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India women take on South Africa in ODI series from today  
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## NEARBY



Delhi to get own school education board: CM

NEW DELHI  
The Delhi Cabinet on Saturday approved the setting up of the Delhi Board of School Education (DBSE), Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said. The move follows the government's decision to commence the 'Deshbhakti Curriculum' in schools from the new academic year.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

SEC declares polls in two DDC seats 'null and void'

SRINAGAR  
The State Election Commission on Saturday declared the polls of two District Development Council seats as "null and void" after two women from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, married to locals from the Valley, contested the elections. "The SEC has declared the polling to the DDC constituency Drugmulla and Hajin (A) as void," the SEC order reads.

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100 and counting



**Firm stand:** Farmers blocking the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) Expressway at Dasna, Ghaziabad, on Saturday to mark the 100th day of protest against the new farm laws. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA (REPORTS ON PAGE 4 & 10)

## After death sentence, a pall of gloom in Khajurbanni

Life has come to a full stop, says wife of one of the nine sentenced to death in hooch tragedy case

AMARNATH TEWARY

KHAJURBANNI (GOPALGANJ)

Twenty-four hours after a local court in Gopalganj district of north-west Bihar convicted 13 accused persons – sentencing nine of them to death and four women to life imprisonment – in the Khajurbanni hooch tragedy, tears have refused to fall from the vacant eyes of Sarita Devi.

She has been wailing since Friday evening, with her three bemused children looking up to her, at a total loss. Her 13-year-old sister-in-law is the only person by her side to console her.

"For the last four years, I have been dying each day. Death has many faces for me. Now, after the court verdict on Friday, it has come as a full stop in my life," she said.

After a long, haunting pause, she looked at her three children and added: "What will happen to them? Does the court care and consider such innocent lives?"

**Four of family convicted**  
Ms. Devi is the wife of Sanjay Pasi, 23, who, along with his two younger brothers, Ranjay and Munna Pasi, has been sentenced to death by the Gopalganj court of Additional District Judge-2 Luvkush Kumar. Their mother, Indu Devi, too, has been awarded a life sentence in the case.

Their father, Shiv Narayan Paswan, died long ago, and now only Sarita Devi, her three sons, and a sister-in-law are left to be haunted by their absence, and to earn a living.

A few yards away is the



**Inconsolable:** The wives and children of Sanjay and Rajesh Pasi, who have been sentenced to death. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

house of Rita Devi, who too has been sentenced to life, and her two sons, Sanjay and Rajesh Pasi, have been sentenced to death. Rita Devi's husband Nandji Pasi also died a long while back, and both her convicted sons are married men with small chil-

dren. A group of neighbours gathered at their home on Saturday evening and they all wailed together to mourn the court verdict.

"No male member is left in our house to go anywhere to take further legal steps. It seems like a death warrant

## HINDU



Pakistan PM Imran Khan wins trust vote in National Assembly  
page 12



India women take on South Africa in ODI series from today  
page 15

## India trounces England, enters WTC final

India outplayed England by an innings and 25 runs in the final Test to clinch the series 3-1 in Ahmedabad on Saturday

■ The result helped Kohli's men top the World Test Championship (WTC) table with 72.2 percentage points (520 of the 720 available) and book a berth in the final against Kane Williamson's New Zealand. The summit clash will be held from June 18 to 22 in England

■ The series triumph also catapulted India to the No. 1 spot in the ICC rankings, displacing New Zealand



REPORT ON PAGE 16

## Villagers relish peace as guns fall silent along Line of Control

It is healing time for residents



Workers construct a concrete bunker for civilians in Silikote village near the Line of Control. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

## SPECIAL

here are waiting and watching how long the ceasefire will hold, as the two countries take tentative steps after a gap of five years.

While the soldiers manning the LoC in Uri remain on guard, a sense of calm is

visible on their faces.

Keeping a close watch on the movement on the other side of the LoC, many soldiers, not officially authorized to talk to the media, told *The Hindu* that the ceasefire was being strictly adhered to by both sides.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 9

## T.N. polls: Cong. settles for 25 seats

T.K. ROHIT  
CHENNAI

The DMK and the Congress reached a seat-sharing agreement on Saturday night, ending days of strong posturing by the national party and its veiled threat of walking out of the alliance.

The Congress will contest in 25 Assembly seats and in the by-election to the Kanniyakumari Lok Sabha seat that fell vacant after the death of H. Vasanthakumar. It will also get one Rajya Sabha seat. In a late night development, party leaders Dinesh Gundu Rao, K.S. Alagiri and K.R. Ramasamy met DMK president M.K. Stalin at his residence.

"We have reached an agreement. We will be signing the agreement tomorrow around 10 a.m.," Mr. Rao told *The Hindu* after the meeting.

## HC denies extension of interim bail, orders 3,499 prisoners to surrender

They had been released to decongest jails during pandemic

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has directed 3,499 undertrial prisoners, who were granted interim bail to decongest jail here amid the COVID-19 pandemic, to surrender to the undertrial prisoners under various criteria laid down by the committee in its several meetings.

"It is therefore directed that all the 3,499 undertrial prisoners, who have not obtained regular bails from their court concerned, or any other superior court to its court concerned, shall surrender before the jail superintendent upon the expiry of the period of their interim bail commencing from March 7," the Bench said.

The High Court considered the observations and recommendations made by the committee and the improved COVID-19 situation in Delhi-NCR.

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A N D E

In a bid to handle the heat, protesting farmers at Delhi's borders are setting up 'trolley colonies' and semi-permanent structures that have been fitted with desert coolers and air conditioners

JATIN ANAND  
SHIJINI GHOSH  
BAHADURGARH/NEW DELHI

**P**rotesting farmers at Delhi's borders are relying on their innovative skills to tackle the impending summer, and their empathetic collaboration to ensure a good harvest back home.

The agitation against the three contentious farm laws began over 100 days ago. At the start, roads leading up to the protest sites were packed with tractors. But the numbers have dipped slightly as the machines are needed back in the villages for harvest season. The number of trolleys, however, has increased and they are at the core of the changing landscape at the protest sites.

Innovations range from RO purification-enabled submersible water devices, 500-litre water storage tanks filled with buttermilk, air-conditioned semi-permanent structures with their own sewerage system, trolleys with desert coolers, and trenches to keep water from entering tents during the monsoon.

'Trolley colonies' have sprung up around semi-permanent structures laden with wet jute bags that will cool the air through portable fans, and submersible pumps are being installed along NH 9 to help create bathrooms for women protesters.

At the Singhu border protest site, trolleys have been fitted with desert coolers and even air

# DIGGING IN FOR THE SUMMER

conditioners. A dental clinic near the main stage has started distributing medicines from inside a semi-permanent structure and is also fitted with an air conditioner.

Fans are being brought to the Tikri and Ghazipur border protest sites to cool the tents. Multiple 500-litre water tanks are replenished several times a day with lassi or buttermilk at the Tikri border and, like in Ghazipur, more bathing areas have also been created there. Both sites have also received additional washing machines.

## Summer plan

Semi-permanent tents are being pitched not only to counter the heat but to also provide accommodation for farmers staying at the Singhu border without trolleys. Ply-based and ready-made structures that can accommodate around 10-15 people have also been procured.

Meanwhile, several patches

of vacant land along NH 9 have been cleared of shrubbery and rocks to make way for trolleys covered with tarpaulin and plastic sheets parked in a rectangular pattern - each seemingly constituting a separate "room" surrounded by porous green cloth - forming mini dwellings with elderly farmers resting on mattresses placed in the middle. The vacant plots are covered in trees that provide some relief from the sun.

Rohit Kumar from Bhiwani said semi-permanent structures such as sheds for tractors, and trolleys laden with supplies, are coming up along the highway. The already-erected tents will see slight modifications as the mercury rises.

"Some of our tents have multiple arrangements, including a kitchen and sleeping area.

Then, there are the larger tents, which are used to store vegetables and other edibles... We are covering the tin ceilings of sheds for our vehicles with jute bags, and will put cardboard ceilings on the smaller tents for the summer. The larger ones will be covered by jute sheets which will be kept wet around the clock and have fans to keep the edibles cool," he said.

Luvpreet Singh from Fatehabad led the way to a large 'tractor colony' that has been set up on a recently cleared vacant plot. The encampment is preparing for the arrival of women protesters. "The owner of the land is a farmer like us. Not only did he give us permission to use the plot but also allowed us to build semi-permanent structures," Mr. Singh said.

Suresh Goswami from Jind in Punjab, who has been camping along the NH 9 since late November last year, said large fans that are used on farms will be placed next to the semi-permanent structures. They will be covered with wet jute sheets to

keep them cool. "Since it is proving slightly difficult to gather water on a daily basis, we have made arrangements to ensure our own water supply by installing submersible pumps. Around a dozen have been set up and we will install a total of 50 by April. We will not leave till the laws are repealed," he said.

## Community harvest

"The number of tractors is about the same as when the agitation started but sometimes tractors do need to go back to villages since the fields are being watered for the fourth time before the harvest," said Virender Singh from Hisar, whose tent is among the many occupying the divider on NH 9 near the Rohtak bypass.

"We have assigned duties for this. For example, one brother waters the fields and then comes here on the family tractor so the other can go back. If the family tractor is not available for some reason, a trolley - sometimes even two - take its place here," he

added.

Gurdeep Singh from Patiala said though the harvest season was still a month away, farmers were in the process of making adjustments and arrangements, so they did not face issues once the harvest began.

Village panchayats have

played a significant role in helping households reach an understanding regarding the pooling and sharing of resources, he said, adding: "In case some of us are required to take back our trolleys for a few days, with the tents installed, there accommodation will be sorted."

There is a sense of community sharing in the villages and there were enough resources back home for the upcoming harvest, Ramandeep Singh from Patiala said, adding: "Recently, a farmer from our village found himself without a tractor which he required for harvesting potato. His neighbours arrived with seven tractors to compensate for the one tractor that is stationed at the Singhu border protest site."

Sukhjeet Singh Sidhu from Ajrav village said people were more than ready to help each other out given the ongoing agitation. "Currently, it is harvest season for potato and sugarcane. Once those farmers are done, they will replace us at the borders. There are a large number of trolleys in our villages, it is unlikely that we will need to take back the trolleys stationed at the protest sites," he said.



Air quality of Delhi-NCR				
Delhi	204	Gurugram	177	
Ghaziabad	213	Faridabad	169	
Noida	182	Greater Noida	204	
Good	0-50	Satisfactory	51-100	Moderate
Poor	101-200	Very poor	201-300	Severe
AIR QUALITY INDEX AT 4 P.M. YESTERDAY (AVERAGE OF PAST 24 HOURS) [SOURCE: CPCB]	201-300	301-400	401+	>401

## IN BRIEF

### Mercury likely to rise; light rain expected today

NEW DELHI  
The maximum temperature in Delhi is likely to rise by three to four degrees Celsius in the next few days, said IMD on Saturday. Light rain and winds gusting up to 40 kilometers per hour are predicted in the city on Sunday.

## Civil defence worker shot dead

Prima facie motive appears to be personal enmity: police

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

A 22-year-old civil defence worker was shot dead in Bawana in the small hours of Saturday, the police said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer North) Rajiv Ranjan Singh said information was received at 5.30 a.m. regarding a man lying dead near Jogi Wada Chowk. When police reached the spot, the man was identified as Shashi Kadyan from Bawana's Katewara. He had multiple gunshot injuries on his body.

Prima facie the motive be-

Multiple persons, who had come in two cars, shot him dead. There are leads in the case and teams have been formed to identify and nab the accused

POLICE OFFICER

hind the murder appears to be personal enmity and local rivalry in the village, the police said.

A senior officer said the incident actually happened at 2 a.m. when the victim

was still in his uniform. He was declared brought dead at a hospital.

### Over 20 bullets

Sources said Singh sustained over 20 bullet injuries as 20 empty cartridges have been recovered from the spot.

"Multiple persons, who had come in two cars, shot him dead. There are leads in the case and teams have been formed to identify and nab the accused," the officer said.

A case has been registered under section 302 (Punishment for murder) of the Indian Penal Code.

They were subsequently arrested on Friday afternoon.

Khairul is the gang leader and in 2012, he met with one of his associates, Rajeev Srivastava in Tihar Jail, who usually helps him in getting a rented house and car.

The gang targeted houses in posh colonies and would return to Bangladesh are committing the crime.

## Look into petition alleging chopping of trees by DIAL'

Take remedial action, NGT tells Forest Dept.

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Delhi Forest Department to look into a plea alleging chopping trees by the Delhi International Airport Authority Limited (DIAL) and the GMR group for expansion of a runway at the Indira Gandhi International Airport.

An NGT Bench directed the Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, Delhi to verify the factual position and take remedial action in accordance with law after due verification.

The directions came when the green panel was hearing a plea by Vivek Awasthi, seeking action against the felling of trees by

DIAL and the GMR group for the expansion of a new runway at the airport.

According to the petition, the felling of trees had taken place in non-compliance of requisite rules.

Based on a RTI filed by the petitioner, it was contended that no permission was taken for the felling. Referring to the RTI, the Tribunal said: "While RTI proceedings cannot be taken as conclusive to presume that there is no permission, instead of straightaway interfering with the project of public utility and at the same time ensuring compliance of rule of law, we direct the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Delhi to verify the factual position."

## SDMC, police told to remove encroachments in R.K. Puram

NGT plea seeks action against illegal shops

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) and the Delhi Police to remove encroachments due to construction of shops and godowns of scrap dealers in Sector 1 of R.K. Puram and contended that it was also leading to different kinds of pollution.

A Bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel directed the SDMC Commissioner and DCP (South-West) to look into the plea and take appropriate action in accordance with law.

