year of university study, create faculty development and continuous assessment programmes and design niche research programmes,” says the report.

NEWS BYTE

Returnee programme

Airbus India has launched a programme, ‘Fly Again’, to ensure that women professionals who have gone on a sabbatical or maternity leave rejoin the industry.

According to a press release, the company will organise mentorship programmes, fund returnship and conduct training workshops to bridge the skill gap among selected candidates.

It will also organise job fairs to increase awareness about the returnee programme. The women who are hired through this initiative will join the organisation at grades and levels commensurate with their talent, added the release.

For details, email neha.adhikari@airbus.com

IN BRIEF

Network of lakes found beneath Antarctica

MELBOURNE

Scientists have discovered a network of lakes beneath the largest glacier in East Antarctica, a finding that may be critical in predicting how the melting of polar ice will change the world's oceans in the future. Researchers carried out seismic studies to trace bedrock or water under the ice.The flow of water in and out of these lakes has the potential to exert a powerful control on the rate that the ice flows into the oceans. PTI

Picasso painting stolen 20 years ago recovered

AMSTERDAM

A Dutch art detective said on Tuesday that he has recovered a valuable painting by Pablo Picasso 20 years after it was stolen from a wealthy Saudi's yacht in France. Arthur Brand told that he took possession two weeks ago of the 1938 painting "Buste de Femme" after trailing it for years in Amsterdam. AP

Over 400 genes linked to schizophrenia discovered

WASHINGTON

Scientists have discovered 413 genes linked to schizophrenia across 13 brain regions, a finding that may pave way for therapies to treat the disorder. Examining gene expression at the tissue level helped pinpoint the regions in which abnormal expression might occur. PTI

Netflix is testing ₹250 mobile plan in India

It wants to woo users with cheap price

REUTERS
MUMBAI

Netflix Inc is testing a ₹250 monthly subscription for mobile devices in India, the video streaming giant said, aiming to boost its presence in a price-sensitive market where data consumption on smartphones is surging.

California-based Netflix currently offers three monthly plans in India, ranging from ₹500 to 800, but those are still expensive compared with similar offerings from rivals.

Amazon's Prime service, which offers video streaming, music and faster shipping of purchases, is priced at ₹999 a year while rival Hotstar has a free service as well as paid plans starting at ₹365 a year.

Netflix's test plan at ₹250 a month gives users access to standard definition video on smartphones and tablets. "We will be testing different options in select countries where members can, for example, watch Netflix on their mobile device for a lower price and subscribe in shorter increments of time," a company spokesman said.

A still from *Sacred Games*, Netflix's original series in India. ▪SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Netflix's roster includes originals such as *Sacred Games*, *Narcos* and Bollywood films. However, its premium pricing is seen by critics as a stumbling block to bulking up its user base here.

Chief Executive Reed Hastings said late last year that Netflix had no plans for cheaper prices in India, where it aims to win its next 100 million subscribers.

All-woman spacewalk nixed over ill-fitting suit

McClain will give up her place to male colleague Nick Hague

REUTERS
LONDON

What should have been a giant leap for womankind has turned into a stumble on the path to equality after U.S. space agency NASA cancelled the first all-female spacewalk because of a lack of spacesuit of the right size.

Anne McClain and Christina Koch had been due to step into history books in a spacewalk on Friday, during the final week of Women's History Month. But Ms. McClain will now give up her place on the mission to her male colleague Nick Hague, NASA announced late on Monday.

"McClain learned during her first spacewalk that a medium-size hard upper torso, essentially the shirt of the spacesuit, fits her best. Because only one medium-size torso can be made ready by Friday, March 29, Ms. Koch will wear it."

Dashed hopes: Christina Koch, above, and Nick Hague will do the spacewalk on Friday. ▪AFP

Nearly 60 years after the first human blasted off into space, less than 11% of the 500 plus people who have travelled to space have been women.

Ms. McClain and Ms. Koch were both part of the 2013 NASA class that was 50% women.

"Anne trained in M (medium size) and L (large size) and thought she could use a large but decided after Friday's spacewalk that a medium fits better," wrote spokeswoman Stephanie Schierholz on Twitter.

The NASA announcement was met with disappointment and anger by many following the mission on social media.

'Technoference' is affecting sleep, productivity: study

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MELBOURNE

Excessive use of mobile phones is making people lose sleep and become less productive, according to an Australian study that found a jump in 'technoference' over the past 13 years.

Researchers from Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in Australia surveyed 709 mobile phone users across Australia aged 18 to 83 in 2018, using questions replicated from a similar survey back in 2005.

They then compared the findings and discovered significant increases in people blaming their phones for losing sleep, becoming less productive, taking more risks while driving and even getting more aches and pains.