The directions came when the green panel was hearing a plea moved by the Khushi Sewa Sanstha, seeking execution of a

2019 NGT order directing removal of encroachments. According to the petition, the encroachments continued despite the earlier order.

The plea sought action against unauthorised commercial activity by scrap dealers in Sector 1 of R.K. Puram and contended that it was also leading to different kinds of pollution.

### No steps taken: plea

Stating that the scrap dealers and furniture shops running in the area were resulting in pollution in drains due to encroachment, the plea also alleged that despite complaints to authorities, no remedial steps had been taken.

## Three foreign nationals held for dacoity in Ghaziabad

With these arrests, police claim to have solved 18 burglary cases in Delhi-NCR

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Three foreign nationals have been arrested for their alleged involvement in a dacoity case, the police said on Saturday.

ACP (Crime) Shibesh Singh said the accused - Mohammad Khairul alias Arman (46), Mohammad Sadiq and Seikh (29) and Montu Mulla

(30), all from Bangladesh, have been arrested for a dacoity case in Ghaziabad's Kavi Nagar. With these arrests, 18 burglary cases committed in Delhi and NCR have been worked out.

The police said that on February 28 at 3.30 a.m., four persons entered a house in Kavi Nagar and looted valuables at gun-

point. They also gave death threats to the family. When police analysed several incidents of burglary reported in Delhi with the same modus operandi, they found that Bangladeshi criminals were involved in those incidents.

During investigation, it was found that a gang led by Khairul was active in India.

The gang targeted houses in posh colonies and would return to Bangladesh are committing the crime.

## Living it large



Elephant not in the room: A zoo keeper bathes an elephant in New Delhi. • SANDEEP SAXENA

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

Timings	
<b>DELHI</b>	
SUNDAY, MAR. 07	
RISE 06:40	SET 18:25
MOON 02:06	SET 12:33
MONDAY, MAR. 08	
RISE 06:39	SET 18:26
MOON 03:07	SET 13:31
TUESDAY, MAR. 09	
RISE 06:38	SET 18:26
MOON 04:02	SET 14:32

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	32	15
Safdarjang	32	15
Palam	31	15

**Delhi Palam Today**  
34°C A pleasant hazy morning and very warm day with partly cloudy sky. A spell of rain/thunderstorm may occur at some places.

**Delhi Palam Tomorrow**  
33°C Short spell of rain or thunderstorm likely towards early morning, sky will turn mainly sunny during day.

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## IN BRIEF

### Security ramped up over inter-community marriage

NEW DELHI

The Delhi police increased deployment in Rohini after a man and a woman from different communities married each other with their parents' consent. The move came after an allegedly fake message about the woman's age went viral on social media.

# Delhi to get its own school education board: Kejriwal

It will conduct assessments throughout the year instead of only once a year'

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Cabinet on Saturday approved the setting up of the Delhi Board of School Education (DBSE), Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said.

The move follows the government's decision to commence the 'Deshbhakti Curriculum' in schools from the new academic year.

The proposed board will conduct assessments throughout the year to develop holistic learning instead of once in a year assessment that focuses on rote learning, the Chief Minister said.

#### Global education

"Our students will progress towards global education. The board will function in close alignment with national and international boards. The board will develop world-class education practices that will enable the shift in teaching-learning practices across Delhi," he said during a digital press briefing.

"In the present education system, we assess a student at the end of the year for three hours, but in the new education board, we will assess students throughout the year. The entire system of education now focuses on rote learning, this has to



Around 20-25 government schools will switch over to the DBSE in the 2021-22 session. ■ FILE PHOTO

change and emphasis has to be placed on understanding, and personality development," he added.

Mr. Kejriwal said assistance would be sought from international outfits, and global practices as well as teaching methods had been analysed so they can be incorporated in the DBSE.

High-end techniques will be used to impart education and conduct assessment, Mr. Kejriwal said, adding that the interests, needs and specialisations of each student would be taken into account by the DBSE to provide insights on what courses they should opt for.

"There are approximately 1,000 government schools and 1,700 private schools in Delhi. Most of them are affiliated with the CBSE. These schools will not become a part of the new board all at once; 20-25 government schools shall be included in the 2021-22 session," he said.

"These schools are being chosen based on suggestions from students, teachers, and parents. Over the next four-five years, we hope to see all government and private schools being affiliated with the DBSE," he added.

The board's governance and coordination will be overseen by a governing body under the chairpersonship of the Education Minister. Members of the governing body will include education officials, experts from higher education, principals of government and private schools, teachers

and parents as well as educationists from other spheres.

"I am very happy and excited to see Delhi Education Board's initiatives towards quality education for all. Before joining politics, when I worked with various NGOs, I always felt that our system of education lags and it is only through its improvement that we will be able to solve the plethora of issues that our country faces," he said.

"The DBSE will prepare students to take responsibility for their country, focus on making students good human beings beyond all religion, caste, and class differences, and enable students to emerge as job givers and not job seekers," he added.

#### Funds for National Flags

In a related development, sources said the Delhi government was preparing to allocate separate funds for the installation of the National Flag at various locations across the national capital.

Sources added that the government was also preparing to hold cultural events based on the lives of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Shaheed Bhagat Singh under the 'Deshbhakti' head for which it is likely to allocate funds in the 2021-22 Budget.

# 'Audit report exposes ₹549-crore flyover scam in north civic body'

Rani Jhansi flyover cost went up from ₹175 cr. to ₹724 cr.: AAP

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Saturday alleged that an audit report of the BJP-led municipal corporations has exposed a "scam" of ₹549 crore in the construction of the Rani Jhansi flyover.

The cost of construction for the flyover was fixed at ₹175 crore but it went up to ₹724 crore by the time it was completed, it said.

"The construction cost of the Shastri Park flyover was set at ₹302 crore, but it was built for ₹250 crore in just 1.5 years under the Arvind Kejriwal model. The cost of the Rani Jhansi flyover was fixed at ₹175 crore but it went up to ₹724 crore and took 24 years under the BJP-led municipalities," AAP leader Durgesh Pathak said, adding that the decision to construct the Rani Jhansi flyover was made in 1995 and it was completed in 2018.

It was supposed to be finished by 2000.

"This means that the BJP leaders were involved in corruption worth ₹549 crore from this project. This audit report has 54 pages and 70 objections," he said.

Mr. Pathak said that when



Durgesh Pathak

is Abhishek Gupta and why was the money given to him? Also, over ₹10 crore was spent without any approval. No approvals were taken from any official or agency to spend this extra money," he said, adding the Delhi government will consider taking legal action against the civic bodies over the matter.

**'Manipulative politics'**  
Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said that Mr. Pathak's statement calling "cost escalation of the flyover project" a scam shows that he "indulges only in manipulative politics to malign the corporations".

Everybody knows that due to court cases, compensation claims, and other humanitarian reasons, this flyover project got repeatedly stuck and was delayed by 20 years, he added.

The two-decade delay escalated the cost of construction from planned ₹175 crore to ₹724 crore. This is cost escalation due to reasons beyond the North Delhi Municipal Corporation's control and not a scam. It would be better if Mr. Pathak talks about facts instead of manipulations, he said.

# RWAs will help govt. convince people to switch to e-vehicles, say AAP MLAs

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party on Saturday said Malviya Nagar MLA Somnath Bharti and Burari MLA Sanjeev Jha held meetings with residents' welfare associations in their respective constituencies to sensitise people on the need to switch to electric vehicles.

"We have received an overwhelming response from the RWAs and they have committed to help Delhiites transition to electric vehicles and support this EV movement," Mr. Bharti said.

"RWAs have always played a crucial role in bringing people together and in the success of many Delhi government initiatives. Recognising this role, we are focusing on RWAs to make this a citizen-led move-

ment. To win this fight against pollution, the whole city will have to come together," he added.

Mr. Jha said many incentives are being offered to people who want to switch to an electric vehicle.

"The website: ev.dehi.gov.in has information on vehicle models eligible for subsidies, dealers, and location of charging stations," he said.

# Front-line workers claim under pressure to get jab

Around 68% have taken COVID-19 shot compared to 62.9% healthcare workers

NIKHIL M BABU  
SAURABH TRIVEDI  
NEW DELHI

Despite the vaccination drive for front-line workers starting almost a month after healthcare workers, more front-line workers have been immunised, according to official data. While vaccination of healthcare workers started on January 16, front-line workers, which includes police, paramilitary and government officials, started getting vaccinated from February 13.

Over 2,30,073 of 3,38,251 (68%) front-line workers had taken the vaccine till Thursday and only 1,49,910 of 2,38,256 (62.9%) healthcare workers had been vaccinated.

**Strong 'encouragement'**  
Officials said that many healthcare workers were infected by the virus and that is one of the reasons for the lesser turnout.

Enthusiasm is more because of "better awareness and communication" among front-line workers, said Delhi government officials. But there have been cases of them being under some level of "pressure" to take the vaccine, as per officials.

The number of people above 60 years of age and in the 45-59 age group taking the vaccine has also been steadily rising since it started



People registering for the COVID-19 vaccination drive in Delhi. ■ FILE PHOTO: SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

on March 1.

On February 26, a Delhi Police head constable made a PCR call from Shakarpur in east Delhi after he was informed by his seniors that his salary will be cut if he refused to get vaccinated.

The Delhi police received many such calls and later in the day, officials said there was a "communication gap" and the message about the increment cut was spread to encourage officers to get vaccinated.

A senior officer said there were misconceptions regarding the vaccination among a few policemen, however, all SHOs have been instructed to ensure that all personnel get vaccinated. "If in a case, any police personnel had doubts, then he is to be counselled by doctors and experts, but ensure 100% attendance," the officer said.

The officer added that policemen

with significant medical conditions have been advised to consult their doctor before taking the shot.

#### Officials monitoring situation

An official working with the Delhi Jal Board said there is "monitoring" by senior officials on who all are getting the vaccine and this "creates a kind of pressure... but vaccination is not mandatory".

Last month, an audio message of a Delhi government official asking employees to get vaccinated or else face action was leaked on social media. Officials later clarified that no such action was ever taken and the message was done just to encourage the employees.

"There were about four-five cases where front-line workers, who came to get vaccinated at the hospital, said that they did not want to take the vaccine. They requested us

to just give them a certificate, as higher-ups were asking them to get vaccinated," said a doctor working at the Delhi government-run Lok Nayak Hospital.

"On Tuesday evening, when we were about to call it a day, a police officer came to get vaccinated. He said that he was not inclined to get vaccinated, but 'ACP saheb' has asked him to get vaccinated. Healthcare workers do not have that level of pressure," the doctor said.

Chinmoy Biswas, Delhi Police PRO, said that around 85% of Delhi Police personnel have got the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine. The remaining personnel will also get vaccinated soon.

"I got a message from the government informing me about my date of vaccination and then I got a call asking me to get vaccinated on the date. I was also asked to submit the certificate of vaccination at the office. In a way, we have more pressure than healthcare workers to get vaccinated," said a police officer who works at the Delhi Secretariat.

But many said that they took the vaccine willingly.

A constable posted in Central Delhi said, "Initially, I was against the vaccination after reading about it on social media. However, my colleagues who got vaccinated shared their experiences and advised me to get vaccinated at the earliest. I got the first shot last week and I am doing fine," said the policeman.

The Delhi Police has a strength of around 90,000 personnel. At least 34 personnel died due to COVID-19.

# ACP who lost her husband to COVID to be honoured on Women's Day

She is among 21 women who will be felicitated for their work

HEMAMI BHANDARI  
NEW DELHI

(SGRH) said that 476 people were vaccinated on Saturday. The hospital also said that 104-year-old Tulsi Das Chawla was immunised at the hospital on Friday.

**321 new infections**  
Meanwhile, Delhi witnessed 321 new COVID-19 cases in the last 24 hours, taking the total to 6,40,815 on Saturday. The death toll has reached 10,919 after one more fatality was reported.

Compared to last Saturday, the number of active cases has increased from 1,307 to 1,779.

In the same period, the number of people on home isolation has increased from 627 to 879.

ter-in-law is also living abroad and could not make it either. I lost my father-in-law a few months before my husband. In the time of sorrow, I was absolutely alone," she said. The officer added that she has not been able to meet her son due to travel restrictions.

#### Empty home

"I go back from work to an empty house as it was only me, my husband and father-in-law staying and the two of them are gone," she said.

Talking about the honour she will receive on Women's Day, Ms. Kaur said she is glad that the department is recognising her effort. "I am happy that the department

realises that I worked during the pandemic and I suffered a huge loss. The department has been cooperative. It is a good feeling when your sacrifice and work is recognised," she said.

Other officers who will be felicitated include Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police Laxmi Kanwar, Inspectors Lalita Rawat and Kaushal Pandey, Sub Inspectors Priya, Mukta, Anita, and Pooja, Assistant Sub Inspector Maya, Head Constable Bharti and Seema, Constables Yanki, Nayamooni, Geeta Bai, Manju, Sukanya, Yogen, Neelam, Resham, Pooja, and Suman for their work in their departments and during the pandemic.

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# Tikait flags off tractor rally to mark 100 days of farmers' protest

It will cover 16 U.P. districts, Uttarakhand before reaching Ghazipur on March 27

**ANUJ KUMAR**  
GHAZIABAD

To mark 100 days of farmers' protest against the Centre's new farm laws, Bharatiya Kisan Union national spokesperson Rakesh Tikait flagged off a tractor rally from Ramraj town of Muzaffarnagar on Saturday.

The tractor march will travel across 16 districts of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand and reach the Ghazipur protest site on March 27.

#### Police deployment

Despite Mr. Tikait's aggressive posturing, only around a dozen tractors turned up for the rally. Local sources said a massive security deployment by Uttar Pradesh Police in Muzaffarnagar, Meerut and Bijnor prevented farmers from joining the protest in large numbers.

"It seems the police con-



BKU leader Rakesh Tikait during the tractor rally in Muzaffarnagar on Saturday. • PTI

siders tractors akin to a Pakistani tank. The local police didn't allow farmers to leave their villages," said Mr. Tikait, who visited a local gurdwara before steering a tractor himself.

He asserted that the rally would continue as planned.

"These are trials to check what the administration is up to. Whenever we want, we can mount a massive show of strength," he claimed.

On the declining number of farmers at the Ghazipur border, Rajvir Singh, State

These are trials to check what the administration is up to. Whenever we want, we can mount a massive show of strength

**RAKESH TIKAIT**  
BKU national spokesperson

BKU vice-president said farmers were busy with their crops. "The government is trying to tire us out. So, we have to plan accordingly. We are in for a long haul."

Mr. Singh said, "The BKU and the Samyukt Kisan Morcha were ready for talks with the government, but it seems the government's focus is on the State elections right now." He said the BKU was not planning to turn political, but the BJP would face the political fallout of farm laws in the coming panchayat elections.

#### A fair deal



Teachers hold placards during an awareness programme ahead of International Women's Day, in Patiala on Saturday. • PTI

## Rape victim dies of burns

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

A 30-year-old woman, allegedly set on fire by a man facing court trial for raping her in Rajasthan's Hanumangarh district, succumbed to burn injuries at Sawai Man Singh Government Hospital here on Saturday. The police have detained two suspects for questioning in the case.

The woman was set on fire at her house in Hanumangarh district early on Thursday. The victim's grandmother said in her police complaint that the accused, out on bail, had entered the house, sprinkled kerosene and dropped a burning stick, which set the woman ablaze. The State government has announced a relief of ₹5 lakh from the CM's Relief Fund to the kin of the deceased.

## Rajasthan seeks Central assistance for water projects

Demand for national status for canal project reiterated

**MOHAMMED IQBAL**  
JAIPUR

The Congress government in Rajasthan has sought Centre's financial assistance for the ongoing water projects and reiterated its demand for the national project status for the ambitious Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP), which will supply drinking and irrigation waters to 13 districts.

**Calls for Oppn. support**  
Public Health Engineering Minister B.D. Kalla said in the State Assembly that the Opposition should work in cooperation with the State government for raising the water-related issues with the Centre.

The State could get the Centre's support if the Op-

Centre's share in the Jal Jeevan Mission should be enhanced to 90%

**B.D. KALLA**  
Public Health Engineering Minister

position leaders put forth the subjects in an assertive manner, he said.

Mr. Kalla was replying to the debate on budgetary demands for Public Health Engineering Department, which deals with water supply in the State.

The Minister said the Centre's share in the Jal Jeevan Mission should be enhanced to 90% and steps be taken for bringing the State's full share in the Yamuna waters from neighbouring Haryana.

The demands worth ₹8,336.74 crore were passed in the House by voice vote after the debate.

Mr. Kalla said strict action would be launched against illegal water connections and steps will be taken to ensure piped water supply till the tail-end.

#### Plan for summer

The State government has also chalked out a contingency plan for summer.

While new water supply schemes will be implemented in both urban and rural areas in 2021-22, Mr. Kalla said new borewells, handpumps, solar power plants and reverse osmosis plants and laboratories would facilitate the supply of adequate water in the villages.

## Night curfew imposed in 4 Punjab districts

Orders come after Chief Secretary-DGP review meeting over COVID-19 surge

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**

CHANDIGARH

A night curfew was imposed in Punjab's four districts from Saturday to tackle a recent surge in COVID-19 cases.

The orders came after Punjab Chief Secretary Vini Mahajan and Director General of Police Dinkar Gupta held a meeting to review the COVID-19 situation with all Deputy Commissioners, district police chiefs and civil surgeons through a video-conferencing.

The districts where the night curfew has been imposed are Jalandhar, SBS Nagar, Hoshiarpur and Kapurthala.

The night curfew will remain in place in the districts from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m.

Ms. Mahajan said, "The second wave of the disease has already started and all the DCs and police chiefs

must ensure that large gatherings like marriages, religious events and social functions are restricted".

Jalandhar Deputy Commissioner Ghanshyam Thorai had earlier in the day said the order will be effective from Saturday till further directions.

**VINI MAHAJAN**  
Punjab Chief Secretary

Deputy Commissioners to impose the night curfew in virus hotspots if needed.

Punjab has been witnessing a surge in the number of COVID-19 cases for nearly four weeks.

Jalandhar reported 242 cases on Thursday, 134 cases on Friday and 154 on Saturday, promoting the district authorities to take this decision. Jalandhar is at the second spot in terms of COVID-19 cases after Ludhiana.

Earlier, the State government had authorised It has so far reported 22,410 COVID-19 cases.

There are a total of 926 active cases in Jalandhar as of now, according to a medical bulletin.

SBS Nagar, Kapurthala and Hoshiarpur on Saturday reported 156, 85 and 137 cases, respectively.

Punjab on Saturday reported 1,179 fresh COVID-19 cases, taking the infection tally to 187,348 cases. Twelve more deaths took the fatality count to 5,910.

Punjab is among the five States that has been asked by the Centre to refocus on strict surveillance, containment and RT-PCR testing to check the growing number of cases. The other four States are Maharashtra, Kerala, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh.

Earlier, the State government had lifted the night curfew from January 1.

## SP's 'cycle yatra' to highlight govt. 'targeting' Azam Khan

It will begin on March 13 and end on March 21 in Lucknow

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**

LUCKNOW

The Samajwadi Party will take out a 'cycle yatra' to highlight the "continued oppression" of senior party leader Azam Khan by the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh, a party spokesperson said on Saturday.

The yatra will begin from Rampur, the home district of Azam Khan, on March 13 and conclude on March 21 in Lucknow, party spokesman Rajendra Chaudhary said in a statement.



Azam Khan

University and SP MP Mohammad Azam Khan and draw people's attention to it," Mr. Chaudhary said.

Mr. Yadav will reach Rampur on March 12 and address a press conference at Mohammad Ali Johar University and will also speak at a

public meeting there, Mr. Chaudhary said, adding that on March 13, State unit president Naresh Uttam Patel will flag off the 'cycle yatra' from Ambedkar Park, Rampur.

Passing through Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Lakhimpur and Sitapur, the 'cycle yatra' will reach the party headquarters in Lucknow where the party president will address workers, Mr. Chaudhary said, adding that senior leaders will flag off the yatra at different places all through the route.

Mohammad Azam Khan is an MP and former Minister, his wife Tanzin Fatima is an MLA yet they have been framed in fake cases," Chaudhary alleged.

## 5 killed as two buses collide in Aligarh

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**

NOIDA

Five people were killed and over 25 injured after a collision between two Haryana Roadways buses in Uttar Pradesh's Aligarh district on Saturday, officials said.

A bus went out of control after one of its tyres burst, colliding with another bus near Karsua village in the Lodha police station area of the district around 2 p.m., the officials said.

Aligarh District Magistrate Chandra Bhushan Singh said the injured have been hospitalised and the Chief Minister's Office in Lucknow has been apprised of the situation.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has directed Aligarh officials to ensure proper medical treatment of those injured.

## Himachal MLAs to get full salaries from April 1: CM

MLALAD fund to be restored, will be hiked by ₹5 lakh from ₹1.75 cr. to ₹1.80 cr.

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**

SHIMLA

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur while presenting the budget for 2021-22 on Saturday said the salaries of State MLAs will be paid in full from April 1 and the MLALAD fund will be restored fully.

Mr. Thakur proposed no new tax in his fourth budget which pegged total expenditure at ₹30,192 crore for 2021-22 against ₹49,131 crore in the last fiscal despite the COVID-19 crisis.

The Chief Minister announced a budgetary allocation of ₹8,024 crore for education and ₹3,016 crore for

health services during 2021-22.

#### Debt burden

After presenting the budget, Mr. Thakur said that the State has a debt burden of ₹60,500 crore. The debt burden has increased by ₹4,763 crore from ₹55,737 crore in the last financial year.

Earlier, Mr. Thakur announced in the Assembly that MLAs will get their full salary from April 1.

Mr. Thakur, who also holds the finance portfolio, said the MLA local area development (MLALAD) fund will not only be restored, but it will be hiked by ₹5 lakh from

₹1.75 crore to ₹1.80 crore.

The State government had last year decided to cut 30% salary of MLAs and suspend the MLALAD fund for two years to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Chief Minister said that total revenue receipts are estimated at ₹37,028 crore during 2021-22, whereas total revenue expenditure is estimated to be ₹38,491 crore, leading to a revenue deficit of ₹1,463 crore. Fiscal deficit is estimated at ₹7,789 crore which is 4.52% of the Gross State Domestic Product, he added.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted revenue re-

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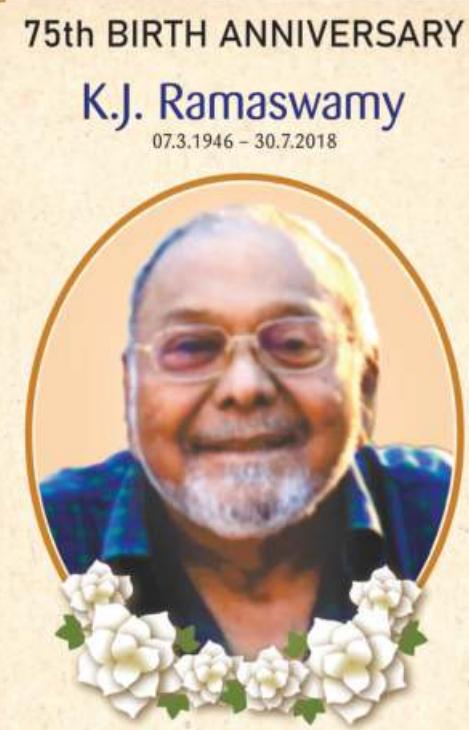
## OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

### BIRTHDAY REMEMBRANCE

DEATH



**Shri S. Muthu**  
Retd. Engineer - DAE  
02.03.1937 02.03.2021  
You will always live in our  
Hearts and Thoughts.  
Deeply Mourned by  
Prakash, Rama,  
Harish, Siddhu  
Phone : 96118 21721



75th BIRTH ANNIVERSARY  
**K.J. Ramaswamy**

07.3.1946 – 30.7.2018



Fondly remembered by  
Family & Friends

DEATH

### THE LEGEND LIVES



**SRI. K.A.H. SUBRAMANIAN**  
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Retd. IAS, Former Chief  
Secretary, Bihar merged  
with the Lotus Feet of  
Bhagawan on 3.3.2021  
at Madurai  
Last physical respects  
on 7.3.2021.  
Fondly remembered by  
Children, Grand Children,  
Family & Friends  
A 11, Vadumithra, Vasudhara  
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Madurai - 625 003  
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### DEATH ANNIVERSARIES

#### ANNIVERSARY



14.04.1935 - 07.03.1995

Founder  
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### DEATH



**V. VASUDEVAN** 64 years  
Chartered Accountant  
Passed away peacefully on  
06.03.2021 afternoon  
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Royapettah, Chennai-14  
Deeply mourned by  
Dr. V. Sampath and brothers  
Dr. Sowmyaranayanan and Sister  
M.K. Murali Advocate  
Dr. Sudhir son in law  
Mr. Mithun Ratnakar son in law  
Wife and Daughters  
Phone: 044 28475622

### DEATH ANNIVERSARIES

### SEARCH OF MISSING

General public is hereby informed that one girl (depicted in the photo), **Named: Rashmi, D/o: Sh. Devi Chand, R/o: H.No. B-76, Gazipur Village, Delhi, Aged: 18 years, has been missing from ISBT, Anand Vihar, Delhi since 18.02.2021. In this regard a case vide FIR No. 62/21 u/s 365 IPC, Dated 19.02.2021, has been lodged at P.S. Patparganj Industrial Area, Delhi. Her physical description is as under:**

**Height: 5'1" Feet, Complexion: Wheatish, Face: Round, Physique/Build: Medium, Clothing: Pink Colour Suit, Grey Colour Plaza and Chappal in her feet.**

Any person having any information/clue about this missing girl, may inform SHO, P.S. Patparganj Industrial Area, Delhi at E-mail: cic@cbi.gov.in or website : <http://cbi.gov.in> Tele No. : 011-24368638 or 24368641

**S.H.O**  
P.S. Patparganj Ind. Area, Delhi  
Tel. 011-22146491, 22146492  
DP/397/ED/2021.



Rashmi

### WEST CENTRAL RAILWAY

#### TENDER NOTICE

Tender No. - WCRTP2021464  
Dated 26.02.2021

For tenders issued by Engineering Department, West Central Railway, Please visit website <https://ireps.gov.in>.  
**Tender No. - WCRTP2021464**  
Dated 26.02.2021 **Description of Items** - Manufacture and supply of fittings of thick web switches 1:12 60 kg to RDSO Dr. No. T-6155 (A) C.I.items (B) M.S. Items. **Tender Value (Rs.) - 58,29,995/- Earnest Money (Rs.) - 1,16,600/- Date of Opening of tender - 30.03.2021 11.30 AM.**

Dy. Chief Engineer / TP, West Central Railway, Jabalpur

रेल यात्रा के दौरान शिकायत होती हैं 138 पर एवं सुरक्षा होती है 182 पर सम्पर्क करें