"When we talk about technoference, we're referring to the everyday intrusions and interruptions that people experience due to mobile phones and their usage," said Oscar Oviedo-Trespalacios from QUT. The survey found technoference had increased among men and women, across all ages.

"For example, self-reports relating to loss of sleep and productivity showed that these negative outcomes had significantly increased during the last 13 years," he said.

The findings, published in the journal *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, suggest that mobile phones are potentially increasingly affecting aspects of daytime functioning due to lack of sleep and increasing dereliction of responsibilities.

1 in 5 women affected

According to the survey, one in five women (19.5%) and one in eight men (11.8%) now lose sleep due to the time they spend on their mobile phone.

About 12.6% of the men said their productivity decreased as a direct result of the time they spend on their mobile – compared to none in 2005 – and 14% of women have also noticed a productivity decline.

More people are blaming phones for losing sleep. ▪GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

> **Self-reports relating to loss of sleep and productivity showed that these had significantly increased in the past 13 years**
>
> OSCAR OVIEDO-TRESPALACIOS
> Researcher

Over 54% of women believe their friends will find it hard to get in touch with them if they do not have a mobile (up from 28.8%), and 41.6% of men thought this. About 8.4% of women and 7.9% of men have aches and pains they attribute to mobile phone use, researchers said.

The survey results also indicated that phones were being used as a coping strategy, with one in four women and one in six men saying they would rather use their phone than deal with more pressing issues.

"Rapid technological innovations over the past few years have led to dramatic changes in today's mobile phone technology – which can improve the quality of life for phone users but also result in some negative outcomes," said Mr. Oviedo-Trespalacios.

"These include anxiety and, in some cases, engagement in unsafe behaviours with serious health and safety implications such as mobile phone distracted driving," he said.

Studying animal sounds for conservation

A recent workshop aimed at building capacity among Indian researchers to study bioacoustics

AATHIRA PERINCHERY
KOCHI

In some forests of central Africa, the Amazon and Borneo, the sounds of chainsaws and gunshots – signs of illegal activities such as logging and poaching – are picked up and communicated to forest managers by unlikely tools: acoustic devices. While bioacoustics (the study of animal sound production, dispersion and reception) is being used worldwide to not only monitor threats to biodiversity but also study animal behaviour and diversity, the field is still in its nascent stages in India. However, a recent workshop conducted at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Tirupati, hopes to change this.

Devices can pick up gunshot sounds and alert officials. ▪GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Aimed at building capacity among Indian researchers to study bioacoustics, the 10-day workshop that concluded on March 21 focused on various methods (field methods on how to record animal calls effectively and analytical methods to extract data from these recordings) in the study of bioacoustics. The workshop trained 25 participants (practising biologists who want to use bioacoustics in their research) to use one of the world's most popular bioacoustics softwares, RAVEN. Resource persons from Cornell University (from its renowned Bioacoustics Research Program and Macaulay Library, the world's largest repository of animal sounds and images) conducted the sessions of the workshop supported by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, IISER Tirupati and Indian Institute of Technology (Mandi), and funded by the Indo-US Science and Technology Forum.

Though many Indian researchers are interested in studying bioacoustics, the lack of any training available in the country has been a problem, said Dr. V.V. Robin (assistant professor, IISER Tirupati), one of the organizers of the workshop.

"There are fewer than 10 research groups in India that study bioacoustics," added the biologist, whose team studies the bioacoustics of bird song in the Western Ghats.

Dr. Robin's bioacoustic studies of bird song have involved studying the differences in song dialects between birds on different mountaintops in the Western Ghats. These studies reveal that bird songs across deforested landscapes were extremely different from those in undisturbed areas.

"This field can not just help understand animal behaviour but also analyse their responses to humans," said Dr. Robin.

In China, *Bohemian Rhapsody* has no reference to Queen's sexuality

A censored version of the film angers viewers as it punches holes in the plot

TIFFANY MAY
CLAIRE FU
HONG KONG

Bohemian Rhapsody, the Queen biopic, has been faulted by some Western audiences and critics for soft-pedaling Freddie Mercury's relationships with men. But in screenings of the film in China, references to the singer's sexuality have been removed altogether.

These holes in the plot incensed a generation of young movie buffs, who are largely more progressive than the country's censors.

Freddie's confession cut

A censored version of the film, released in China last weekend, is only about three minutes shorter than the original. But it omits a crucial scene in which Freddie tells his fiancée that he is not straight, and the scene in which his lover, Jim Hutton, is introduced.

A celebratory scene in which the band members perform in women's clothing was also cut from the Chinese release.

These changes were not lost on the Chinese audience, many of whom sensed while watching the film in theatres that something was amiss.

Sun Jing, a 26-year-old office worker who saw the film with friends in Shanghai, said she had quickly immersed herself in the music and the plot, but noticed that certain points in the story were left unresolved and spotted several instances where the subtitles didn't quite match what the characters were saying.