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For further details visit [www.tender.telangana.gov.in](http://www.tender.telangana.gov.in) and [www.tsnpcl.in](http://www.tsnpcl.in)  
For obtaining Digital Key visit [www.tsits.gov.in](http://www.tsits.gov.in)  
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Details regarding Quantity, Tender cost, Earnest Money, Schedule date of tender opening for aforesaid tenders are available on our website at [www.jvvnlnl.com](http://www.jvvnlnl.com) and also at <http://sprr.rajasthan.gov.in>

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This office e-tender specification no. CCP-II/28/2020-2021 invited previously, for supply of 12.5MVA, 33/11KV Power Transformer is hereby extended due to unavoidable reasons. The e-tender can be purchased and submitted upto 17:00hrs. of 15.03.2021. Part-I of the e-tender shall be opened on 16.03.2021 at 15.30hrs. For further details, please visit our website [www.uktenders.gov.in](http://www.uktenders.gov.in)

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#### E-TENDER NOTICE

Online tenders are invited for TN-15185(RVU2021GL0B01831) Supply of Heat Exchanger & their spares for ID fan of Unit 6 to 4 to 7, 4851(RVU2021VS0B01862) Operation of Railway yard, maintenance of Railway Track and Electrical & Mechanical maintenance of Locomotives and 4871 (RVU2021SL0B01860) Hiring of 15 Nos. AC Mahindra Bolero with driver for 2 years. Tender details are available on websites <http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in> (for e-tender), [www.energy.rajasthan.gov.in/rvun/](http://www.energy.rajasthan.gov.in/rvun/) & [www.sppr.rajasthan.gov.in/RVUN/PR-3495](http://www.sppr.rajasthan.gov.in/RVUN/PR-3495)

Chief Engineer (KSTPS)

### G.B. PANT NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF HIMALAYAN ENVIRONMENT (NIHE)

Kosi-Katarmal, Almora - 263643, Uttarakhand

#### Tender Notice No.- GBNIHE/Canteen/2020-21/16

Please refer to Institute's Tender notice No. GBPI/Public Notice /2020-21/03 published in "The Hindu" (Delhi edition) dated 11.02.2021 for running existing canteen of the Institute for catering around 150 nos (approx) employees/students. It is to inform all concerned that last date of receiving bids is extended up to 15.03.2021 at 03:00 P.M.

The full details of proposal are available in the Institute website <http://gbpihed.gov.in>

Administrative Officer  
Email: [ao@gbpihed.nic.in](mailto:ao@gbpihed.nic.in)

### HIMACHAL PRADESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

#### INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

The Executive Engineer Bilaspur Division No.2, HP-PWD, Bilaspur on behalf of Governor of H.P invites the item rate bids, in electronic tendering system, from the eligible class of contractors registered with HPPWD for the works as detailed in the table.

Sr. No.	Name of work	Estimated cost	Starting Date for downloading Bid	Earnest Money	Deadline for submission of Bid
1.	Slope protection work on the left bank river Satluj Plug Pool Metri Setu Bridge (SH- Protection work i/c RCC Tow wall and wire crate wall etc.) NTPC Deposit	Rs. 1,81,14,028/-	26.03.2021	Rs. 2,13,650/-	05.04.2021
2.	Special repair on Nehar to Mattri Setu Bridge Km. 0/0 to 2/500 (SH- ROFD at RD 1/444 to 1/220, C/o U-shape drain, Edge wall and C/o Protection work i.w. wire crate in valley side at RD 1/100) NTPC Deposit	Rs. 57,45,757/-	26.03.2021	Rs. 90,000/-	05.04.2021

The bidders are advised to note other details of tenders from the department

Executive Engineer website [www.hptenders.gov.in](http://www.hptenders.gov.in)  
Bilaspur Divn. No. II, HP-PWD, Bilaspur  
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On behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh

|| नैनं छिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः ||

न चैनं क्लेदयन्त्यापो न शोषयति मारुतः ||

Weapons can't cut the Soul, neither fire burn it, nor water wet it, nor the wind dry it.  
It is eternal, all-pervading, divine, beyond the interaction of material objects.

- Bhagavad Gita, Ch 2, Text 23



You left us a year ago, yet you continue  
to inspire us with the extraordinary  
life you have led. Today we renew our pledge  
to carry forward your legacy and vision.



In loving memory, The KCP Family



The KCP Limited

**Dr. Velagapudi Lakshmana Dutt**  
27<sup>th</sup> December, 1937 - 18<sup>th</sup> February, 2020

Former Chairman



KCP Vietnam Industries Limited



Fives Cail KCP Limited

# MATRIMONIAL

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

## BRIDEGROOMS WANTED

### INDEX OF MATRIMONIAL

#### BRIDEGROOMS WANTED

#### BRIDES WANTED

#### BRIDES & GROOMS WANTED

Classification common for Brides, Bridegrooms, Brides & Grooms

Assamese

Awadhi

Bengali

Bhojpuri

Bihari

Chhattisgarhi

English

Gujarati

Haryanvi

Hindi

Kannada

Kashmiri

Konkani

Malayalam

Manipuri

Marathi

Marwari

Nepali

Oriya

Parsi

Punjabi

Saurashtra

Sindhi

Tamil

Telugu

Tulu

Urdu

Advocate

Business

Defence

Doctor

Engineer

Finance/ Banking

Government/ Quasi-Govt.

IAS/ Allied Services

Information Technology

MBA/ CA/ ICWA

NRI

Cosmopolitan

Divorcee

Physically Challenged

MARRIAGE BUREAUS

WEDDING ARRANGEMENTS

COSMOPOLITAN

ATTRACTIVE, KIND teacher, 43, 174cm, divorced (no kids), veg, loving family, seeks educated, compatible partner. jdsp@gmail.com

Ezhava girl Beautiful 5.2-3.5 Fair Ayilam from thrissur district Masters degree from british university now look after her own hospital Seeks alliance from same status boys Preferably settle outside kerala. W App: 6239442353, 9809233008

DIVORCEE

WELL CHENNAI settled 34 yr old MBA Australia Single Mother with 7 year old son, seek alliance from suitable groom Contact 9381046406

PARENTS SEEK Alliance Mudaliyar Vegetarian 33 with a Girl Child. Preferably Chennai settled within 38years Vegetarian:9551849757; 6380392524

DOCTOR

TAMIL VISWAKARMA Govt Doctor MD/BM (GM) 30/167 Fair Vishagan. Seeks Doctors / Govt Officer Bride-groom Ct: 94459 64265

GOLDMSITH GIRL Surgeon 28/MS seeks Gold/MS Groom well settled from same/ other equal caste. W-app 9444563880

EZHAWA GIRL 32, 173, Ayyiliyam, Mch (Surgical Gastro). Prefer PG Doctors. 9444183400

TIRUNELVELI SAIVA Pillai, 30yrs, MBBS, TN Govt/Doctor seeks suitable BMS/ MD, BDS Groom from Tirunelveli / Tanjore Saiva Pillai/ Brahmin. Contact: 9468901679

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MS GENL Surgery 2nd Yr Doctor Nadu Girl from Chennai 27 yrs 5'6" Fair Bf/ful Seeks PG Doctor Only (Clinical) from TN/AP/ TS#9406949410 & Email: id: venkatesarao5@gmail.com

PADMASALINI 25/ 177 cm/ MS Doctor: 8072553513, 9442502812

## DOCTOR

28/ DOCTOR/ palliar doing PG seeks doctor groom. ct- 9994499574, 9159860877

Looking for a Doctor Groom living in India for a Brahmin Girl Vaduvali / Uthram 2nd Paadham (30/5'5"/MD Practicing in a Private Hospital Chennai. Contact # 9344569990.

## ENGLISH

KERALA BRAHMIN Girl, iyer, Vadama, Srivastava Gothram, Canadian citizen, working in USA, 25YS/ 5'9" Slim, Vegetarian, non smoker, teetotaller, B.E from Toronto University, Seeking alliance from US educated and well employed Kerala Brahmins groom's, settled in USA, from affluent family. Contact : Shr. P.V. Kumar : +267 71365075, E - mail : sararama6962@gmail.com

## HINDI

Chandigarh based Hindu high status business family seeks alliance for their NM daughter,beautiful 36/5'10". MBA from Imperial College, London. Currently working in family business. Looking for qualified well-settled match from cultured and respectable family. Caste no bar, groom: minch@gmail.com,+91 98769-06000

## MALAYALAM

MALAYALEE VISWAKARMA(G.S) girl 37/162, Avitton, Deputy Manager in MNC,Chennai. Seeks educated & Employed Groom(CNB). 944561626 / 9797039037

VISWAKARMA-EZHAVA girl, 34/154, Uthram, Nilambur, M.Sc., Ph.D., Pursuing PhD in Chennai, seeks suitable alliance from well-educated and professionally qualified grooms preferably researchers from Kerala. Contact: 7973486111

KANNUR, NAMBIAR Girl, 42/165, Chithra, MDS Doctor working Abroad. Looking for Suitable alliance. 9495458582.

✓ BOMBAY - BASED Well-Settled Upper Middleclass Nair Parents Seek Suitable Alliance for Daughter. Birth year 1991. M.C. Well educated. Well-settled Dr/Engt. Govt. Employee Groom with Reputed Corporate Group in Chennai. Will Relocate Post-Marriage. Father Trichur Dist. Mother Malappuram Dist. Own House Kerala. Prefer Well-Qualified Boys Born and Brought Up Outside Kerala with Traditional Values. Preferred Districts Trichur, Palakkad, Malappuram, Kozhikode. Reply to: gkn500 @gmail.com

Ezhava Girl , Fair, Puram, Papajham, 27/153, BAMS, Working in Chennai seeks Suitable Alliance. Contact: 9444775399

ELITE SOZIAH VELLALA PILLLAI 36/163cm, MBA FAIR Visakam 16 lacs pa Chennai seeks SWE Groom, CNB rasnari1948@gmail.com Ct: 9846078383

## NRI

Tamil Girl, Vegetarian, 1988 July born, 50", Thiruvonam, Slim, Wheatish, B.Tech (NIT, Trichy), MS(USA), SW Eng in California, H1B, GC in process, seeks S/Indian Hindu unmarried Groom Working on H1B in USA. Canada. Contact +917339951722, Email: bpk.8588@gmail.com

## TAMIL

DIVORCEE, 34YRS with a daughter, working,upper middle class , RC wants a decent partner ph: 9840192878

Tamil Muslim 25/167 MBBS MD See prof qualified groom. Ct : 8220042091 malushallasi@gmail.com

TAMIL MUSLIM Girl 30/163cm MS, Lives in Vancouver, Canada PR Status. Seeking Alliance from a Suitable Groom living in Vancouver / Intent moving to Vancouver. Ct: 8903905909

PENTECOST 23/170 BA (Eng Litt) B.Ed., working 30K wheatish beautiful seeks well educated, good natured decent family groom. Ct: 994257510

EZHAVA GIRL, 33, Bank Officer, seeking Suitable Groom. CT: 994257510

HINDU SC PR Kongu 36, MBBS DCH Doctor, working in Govt Hospital suitable Groom. Ct: 94436 80973

HINDU NADAR girl, 41, 152,Teacher, widow with 7yr old son, caste no bar, 9789240521

PILLAI 25 MBBS 165cm Chennai seeks PG Doctor from Pillai/Mudaliar Ct: 7305491610

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PROFESSIONAL GROOM for only daughter 19/60, M.E.,Ph.D.(BME) for parents Hindu AD / Vellarai Settled Family Karukalai, Seeks well educated and settled educated Thiyai / Ezhava Groom. Contact : 7010925474

YADAV 33, MBA, Wheatish, Working@ infosys. Seeks Suitable Groom Preferably IT professional. Ct: 9962601864/ 9884191464

HINDU MARUTHVAR 25yrs girl MCN/ MBA employed MNC Chevai Dosham looks educated employed groom low 30s Ct 9849935653

CHRISTIAN AD Girl 25yrs/ 167cm, B.Ed., working 30K wheatish beautiful seeks well educated, good natured decent family groom. Ct: 9944024235

TIRUNELVELI SAIVA Pillai, 30yrs, MBBS, TN Govt/Doctor seeks suitable BMS/ MD, BDS Groom from Tirunelveli / Tanjore Saiva Pillai/ Brahmin. Contact: 9468901679

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# ASSEMBLY POLLS

DELI THE HINDU | SUNDAY, MARCH 7, 2021

## WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE &amp; AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



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

**Forecast for Sunday:** Heavy rainfall/snowfall likely at isolated places over Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Muzaffarabad, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Thunderstorm with lightning/hail likely at isolated places over Ladakh, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura

**CITY RAIN MAX MIN CITY RAIN MAX MIN**

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	32.6	23.2	19.4	Kozhikode	34.0	25.0	20.2
Ahmedabad	38.9	19.4	14.4	Kurnool	38.1	20.2	15.8
Aizawl	25.7	17.0	14.0	Lucknow	31.6	23.4	19.0
Allahabad	31.7	14.0	14.0	Madurai	35.8	23.4	19.0
Bengaluru	35.9	18.4	14.4	Mangaluru	35.4	20.9	15.0
Bhopal	34.2	14.6	14.6	Mumbai	32.8	23.0	15.0
Bhubaneswar	40.4	20.0	14.4	Mysuru	33.7	16.7	15.0
Chandigarh	32.4	14.4	14.4	New Delhi	31.5	15.0	15.0
Chennai	32.2	23.7	19.4	Patna	31.4	17.6	11.0
Coimbatore	36.4	21.5	17.0	Port Blair	31.1	25.7	19.0
Dehradun	31.1	11.0	11.0	Puducherry	32.1	21.1	15.0
Gangtok	26.6	12.3	8.3	Pune	36.7	18.0	15.0
Goa	33.0	22.1	16.4	Raipur	36.2	15.5	15.0
Guwahati	4.7	28.2	16.4	Ranchi	32.0	16.8	16.8
Hubballi	34.0	17.0	17.0	Shillong	0.6	22.5	11.0
Hyderabad	37.2	19.4	19.4	Shimla	19.6	8.6	8.6
Imphal	26.0	12.7	12.7	Srinagar	16.0	11.0	11.0
Jaipur	35.8	16.2	16.2	Tiruchi	34.1	24.1	22.2
Kochi	32.8	24.2	24.2	Vijayawada	35.6	19.2	19.2
Kohima	20.0	8.0	8.0	Visakhapatnam	32.5	24.0	24.0
Kolkata	36.2	21.7	21.7				

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

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

CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>x</sub>	CO	PM <sub>2.5</sub>	PM <sub>10</sub>	CODE
Ahmedabad	48	108	51	213	215	██████
Bengaluru	.8	62	43	71	90	█████
Chennai	13	19	45	57	66	██████
Delhi	38	45	28	260	236	██████
Hyderabad	.5	87	48	110	123	██████
Kolkata	30	22	44	212	162	██████
Lucknow	26	24	68	269	156	██████
Mumbai	.9	28	4	249	144	██████
Pune	121	36	128	104	148	██████
Visakhapatnam	.9	79	41	84	148	██████

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)  
**SO<sub>2</sub>:** Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.  
**NO<sub>x</sub>:** Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

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

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

## AJP chief to contest from Duliajan

Assam Jatiya Parishad is an outcome of the anti-CAA movement in the State

RAHUL KARMAKAR  
GUWAHATI

The six-month-old Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) has named its president Lurinjyoti Gogoi as its candidate for the Duliajan Assembly constituency in eastern Assam.

Party general secretary Jagadish Bhuyan, who quit the Brahmaputra Janata Party in December 2019 over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, will contest from Sadiya, a constituency where the Brahmaputra begins.

AJP was launched in September 2020 by members of the influential All Assam Students' Union, of which Mr. Gogoi was the general secretary, and the Asom Jatiyat-

badi Yuba Chhatra Parishad. The party was an outcome of the anti-CAA movement in Assam and sought to give Assam a new brand of regionalism that the Asom Gana Parishad - birthed by the same organisations - had allegedly surrendered to its ally, BJP.

"We have announced the candidates for 18 seats. Candidates for the other constituencies will be named soon," Mr. Bhuyan said, dismissing reports of a rift with the Rajbari Dal, another party formed by jailed rights activist Akhil Gogoi's group and associate organisations.

He declined to comment on the jailed rights activist's view that an opposition alliance too many would help



Lurinjyoti Gogoi. ■ FILE PHOTO

BJP and its allies retain power in the State. "We cannot comment on the views of another party or individual. We don't feel so weak," he said.

Apart from Duliajan and Sadiya, AJP would be contesting Sarupathar, Dhemaji, Khumta, Dhekiajuli, Rangap-

ara, Dhang, Batadrava, Deragon, Nazira, Thaora, Bipupuria, Dibrugarh, Mariani, Tinsukia, Dhakuakhana and Margherita.

### Friendly fight

The All India United Democratic Front, the second major party in the Congress-led Majahot or grand alliance, said it would be contest 24 seats. The party would contest 21 seats independently and there will be a friendly fight with the alliance partners in three.

The seats that the AIUDF would be contesting for the Majahot include the 14 it had won in 2016 and a by-election later. These are Rangia and Sorbhog, Morigaon, and Bihali. The Congress and Bodoland People's Front, which is demanding at least 12 seats, are yet to announce their candidates.

I stand firmly with anti-CAA forces: Mahanta

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT GUWAHATI

Former Assam Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta said he has not wavered from his stand against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA). He is among the four MLAs of the regional Asom Gana Parishad who have been denied ticket for the three-phase Assam election starting March 27.

"I stand firmly with the anti-CAA forces," Mr. Mahanta said after arriving in Guwahati from New Delhi, where he had undergone treatment at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences.

The two-time Chief Minister is the founder-president of AGP, a minor ally of BJP in the State. The party got 26 seats following the seat-sharing agreement with BJP and other allies in New Delhi on March 5.

### AGP(P) ticket

"Which party denied ticket?" he retorted, when journalists asked why he was left out. This has fuelled speculation that he could contest the polls on AGP-Pragatisheel (AGP-P) ticket.

Mr. Mahanta had formed the AGP-P in 2005 after his expulsion from AGP. The party merged with the AGP in 2008 but was revived on a low key during the anti-CAA protests three years ago.

AGP-P general secretary Pranab Goswami said the party had been re-emerged ahead of the Assembly poll and they were waiting for Mr. Mahanta to lead them towards forming an "anti-CAA government". His wife and former Rajya Sabha member Jayshree Goswami Mahanta slammed AGP.

## Marking her presence



Painting on the wall: Trinamool Congress candidate Shashi Panja paints the party symbol on a wall during her election campaign in Kolkata on Saturday. ■ PTI

## Dinesh Trivedi is ungrateful, says TMC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
KOLKATA

Slamming its former Rajya Sabha MP Dinesh Trivedi for switching over to the BJP, the Trinamool Congress on Saturday said he is "ungrateful" and has backstabbed the ruling party in West Bengal ahead of the Assembly polls.

Mr. Trivedi quit from the Rajya Sabha last month, saying he was feeling suffocated in the Trinamool Congress and was unable to bear various incidents that are happening in the State. TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said, "For the last so many years, he (Mr. Trivedi) did not say anything. Now, just before the Assembly polls, he has made complaints...he is ungrateful and has betrayed people of the State."

## NIA chargesheets 3 Bodo militants for 2014 ambush

A police officer, one civilian were killed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
GUWAHATI

farm loan waiver and jobs. He said the youth will give a befitting reply to the Gehlot government in the bypolls for "playing with the dreams of the unemployed".

**Unemployment rate** Mr. Poonia said Rajasthan has the highest rate of unemployment in the country, which is more than 28%.

There are 12 lakh registered unemployed youths in the State, but this government could give unemployment allowance to 2.49 lakh youths only, he said.

Earlier, while addressing the media, the BJP leader said the party has started preparations for the bypolls.

He targeted the Ashok Gehlot government over

Friday.

The case relates to an ambush that resulted in the death of Gulzar Hussain, the then Additional Superintendent of Police, Sonitpur, and a civilian, Anlark Basumatary, and injuries to several police personnel in Assam's Sonitpur district.

NI, which took over the probe in the case in August 2019, said members of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB-S) had laid the ambush. Two of the accused - Narzary and Nitol Daimary - have been convicted in another case, in which the former has been given a death sentence while the latter has been sentenced to life imprisonment.

The chargesheet was filed before the Special NIA Court in Guwahati on

Odisha Right to Food Campaign says adding children's names also difficult

SATYASUNDAR BARIK  
BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Right to Food Campaign, a forum of individuals spearheading the movement for food entitlements, said the government should implement inter-portability facility for newlywed women, whose names are struck off the public distribution system after their marriage.

According to RTF, Odisha, a large number of newlywed women are unable to access their share of ration as their names are cancelled from their parental card but not added to their marital cards.

The problem worsens further as families find it equally difficult to add names of children to the ration card.

"The State lacks a clear

and transparent process to port names of migrated individuals or to add new individuals to ration cards. The process remains just as opaque and difficult to navigate despite the government implementing Aadhaar card, digitisation of PDS or even 'One Nation One Ration Card' scheme," said Samit Panda, a lead member of RTF, Odisha.

Thousands of women migrate after marriage, and a large fraction of this section of population risks exclusion from PDS, he said.

The RTF, Odisha says the 2011 census shows that 46% of migration was due to marriage, of which 97%, or 20.58 crore migrants, were women.

### 78% population

"As high as 78% of Odisha's population are PDS beneficiaries. Observing the widespread exclusion of women, it is estimated that at least ten lakh women have been left out from PDS since National Food Security Act came into force," he

pointed out. Stating that access to food was under stress following the COVID-19 lockdown due to loss of income, Mr. Panda alleged, "exclusion from PDS will further reduce food intake of families, and worsens the already abysmal nutritional status of children, adolescent girls and women."

The forum demanded improvement in access to PDS. "A standard operating procedure for porting newly wed women's names from parental to marital ration cards in a time-bound manner, must be issued after consultation with different stakeholders," it emphasised.

### Grievance redressal

A grievance redressal system should be implemented to identify and fix gaps in the process.

There must be a mechanism to inform beneficiaries about deletion and addition of names in PDS system.

## Three-member expert panel takes stock

# ASSEMBLY POLLS

DEHLI THE HINDU | SUNDAY, MARCH 7, 2021

## SWOT ANALYSIS

# Hard-charging BJP and unrelenting Trinamool

But it's no longer a bipolar contest in West Bengal, with the Left-Congress-ISF combine putting up a show of strength

SHIV SAHAY SINGH  
KOLKATA

West Bengal is poised for a high-stakes, historic Assembly election that will be held over a record 33 days in eight phases. The ruling Trinamool Congress, which has been in power for 10 years, is not only grappling with the anti-incumbency factor but is also faced with the challenge of a dramatic rise of the BJP. This is the first time in the political history of West Bengal that the BJP has emerged as a challenger to the ruling party.

The Trinamool, which in the past few months has been dealing with a series of defections, is relying on the charisma of West Bengal Chief Minister and party chairperson Mamata Banerjee to tide over the toughest political challenge the party has ever faced since 2011.

### BIGGEST DRAW

Even after 10 years in power, Ms. Banerjee remains the tallest leader and the biggest crowd puller in the State. Her government claims to have launched 70 welfare schemes, including conditional cash transfer to girls and women and the much-touted universal health scheme Swasthasthi that issues cards in the name of the eldest woman of the family.

A carefully crafted campaign of the Trinamool aims to retain people's faith in Ms.

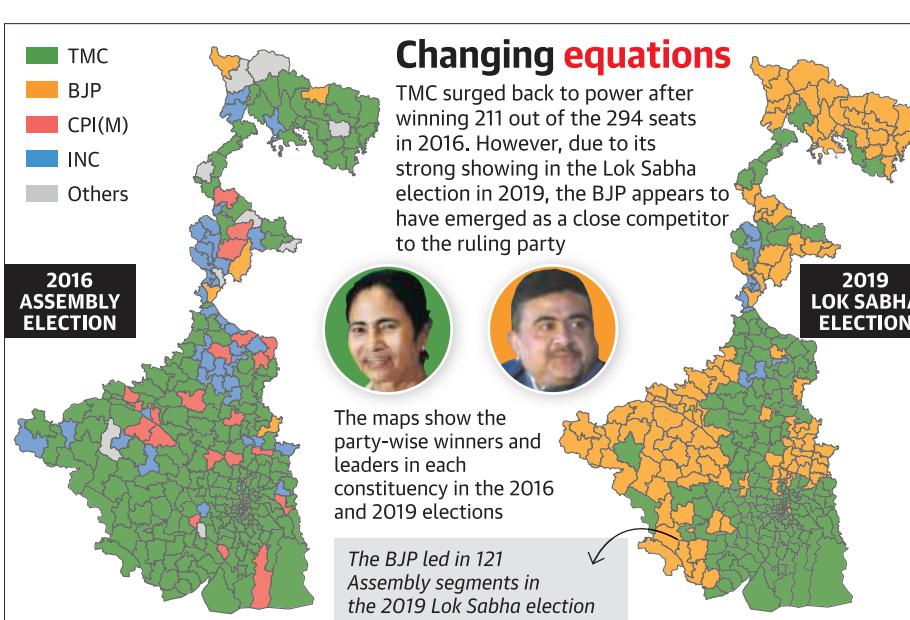
Banerjee by projecting her as "Bengal's own daughter".

The ruling party has also brought to the fore the issue of identity in the polls, dubbing the BJP an "outsider" party, emphasising that "Bengal will be governed by people of the State and not by people from Gujarat". Slogans like "Joy Bangla" raised at public gatherings are coupled with projecting Ms. Banerjee as a crusader for "Bengali pride".

The BJP's rise in West Bengal has been at the centre of a political churn in the State for the past few years. From a minuscule 4% in 2011 and 10.16% in 2016, the BJP's vote share increased to 40.3% in the 2019 Lok Sabha election, enabling the party to win 18 of the 42 seats.

Since 2019, the BJP, which lacked an organisational base in the State, has used defections as a political tool and induced senior Trinamool leaders like Suvendu Adhikari and Rajib Banerjee who have a significant support base and acceptability among the masses. The saga of defections has continued even after the election dates were announced.

In a State starved of industry and employment, which sees a huge migration for work, the BJP is selling the dream of a *Sonar Bangla* (Golden Bengal). The party has also relentlessly targeted



the Trinamool, accusing it of denying benefits of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi and non-implementation of Ayushman Bharat schemes in the State. The party has promised ₹14,000 – the sum of seven instalments of the PM Kisan scheme since it was started – to each of the 73 lakh farmers if it comes to power.

Apart from the development plank, the BJP is not shying away from using religious rhetoric to polarise the electorate.

While the BJP is raising issues of "illegal infiltration" and accusing the Trinamool of indulging in "appeasement

politics", it is maintaining a strategic silence on the implementation of the controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Act, which Ms. Banerjee has vehemently opposed. The BJP is also trying to reach out and placate the Matua sect, largely Hindu refugees from Bangladesh who are pressing for CAA implementation.

Both the Trinamool and the BJP are also locked in a bitter contest on appropriation of cultural icons of West Bengal, a process that started months before the polls were announced. The tussle was visible on several high-profile occasions including the 125th birth anniversary celebra-

tions of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and recent events at Rabindranath Tagore's Visva-Bharati University.