Rami Malek, left, and Gwilym Lee in a scene from Bohemian Rhapsody. ▪AP/TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

The censorship was most stark, she said, when the Queen singer told others that he had AIDS. The dialogue was abruptly silenced at that point in the censored film, and no subtitles appeared.

"Since I'm watching a biopic, I want to see an authentic person," Ms. Sun said. "Contents of his life should not be so inexplicably removed."

Lu Zhan, a 22-year-old in Beijing who had hoped the film would introduce a broader Chinese audience to the power of live music, said she found the omissions misleading and disrespectful to the band.

Discouraging people

"On the topic of LGBT issues, they've completely misled the public," she said of the censors, adding that she worried that the decision to screen a sanitised version of the film would discourage gay people in China.

Rami Malek, the actor who plays Freddie Mercury in the film, was also censored on a Chinese streaming platform in his remarks after winning the Academy Award for best actor last month. When he said in his acceptance speech, "We made a film about a gay man, an immigrant, who lived his life just unapologetically himself," the platform Mango TV replaced "gay man" with "special group" in subtitles.

Asked why the gay content had been removed from the China release of *Bohemian Rhapsody*, a spokesman for 20th Century Fox, which produced the film, said in an email that the studio had no comment. Those wanting to find out what they were missing have turned to the internet, where compilations of uncensored clips are drawing further attention to the scenes that censors sought to suppress.

And the screening of the censored film comes at a time when gay rights activism is gaining prominence in China. "I think a lot of people are used to avoiding certain topics, especially if it doesn't affect their own lives," said Yang Zhiyuan, 22, a digital media arts student in Beijing. "But when these things become topics of conversation, people will be compelled to think about them."

Yet some Chinese filmgoers said they would not watch an altered version of the film. "On principle, I refuse to watch this type of censored film," said Li Yang, 24, a fashion writer, who decided to avoid Bohemian Rhapsody after friends told him it was a choppy viewing experience. NY TIMES

Male contraceptive pill may be possible

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON

An experimental birth control pill for men has successfully passed tests of safety when participants used it daily for a month, according to scientists who said that the drug does not affect libido.

The contraceptive, called 11-beta-methyl-19-nortestosterone dodecylcarbonate, is a modified testosterone that has the combined actions of a male hormone (androgen) and a progesterone.

"Our results suggest that this pill, which combines two hormonal activities in one, will decrease sperm production while preserving libido," said Christina Wang, from the Los Angeles Biomed Research Institute (LA Biomed).

The study took place in 40 healthy men at LA BioMed and the University of Washington in the U.S.

Subjects took the drug or placebo once daily with food for 28 days.

Ms. Wang said drug side effects were few, mild and included fatigue, acne.

Street gallery

Women walk past a wall painting at Mumbai's Marol Arts Village, where an all-woman Street Art festival is underway, on Tuesday. ▪SUPREET SAPKAL

Age is no bar for weightlifting: study

It may build not only strength and muscle mass but also confidence

GRETCHEN REYNOLDS

Weight training by older people may build not only strength and muscle mass but also motivation and confidence, potentially spurring them to continue exercising, according to a study of the emotional impacts of lifting weights.

The findings intimate that people worried that they might be too old or inept to start resistance training should perhaps try it, to see how their bodies and minds respond.

We already have plenty of evidence, of course, that weight training can help us to age well. By our early 40s, most of us are losing muscle mass, at a rate of about 5 percent a decade, with the decline often precipitating a long slide toward frailty and dependence.

An elderly person exercising with weights at a gym. ▪GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

But older people who lift weights can slow or reverse that descent, studies show. In multiple experiments, older people who start to lift weights typically gain muscle mass and strength, as well as better mobility, mental sharpness and metabolic health. But lifting helps only those who try it, and statistics indicate that barely 17% of older Americans regularly lift weights.

So, as part of a study of weight training and the elderly, scientists at the University of Jyvaskyla in Finland recently decided to see if they could discover how weight training changes the minds as well as the musculature of people who had not done it before.

To start, they turned to 81 older men and women who were part of their health database and who had agreed to begin resistance training. These volunteers were all between the ages of 65 and 75 and, like many Finns, healthy and physically active. But they did not lift weights. For the full study, they began a twice-weekly programme of supervised, full-body resistance training at the university to familiarise participants with proper technique and to build a base of strength.

After three months, the group was randomly assigned to continue training once, twice or three times a week, while a separate, untrained group served as controls. Periodically, the researchers checked the volunteers' strength, fitness and metabolic health, and also their attitudes about the workouts, including whether they found them daunting or inviting and how difficult it was for the volunteers to find the time and resolve to show up.

This routine lasted for six months, by which time the people lifting weights had almost all improved various markers of their health, even if they had lifted only once a week. NY TIMES