The third player in the political matrix, the Left-Congress alliance, which was the main Opposition force till 2019, has got a new lease of life as fresh political equations emerged after they roped in influential Islamist leader and Furfura Sharif peer Abbas Siddiqui's newly formed party Indian Secular Front.

What makes the combination of the Left and the Congress with the ISF effective is their ability to influence Muslim voters. By the last Census,

the Muslim population in the State is about 27.01%. There are 75 Assembly seats out of 294 where Muslims are in a majority. Even in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the Trinamool maintained a lead in 80% of these Assembly seats. Any possible split in Muslim votes will pose a challenge for the ruling party.

The significance of the Left-Congress-ISF combine became clear, particularly after the Brigade rally on February 28, indicating that the polls were not going to be a bipolar contest.

For both the Left and the Congress whose support base has been going down, the 2021 Assembly poll is a battle to re-establish their relevance in State politics. Leaders of both parties say that they are presenting the real alternative to the people against the "competitive communalism" of the BJP and the Trinamool.

The Left still has a dedicated cadre base that was evident in the recent Brigade rally and other programmes, while the Congress has maintained its dominance over certain districts in central Bengal such as Malda and Murshidabad.

As the campaign gains momentum, another provocative slogan has been raised by both the Trinamool and the BJP – *Khela hobe* (the game will be played) – implying a threat of political violence.

## Ground truths



**Colour code:** A rangoli vies for voters' eyes at Sriperumbudur, near Chennai, on Saturday with a message to ensure 100% voting. • VELANKANNI RAJ B.

## INTERVIEW | V. MURALEEDHARAN

# 'BJP is the only party to better performance in Kerala'

Minister of State for External Affairs says the party has not decided on a chief ministerial face for the State

NISTULA HEBBAR

**Minister of State for External Affairs V. Muraleedharan speaks on the BJP's chances in the Assembly election in Kerala.**

What is the thinking around pushing for a chief ministerial candidate on behalf of the BJP in the Kerala Assembly polls, specifically with regard to E. Sreedharan?

On Thursday, I had seen some news media reports that Mr. Sreedharan was decided on as a chief ministerial face. But later on, when I spoke to the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) State unit president, who said that during the course of his speech, related to issues of development in Kerala, he had said that people would like to see a Chief Minister like E. Sreedharan in place of Pinarayi Vijayan or Oommen Chandy. This was misunderstood by the media as an announcement and it was reported, but since no such

announcement has been made, a clarification was made.

But is the Kerala unit veering around to the view that a chief ministerial face needs to be projected?

It has not been discussed with me at least, possibly with the State unit president, whatever the case, it will be acceptable to me as a party worker.

The BJP claims that it has up to 15% vote in Kerala, but your performance in the recently concluded local body polls has not been encouraging. How do you square your claims with what happened in the local body poll?

First of all, even in the local



**We don't differentiate between the UDF and LDF, as we don't think that they are in any way different from each other**

growth will be regardless and we would like to win decisively.

The Sabarimala issue had given a lot of traction to the BJP in Kerala but the local body polls again did not reflect this traction. Is the Sabarimala issue still alive against them?

We like to think that our

body polls we polled a similar number in poll percentage, and we can't say that the BJP's performance was not good. We are the only party that improved its performance from the last time around, we saw an increase in the number of seats we won.

Who do you consider your main rival in Kerala, the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) led Left Democratic Front (LDF) or the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF)?

Both. We don't differentiate between the two, as we don't think that they are in any way different from each other. Governments led by both parties have had corruption allegations laid against them.

But whose victory will be more advantageous to your future expansion?

I don't think that any issue

is there for years together, issues keep on changing, but BJP is the only party in Kerala that has grown steadily from 6% vote to 15%-16%. We have almost tripled our strength.

In Sabarimala in the 2019 polls, people felt that the Left Front government should be taught a lesson, and though BJP was at the forefront of the agitation, they felt that for them to ensure the defeat of CPI(M), they should vote for the UDF.

But in the local body polls, the LDF did well in areas around Sabarimala.

See, Lok Sabha elections are different from local body elections and, going ahead, issues in the Assembly polls will be even more different. So one cannot compare one election to another.

Then, if not Sabarimala, what will be the main plank for your campaign?

Development that the BJP

can bring and the misrule by both the LDF and UDF governments.

On the question of development, Kerala ranks quite high in all sorts of development indices and the current government has gathered kudos for its handling of the pandemic as well, so won't that be a difficult narrative to defeat?

See, you also might have read the reports, that now almost 70% of COVID-19 cases are from Kerala and Maharashtra. Secondly, if Kerala ranks so high on development indices, how come Kerala has the largest number of expatriates? People [are] not finding jobs in the State and [are] having to travel out. Yes, the State ranks high in term of human capital, it's an educated society with hard-working people, called 'God's Own Country', but this hard work is not used up in Kerala. So, development is not there in the way that it should be.

**We will contest in only 18 seats with the intention of not dividing the votes so that the BJP is defeated**

• BHASCO DE SAIKA, chief state convenor of newly floated Rajojar Dal in Assam

## POLL POURRI



The BJP has been hosting a series of roadshows in the run-up to the Modi rally. • FILE PHOTO

### Modi to address rally in Kolkata

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address a rally at Brigade Parade grounds in Kolkata on Sunday while Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee will hold one at Siliguri in north Bengal. Mr. Modi's rally is touted as a major political event by the Bharatiya Janata Party and the party has run a campaign for days to draw large crowds at the venue. Last Sunday, the Brigade Parade Grounds witnessed another mega political event with the Left parties, Congress and the Indian Secular Front organising a rally. BJP leaders said that their rally would have the presence of several prominent personalities from the cultural world of West Bengal, including actor Mithun Chakraborty.

### Making the wrong call

Kodiyeri Balakrishnan, former Kerala secretary of the CPI (M), may have never imagined that his allegation that the Opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala accepted an expensive mobile phone as a gift from one of the prime accused in the gold smuggling case would eventually boomerang on him. It took a U-turn when Customs (Preventive) Commissioner revealed that Mr. Balakrishnan's wife, Vinodhini, had used one among the five expensive phones that a builder had handed over to Swapna Suresh, the second accused in the case, as a gift for securing a construction contract under the government's Life Mission housing project for the poor in Thrissur. Ms. Vinodhini has denied the allegations. Mr. Balakrishnan had accused Mr. Chennithala of having violated protocol by accepting an expensive mobile phone in a raffle organised by the UAE Consulate in Thiruvananthapuram.

### 'Outsider' barb against Mamata

The Trinamool Congress leadership, particularly West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, has been targeting the Bharatiya Janata Party calling it a party of "Bahirgata (outsiders)". On Saturday, BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari used the same phrase against the Chief Minister saying that the Trinamool Congress candidate at Nandigram (from where Ms. Banerjee will contest the Assembly election) is an "outsider". Mr. Adhikari said that Ms. Banerjee has hardly ever visited Nandigram in the past five years and raised questions on why she did not contest from Bhawanipur, where she resides.

### Ticket tantrums in Singur

Becharam Manna, one of the prominent leaders of the anti-land acquisition movement, had approached the Congress for ticket from the Singur Assembly seat, West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee president Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said on Saturday. Mr. Chowdhury made the claim on Saturday saying that the Trinamool Congress has become a party of those only interested in ticket. Mr. Manna, who got the Trinamool ticket from Singur, denied the claims and called Mr. Chowdhury a liar.

### Cong. giving fake news: Himanta

Assam's Finance Minister and the BJP's chief poll strategist Himanta Biswa Sarma has labelled the Congress a "fake news factory" for allegedly passing off a mock drill video from Jharkhand as shooting by the Assam police on protesters against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. The Assam Congress had shared this video on its Twitter handle, asking voters to watch the video before deciding on their vote.

## DATA BYTE

### Turnout tale

A comparison of voter turnouts during the 2016 Assembly elections and the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in the poll-bound States/U.T.

State/U.T.	2016 Assembly poll voter turnout (%)	2019 Lok Sabha poll voter turnout (%)
Tamil Nadu	74.2	72.5
Kerala	77.1	77.8
West Bengal	82.7	81.8
Assam	84.5	81.6
Puducherry	84	81.2

**WOMEN LEADING** | In all the five States/U.T. in 2016, the share of women who turned out to vote was higher than men

State/U.T.	2016 Assembly poll women turnout (%)	2016 Assembly poll men turnout (%)
Tamil Nadu	74.3	74.2
Kerala	78.1	76
West Bengal	83.1	82.2
Assam	84.7	84.3
Puducherry	85.4	82.5

## FROM PAGE ONE

COVID-19 cases  
breach 18,000 again

The team called on the Maharashtra Chief Minister as well as those at the forefront of the COVID-19 management exercise. It also visited Amravati, Yavatmal, Nagpur, Pune and Thane.

According to the report, the State "desired" that the Centre should indicate the total numbers to be vaccinated and leave actual process to the State, with "more flexibility" in vaccination, including use of private hospitals, time flexibility and data management.

The Central team suggested that Maharashtra involve revenue and police officials in "mission mode and zeal."

In Nagpur, the team reported, some senior doctors and specialists were not attending to COVID-19 patients and leaving it to juniors. "Some private doctors, Ayurveda practitioners, unqualified quacks which are first point of contact [for patients] may not be advising/ managing as per protocol. They also have to be reached out to, re-trained and reoriented re-

garding protocols," the report noted.

State officials reported problems in the CoWIN portal and app and ascribed the rise in cases in Amravati to a "possible internal mutation (of the virus)."

## Early management

AYUSH (traditional medicine including Ayurveda and Homeopathy) practitioners were still not part of deliberations, according to feedback from the States and they suggested "mainstreaming of AYUSH" for managing cases at an early stage.

"Role of media has been erratic – focussing on non-issues such as AEFIs (Adverse Events Following Injection (with vaccine) and ignoring issues such as promotion of vaccination now that vaccine has arrived," the report said.

The report noted that people believed that this was a disease only of urban areas and were, therefore, not following COVID-19 appropriate behaviour.

## Villagers relish peace as guns fall silent along LoC



Saja Begum, a Silikote resident, showing the mound of debris which was once her house. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

"The free hand given to the soldiers earlier is no more in vogue," a soldier, on the condition of anonymity, said.

At a number of posts with small boards reading 'No open movement, sniper zone', relaxed soldiers could be seen milling around. Earlier, such zones were no-go areas to escape Pakistani snipers positioned on the hill slope.

## Deep wounds

For the scores of border residents, the peace may come as a time for healing, though many scars remain fresh.

The eldest of five siblings, 15-year-old Shahista Bano, daughter of labourer Bashir Ahmad Dar, has been forced to take on the role of a mother. Her mother, Farooqa Begum, was killed on November 13 last year by a powerful shell fired from PoK that hit their home as she was climbing to the attic to store firewood.

"There was a loud explosion. The house was filled with light followed by dust. I turned into a stone. What I saw later was the mutilated body of my mother. She was lying dead, while the smoke had turned every wall black," recalled Shahista, her voice overcome with grief.

Now she takes care of her siblings, as her father goes to work. "I doubt if I can continue my schooling. My dream of donning the uniform of a policewoman was dashed with the killing of my mother," the teenager said.

Officials said 22 civilians were killed in the more than 5,133 incidents of border skirmishes along the LoC in 2020, the highest number of violations since the Kargil War.

Uri – like the border villages of Rajori, Poonch, Samba, Kathua, Bandipora and Kupwara districts – too turned into a theatre of war at least 21 times last year. Five civilians and three soldiers lost their lives, five suffered major injuries, and around 16 houses were damaged in the cross-border firing, according to official fi-

## Kerala CM ups the ante in Customs stand-off

Customs playing politics to advantage BJP-Congress axis, says Pinarayi Vijayan

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Saturday upped the ante in the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government's stand-off with Customs (Preventive) over the alleged "role" of the top political executive in the foreign currency smuggling aspect of the UAE Consulate-linked illegal gold importation case.

The Customs had taken over the task of disseminating political hyperbole to advantage the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party)-Congress axis in Kerala, Mr. Vijayan said.

The Customs Commissioner (Preventive) now spearheaded the propaganda campaign against the LDF government, he added.

The official had wrongfully impleaded in a case in

which the Prisons and Correctional Department, COFEPOSA detainee Swapna Suresh and an Assistant Commissioner, Customs (Preventive), were respondents. The official had thus created a fig leaf of an excuse to insinuate that Ms. Suresh had "stated with clarity about the smuggling of foreign currency at the instance of Hon'ble Chief Minister [Pinarayi Vijayan] and Hon'ble Speaker [P. Sreeramakrishnan]."

The official had cherry-picked portions of Ms. Suresh's sworn statement to tarnish the government. The official had acted like the cat's paw of the Congress-BJP axis, Mr. Vijayan said.

The official had leaked the statement to the media to advantage the Opposition; he



KERALA

had violated the confidential nature of sworn depositions, the CM said.

## Legal route

The government would seek legal recourse to counter the unabashed act of defamation

and violation of the election code. Mr. Vijayan's defiant take on the Central agency came against the backdrop of LDF protest marches to Customs offices in Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi and Kozhikode. The government

also seemed set for a run-in with Commissioner Customs (Preventive) Sumit Kumar, who remarked about the LDF protests in a Facebook post: "A political party is trying intimidation, will not work."

**March of dissent:** Supporters of the ruling Left Democratic Front taking out a rally to the Customs office in Kochi on Saturday. ■ THULASI KAKKAT

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## CEO among 24 persons arrested for MLM fraud

₹1,500 crore firm has over 10 lakh members across India

STAFF REPORTER  
HYDERABAD

Twenty-four persons, including three government school teachers from Telangana, associated with Indus Viva (IndusViva Health Sciences Pvt. Ltd.), a ₹1,500 crore multi-level marketing business with over 10 lakh members across the country, were arrested by the Cyberabad Commissionerate's Economic Offences Wing here on Saturday. Over ₹20 crore in various bank accounts were frozen.

Commissioner of Police V.C. Sajjanar said the arrested include Indus Viva's CEO Abhilash Thomas, 40; COO Prem Kumar, 39; director Mandalainen Subramanyam, 57; and government school teachers, Mulugu Venkatesh, 45, from Yadagirigutta, Kasani Shesh Rao, 47, from Khammam, and Manepu Hari Prasad, 40, from Miryalaguda. The

schemes and invested ₹12,500 in Indus Viva. "The complainant didn't receive any commission on his investment as promised by promoters. Later, he realised that he had been cheated and approached police," Mr. Sajjanar said.

He said the scheme of the company was to earn money by enrolling members in Indus Viva Plan and Compensation Plan.

To become a member, one had to pay ₹12,500 and buy their products and then, they would receive a 100-point value.

Then the member would be issued a user ID and password for continuing in the scheme. More than 1 lakh people were duped from Telangana 20.

The victim told the police that he was cheated by the company that promoted its products like coffee and juice by offering attractive income. He was attracted to

teachers took long leave to promote the MLM trade and were earning more than ₹10 lakh per month. Their wives were also taken into custody. Based on the complaint lodged by a victim, Gachibowli police filed a case against the firm on February 20.

The victim told the police that he was cheated by the company that promoted its products like coffee and juice by offering attractive income. He was attracted to

the firm promised many incentives for enrolling more members ■ ISTOCKPHOTO

TELANGANA

■ ISTOCKPHOTO



## 'Put off IT rules, consult stakeholders'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Editors Guild of India (EGI) has called upon the government to put the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 in abeyance, saying the guidelines can undermine media freedom.

In a statement on Friday, the EGI said it was "deeply concerned" about the recent notification of the rules and asked the government to consult the stakeholders.

"The Rules, issued under the Information Technology Act, 2000, fundamentally alter how publishers of news operate over the Internet and have the potential to seriously undermine media freedom. They empower the Union government to block, delete or modify published news anywhere in the country without any judicial oversight and mandate all publishers to establish a grievance redressal mechanism," the EGI said.

It said some provisions of the rules could put unreasonable restrictions on digital news media.

"The EGI is concerned that the government did not consult stakeholders before notifying these far-reaching rules. The Guild urges the government to put the rules in abeyance and conduct meaningful consultation with all stakeholders. The government must take note of the fact that in the name of reining an unfettered social media it cannot overwhelm constitutional safeguards for free media that has been the cornerstone of our democracy," the EGI said.

## Inoculations inch close to 2 crore

More vaccinations in second phase since March 1 with an average of 7 to 8 lakh a day last week

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Close to 2 crore COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered since the programme began on January 16 with 7.6 lakh senior citizens and 1.4 lakh persons aged above 45 and with comorbidities getting their first dose on Saturday.

Nearly 70 lakh healthcare workers (HCWs) have been vaccinated with at least one dose of either Covaxin or Covishield and 34 lakh of them have got their follow-up doses after at least four weeks, the recommended schedule. Nearly 63 lakh frontline workers (FLWs) have been inoculated with one dose with 14 lakh getting a second dose.

The second phase of the vaccination drive appears to



**Waiting their turn:** Senior citizens wait to register themselves for the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine, at a hospital in Bengaluru on Saturday. ■ MURALI KUMAR K.

be inoculating more people than during the first phase of the exercise.

Close to 7 to 8 lakh have

been inoculated for most days last week as opposed to the 1 to 3 lakh HCWs workers in the early weeks of the vac-

cination programme. The second dose of COVID-19 vaccination started on February 13, 2021 for

those beneficiaries who have completed 28 days after the first dose. Vaccination of the FLWs started on February 2.

The second phase of COVID-19 vaccination commenced from March 1, 2021 for those who were over 60 years of age and for people aged 45 and above with specific co-morbid conditions.

So far 3.5 lakh beneficiaries aged more than 45 years with specific comorbidities have got their first dose and 24 lakh who are 60 and above have got their first doses. The government plans to inoculate at least 300 million of the HCW, FLW, seniors and the specific subset of those over 45 by September. Unless there is a massive acceleration in vaccination this exercise might extend well into 2022.

## Remove PM's photo, EC tells Health Ministry

Vaccine certificate violates poll code

DAMINI NATH  
NEW DELHI

ies in government advertisements during elections.

A senior EC official said the Ministry was asked to follow the MCC in letter and spirit. The EC asked the Ministry to come up with a technical solution to remove the photo in the next couple of days. Elections to the Assemblies of Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry were announced on February 26, while the vaccination drive began in January.

As part of the drive, those who receive the vaccine can download a certificate from the centralised CoWIN portal and app. The certificate carries the photo which, according to sources, goes against the EC's standing instructions on use of images of living political functionar-

ies in government advertisements during elections.

The Trinamool Congress had taken up the issue with the EC on March 2, demanding removal of the photo.

Asked for comment, a Health Ministry official said: "We will peruse the instructions of the EC and then comply with its directions."

The Trinamool Congress had taken up the issue with the EC on March 2, demanding removal of the photo.

Woman files rape complaint after 27 years

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
SHAHJAHANPUR (U.P.)

Raped on several occasions by two men at the age of 12, the victim, who had become a mother, has now lodged a case against the accused on court orders after her son enquired about his father's name.

About 27 years ago, the victim was living in the city with her sister and brother-in-law. One Naki Hasan had entered the house when she was alone and allegedly raped her, Superintendent of Police (City) Sanjay Kumar told PTI on Saturday. Mr. Kumar said that after the accused, his younger brother Guddu also raped her.

## India, Japan cool to Colombo offer of new port project

New Delhi has indicated that it was not directly apprised of negotiations with the private investor

SUHASINI HAIDAR  
MEERA SRINIVASAN  
NEW DELHI/COLOMBO

Days after the Sri Lankan Cabinet decided to allocate Colombo's West Container Terminal (WCT) to an Adani Group consortium to compensate for cancelling the East Container Terminal (ECT) agreement, previously signed by India and Japan, both New Delhi and Tokyo have signalled their distancing from the decision.

"Our High Commission in Colombo has already conveyed to the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) that their media release, in so far as their reference to the approval of the (Indian) High Commission, is factually incor-

rect," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said on Friday, speaking about the Cabinet notification issued on March 1 (<https://www.dgi.gov.lk/news/cabinet-decisions>) that had said the proposal presented by the Adani group and Special Economic Zone Ltd, a consortium called APSEZ, had been "approved" by the Indian High Commission.

"We understand that GoSL has engaged directly with investors on this project," added Mr. Srivastava, indicating that New Delhi had not been apprised of the negotiations directly.

The Japanese government has not yet responded offi-

cially to the Sri Lankan offer for the WCT, but it had reacted sharply to being ousted from the previous Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) with India and Sri Lanka for the neighbouring ECT project, and had called the decision "regrettable".

"We (Japan) have been in touch with (governments of) India and Sri Lanka, but Japan has not made any decision regarding the West Coast Terminal (WCT)," a senior diplomatic official told

"Severed ties": Japan had reacted sharply to being removed from the MoC for the East Container Terminal project. ■ FILE PHOTO

*The Hindu* on Friday.

However, another diplomatic source said both India and Japan were keen to remain engaged in Sri Lanka.

When it was signed in May 2019, the trilateral MoC between India, Japan and Sri Lanka for the ECT was a government-to-government agreement, expected to send a strong strategic signal in the region, as India and Japan planned to collaborate to fund and develop infrastructure projects in South Asia, where thus far China had a bigger role. Japan is understood to have offered very generous terms at the time, for a 40-year soft loan with a 0.1% interest rate to help fund the ECT.

Japan's reluctance to accept the WCT offer instead of the ECT could be a blow to the new agreement, which is now a public-private partnership driven by the Adani group.

"In the Sri Lanka port project, Adani group is committed to make investment to the tune of \$400 million (approximately ₹3,000 cr) to develop the terminal and other infrastructure," a senior Adani Group representative said in response to a query. He added that the investment would be met from the company's own resources, and not linked to funding from Japan.

(With Inputs from Mahesh Langa in Ahmedabad)

## Only NRI quota seats for OCI cardholders

They can lay claim to the seats based on all-India entrance exams, says MHA

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has reiterated through a gazette notification that Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) cardholders can lay claim to "only NRI (Non Resident Indian) quota seats" in educational institutions based on all-India entrance tests such as National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), Joint Entrance Examination (Mains), Joint Entrance Examination (Advanced) or other such all-India professional tests.

The notification also reproduced a part of the guidelines issued by the Ministry on November 15, 2019 regarding benefits to OCI cardholders, which said that OCIs are not entitled to undertake any "missionary, mountaineering, journalism and tabligh activities" without prior permission of the Government of India. The notification provides legal teeth to the guidelines.

The notification says that the OCI cardholder shall be required to obtain a "special permission or a special permit" from the competent



OCI cardholders are of Indian origin but have foreign passports. ■ PICTURE FOR REPRESENTATION

authority or the Foreigners Regional Registration Officer (FRRO) or the Indian Mission

"to undertake research, Missionary or Tabligh or Mountaineering or Journalistic activities, undertake internship in any foreign diplomatic missions or foreign Government organisations in India or employment in any foreign diplomatic missions in India and visit any place which falls within the Protected or Restricted or prohibited areas as notified by the Central Government or competent authority".

OCI citizens are of Indian origin but they are foreign passport holders and are not citizens of India. India does

not allow dual citizenship but provides certain benefits under Section 7B(I) of the Citizenship Act, 1955 to the OCIs.

The fresh notification replaces three previous notifications issued on the subject on April 11, 2005; January 5, 2007; and January 5, 2009, respectively. The previous notifications did not specify the special permission required for "missionary, Tabligh, mountaineering or journalistic activities" and were merely part of the November 2019 guidelines.

### Petitions filed

A Ministry official said that several OCI cardholder students have filed petitions in courts that they are eligible to get admission against general seats in medical, engineering and other government colleges if they clear the all-India tests.

In March 2019, the MHA clarified to the Karnataka High Court that students with OCI cards had "parity with Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and can lay claim only on the NRI quota seats based on the all-India tests".

However on December 15, 2020, the High Court of Karnataka directed that students under the OCI category are to be considered as "citizens of India" for admission to professional courses and asked the State government to admit them to undergraduate professional courses, including engineering, medical, and dental, even under the government and institutional quotas, and not to restrict their admission only under the NRI quota.

The March 4 notification by the MHA said that OCI cardholders will have parity with NRIs in the matter of "appearing for the all India entrance tests such as National Eligibility cum Entrance Test, Joint Entrance Examination (Mains), Joint Entrance Examination (Advanced) or such other tests to make them eligible for admission only against any Non-Resident Indian seat or any supernumerary seat". Provided that the OCI cardholder shall not be eligible for admission against any seat reserved exclusively for Indian citizens."

## 'The Shabnam I knew was different from the one the world hates'

Freelance journalist and friend talks about the first woman convict on death row in independent India

ANUJ KUMAR  
GHAZIABAD

"The Shabnam I knew was very different from the one that the world loves to hate." Usman Saifi makes this statement many times during the conversation. The Bulandshahr-based freelance journalist is the foster father of death row convict Shabnam Ali's son Taj.

Shabnam along with her lover Saleem was convicted of killing seven members of her family, including a 10-month-old nephew, in 2008. If executed, she will be the first woman in independent India to be hanged for a crime.

On February 18, Shabnam

filed a second mercy petition with the Governor of Uttar Pradesh and the President of India, both of whom had earlier rejected her plea. Around the same time, news spread that preparations are being made in Mathura jail, the only one in the country where female convicts could be hanged.

The news of her review petition and Taj's appeal to spare her mother from the gallows once again turned the focus on Taj, and Mr. Saifi had to plead for privacy from the probing media. Having spent the first six years of his life with his mother, Mr. Saifi said Taj understands everything.

"But still he needs to be saved from unnecessary questions. We were leading a normal life but now it seems everybody in the neighbourhood is looking at us," says Mr. Saifi. He also appreciates his wife Vandana's role in tiding over social pressures. "It was she who decided not to have our own child."

People in Amroha district of western Uttar Pradesh call Shabnam stone-hearted, the judiciary described her crime as "the rarest of rare", particularly because she committed parricide despite being educated. But Mr. Saifi remembers Shabnam, a double MA in English and Geography, as a caring senior who used to treat him as her younger brother.

"We would often travel on

the same bus from our respec-

tive teacher in primary school) could commit such a heinous crime. "From 2012, I tried multiple times to meet her in jail, but she refused."

When Shabnam was arrested, she was about three months pregnant and gave birth to Taj in December 2008. "As a friend, I felt it was my social responsibility to adopt the child." It was after Taj moved with Mr. Saifi that Shabnam started opening up. "When she was in Moradabad jail, she used to cover her face. It was difficult to read her face." When she was shifted to Rampur jail, Mr. Saifi says her attitude changed. "She would not talk about what led to the crime. This February, she said that she didn't commit the crime and that she wanted a CBI inquiry."

No foul play in George's death, say police

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

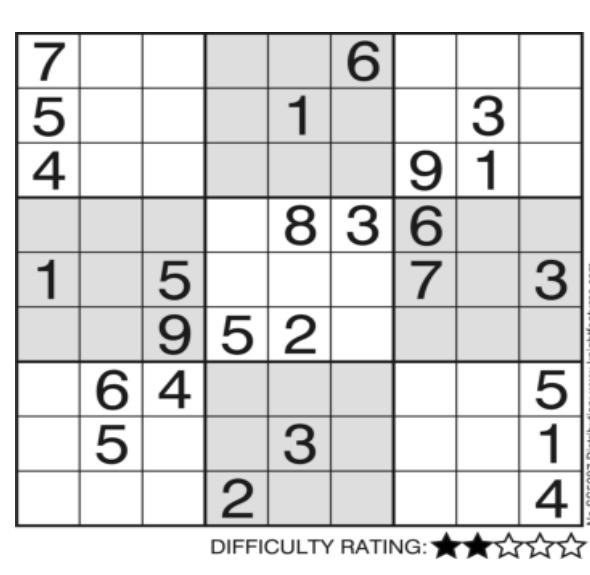
Muthoot Group Chairman M.G. George died after a fall in his fourth floor residence in South East Delhi's Amar Colony area on Friday night, the police said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (South East) R.P. Meena said he was declared dead to hospital.

"Enquiry is being conducted and statements have been recorded. CCTV cameras are also being checked," Mr. Meena said. The post-mortem was conducted at the AIIMS.

"No foul play is suspected and inquest proceedings are on," he said.

## SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

A ND-NOE

# Pakistan PM survives confidence vote

He secured 178 votes in the 340-seat National Assembly via open ballot, boycotted by the Opposition

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan survived a vote of confidence by the country's Parliament on Saturday, days after his party lost a key Senate seat to an opposition candidate.

Ruling party and opposition cadres clashed briefly outside the Parliament ahead of the vote, with local TV channels showing a shoe being thrown at former Interior Minister Ahsan Iqbal.

Mr. Khan secured 178 votes in the 340-seat National Assembly through an open ballot, boycotted by the main opposition parties, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistani Peoples Party (PPP).

The vote followed the contentious results of Wednesday's election to Pakistan's Senate, whose members are



Show of support: Backers of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf outside the National Assembly in Islamabad. • AFP

chosen by provincial Parliaments and lawmakers from the lower house.

In a sign of growing ruptures within his ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Mr. Khan's Finance Minister lost his seat to an opposition candidate, suggesting some members of the party had switched their loyalty.

Speaking following the confidence vote, the Prime Minister accused the opposi-

## Imran Khan bats for electoral reforms, EVMs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said on Saturday that his government will introduce electoral reforms and electronic voting machines (EVMs) to ensure fair

elections in the country. Delivering a speech after winning a trust vote in the National Assembly, Mr. Khan said his government plans to introduce electronic voting, enabling millions of Pakistanis abroad to vote in elections.

### Economy in turmoil

Addressing party workers outside the Parliament, senior opposition leader and

former PM Shahid Khaqan Abbasi denounced the vote as "illegal and unconstitutional". "People are being deceived by this government," he said.

Since taking office, Mr. Khan has struggled to stabilise an economy hit by rising inflation, a depreciating rupee and ballooning deficits.

# Intense fighting in Yemen's Marib leaves at least 90 dead

Pro-govt. forces clash with Houthis to retain the province

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

DUBAI

Fierce fighting between Yemeni pro-government forces and Iran-backed Houthi rebels has killed at least 90 combatants on both sides in the past 24 hours, military sources said on Saturday.

The Shia rebels launched an offensive last month to seize Marib, the last stronghold in northern Yemen of pro-government forces who are backed by a Saudi-led military coalition.

The clashes in the oil-rich province left 32 dead among government forces and loyalist tribes, while 58

Houthi rebels were killed in coalition air strikes, the sources said.

They said heavy clashes broke out on six fronts as government forces were able to counter attacks by the Houthis who managed to advance only on the Kassara front northwest of Marib city.

The fighting also left dozens of people wounded, the sources added.

The loss of Marib would be a huge blow for the Yemeni government, but would also threaten catastrophe for civilians, including hundreds of thousands of dis-

placed people in desolate camps.

It would also be a major setback for Saudi Arabia, which has been the target of increasingly frequent Houthi missile attacks in recent weeks.

Shrapnel from Houthi drones intercepted by the Saudis on Friday wounded two civilians, including a 10-year-old, in the southwest of the kingdom.

The U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Monday urged the Houthis to halt their offensive in Marib, as he announced \$191 million in aid.

## U.S. Senate clears Biden's \$1.9 tn COVID-19 aid plan

Bill will now return to the House for approval

REUTERS

WASHINGTON

The U.S. Senate on Saturday passed President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief plan in a party-line vote after an all-night session that saw Democrats battling among themselves over jobless benefits and the Republican minority failing to push through some three dozen amendments.

The final Bill includes \$400 billion in one-time payments of \$1,400 to most Americans, \$300 a week in extended jobless benefits for the 9.5 million people thrown out of work in the crisis, and \$350 billion in aid to state and local govern-

ments that have seen the pandemic blow a hole in their budgets.

The Senate voted 50-49, with no Republicans supporting what would be one of the largest stimulus packages in U.S. history.

The Bill needs to return to the House of Representatives, which approved a slightly different version a week earlier. The House is expected to give its final approval next week. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said the House passage is expected in time for Mr. Biden to sign the Bill before enhanced unemployment benefits expire on March 14.

# Pope, top Shia cleric plead for 'peace' in historic Iraq meet

Papal visit is aimed at deepening dialogue with other faiths

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

NAJAF

Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, spiritual leader of most of the world's Shia Muslims, told Pope Francis in a historic meeting in Iraq on Saturday that the country's Christians should live in "peace".

The meeting, on the second day of the first-ever papal visit to Iraq, marked a landmark moment in modern religious history and a milestone in the Pope's efforts to deepen interfaith dialogue.

Pope Francis later addressed the rich spectrum of Iraq's religious communities at Ur, the birthplace of the Prophet Abraham, a central figure in the Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths, where he made an impassioned



Convergence of faiths: Pope Francis meeting with Iraq's top Shia cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, in Najaf. • REUTERS

plea for "unity" after conflict.

The 84-year-old pontiff's trip to Iraq is an effort to both comfort the country's ancient but dwindling Christian community and deepen his dialogue with other faiths.

The Grand Ayatollah, 90, "affirmed his concern that

Christian citizens should live like all Iraqis in peace and security, and with their full constitutional rights," his office said.

During his address, Pope Francis said freedom of conscience and of religion were "fundamental rights" that should be respected everywhere.

Security forces use stun grenades, tear gas on protesters

ASSOCIATED PRESS

YANGON

Security forces in Myanmar again used force on Saturday to disperse anti-coup protesters, a day after the UN special envoy urged the Security Council to take action to quell junta violence that this week left about 50 peaceful demonstrators dead and scores injured.

Fresh protests were reported on Saturday morning in the biggest city of Yangon, where stun grenades and tear gas were used against protesters. On Wednesday, 18 people were reportedly killed there.

The escalation of violence has put pressure on the world community to act to restrain the junta, which seized power on February 1 by ousting the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. The coup reversed years of slow progress toward democracy in Myanmar, which for five decades had languished under military rule.

UN special envoy for Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener said in her briefing to Friday's closed Security Council meeting that council unity and "robust" action are critical "in pushing for a stop to the violence and the restoration of Myanmar's democratic institutions."

"We must denounce the actions by the military," she said.

# Protests continue in Myanmar after UN envoy urges action

Security forces use stun grenades, tear gas on protesters

ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Protests were also reported in Myitkyina, the capital of the northern state of Kachin, Myeik, in the country's far south where police fired tear gas at students, and Dawei in the southeast where tear gas was also used. Other places included Kyaikto, in the eastern state of Mon, Loikaw, the capital of Kayah state in eastern Myanmar, and Mingsyan, a city where one protester was killed on Wednesday.

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## ALTERNATIVE FOR GERMANY

# The party can't go on

Germany has put the AfD under surveillance for ties with right-wing extremism

G. SAMPATH

For the first time in its post-Nazi history, a political party in Germany is officially under surveillance. Germany's Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, also known as the BfV, has classified the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) as a "suspected case" with links to right-wing extremism. This means German security agents can monitor AfD party members, tap their phones, read their emails, and scrutinise the party's sources of funding.

AfD leaders reacted angrily to the decision, describing it as a politically motivated attempt by the Angela Merkel-led government to sabotage its prospects in an election year by putting them "in the Nazi corner". It is true that the move comes at the beginning of an election season. Six of Germany's 16 States go to the polls

this year while the country will hold general elections in September, when Ms. Merkel will depart as Chancellor. However, except for the AfD, which has challenged the decision in court, most parties have welcomed the move.

The decision marks the culmination of a two-year long investigation into the activities of the AfD's youth division and the "Flügel" (the Wing), an extremist unit of the party. As the courts review the legality of monitoring the entire party, the BfV has said, for now, incumbent lawmakers and those contesting the September elections will be exempt from surveillance, indicating that the tracking would be confined to lower-level party members. But formal surveillance, even if a limited one, could impact the per-



ception battle ahead of the elections and put the AfD at a disadvantage.

The AfD was founded in 2013 as a euro-sceptic party. But in 2015-16, when Germany welcomed 1.2 million refugees, it morphed into a platform for anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim politics, after which its popularity soared.

In the 2017 federal elections, it emerged as the largest Opposition party, securing 12.6% vote and 94 seats. The party is also represented in all the 16 State Parliaments and the European Parliament.

**Sense of betrayal**

The AfD has always enjoyed greater support in what used to be East Germany, in States like Saxony, Brandenburg and Thuringia. In these parts, sections of society that could not plug into the prosperity of post-unification Germany felt abandoned by the federal government. Their resentment was already high when the Merkel administration began to welcome refugees and spend on their welfare. The AfD stoked the sense of betrayal felt by many in eastern Germany – the sense that a government that has done little for them, even though they 'arrived' in 1990, is seeming-

ly laying out the red carpet for 'foreigners' who are not even German, don't speak their language, and follow a religion that "isn't German". The AfD's manifesto proclaims that "Islam does not belong to Germany".

As the AfD's popularity rose, Germany saw a spike in hate crimes targeting immigrants. As per official figures, the country witnessed around 900 Islamophobic hate crimes in 2020, with 80 mosques attacked during the year. The deadliest attack was the shooting spree by a far-right extremist in Hanau in February 2020, in which 11 people were killed. At the same time, AfD politicians have been serial offenders when it comes to anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and even anti-Semitic rhetoric, with some going so far as to break the nation's biggest taboo – trying to whitewash its Nazi past. For instance, the party's leader of the Opposition Alexander Gauland described the Nazi era as just a "speck of bird poo" on German history. The AfD's Thuringia head Björn Höcke said Germany was "crippled" by its "politics of remembrance" about the Holocaust and must "reverse it by 180 degrees". Speaking of Muslim migrants, another AfD

politician Christian Lüth said, "We can always shoot them later. That's not an issue. Or gas them, as you wish." The AfD had to expel Lüth following public outrage over this comment.

**Right-wing violence**

Frequent outbreaks of right-wing violence – a pro-migrant politician was shot dead in June 2019, and a synagogue was attacked in Halle in October 2019 – appears to be one of the reasons behind the recent dip in the AfD's popularity. The other factor has been infighting, with some leaders calling for extremist members to be expelled in the larger interests of the party, which they want to project as a viable alternative for a conservative middle class that wants nothing to do with neo-Nazis. Instances of right-wing violence have also sparked large rallies demanding that the state act against extremist platforms.

While AfD leaders have sought refuge in free speech rights, Germany's post-War Constitution is stringent on one aspect: preventing the return of Nazi ideology. As the Merkel administration moves to stop the normalisation of hate, it believes it has public sentiment and the Constitution on its side. With right-wing populism on the rise in many parts of the world, it is significant that the political establishment in Germany, Europe's most powerful economy, is bucking the trend of liberal-centrists shying away from confronting the far-right head-on, and instead, showing the political sagacity to wield the powers of the state in defense of the constitutional order. Setting this example could well be Ms. Merkel's parting gift to Germany, Europe and beyond.



MIN AUNG HLAING

# The man behind the coup

Myanmar's military ruler seeks to quell growing protests using brute force

STANLY JOHNY

When Min Aung Hlaing became Myanmar's military chief in 2011, the country was transitioning into quasi democracy. The military had introduced a new Constitution in 2008, a year after the violent crackdown of the Buddhist monks who led the 'saffron revolution'.

Senior General Than Shwe, who had been in power since 1992, had handed powers to a new transition government of President Than Sein, a former military officer. Aung San Suu Kyi and many other political prisoners were released. All eyes were on the little-known General Min Aung Hlaing, who was described by blogger Hla Oo, who knew the commander from his childhood, as a "battle-hardened warrior of the brutal Burmese Army".

Initially, the General endorsed the government's efforts to reach out to the political opposition and initiate a peace process with different insurgent groups. When Ms. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) swept the 2015 election, the military accepted the results.

But the political peace did not last long. When the NLD swept the 2020 election with a bigger mandate, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), a proxy of the military, alleged election fraud. On February 1, Gen. Min Aung Hlaing carried out the third coup in the country's history, declaring a state of emergency and detaining elected leaders, including Ms. Suu Kyi and President Win Myint.

Ever since, the Myanmar military has unleashed violence on protesters, killing over 50 people. International criticism is mounting. But

the man behind the coup appears to be unmoved. The Tatmadaw, as the Myanmar military that controlled the country through direct rule for about 50 years is called, is notorious for its repressive tactics. The soldiers had killed hundreds of protesters in the past, incarcerated thousands of activists and established a system in which the Tatmadaw's interests are perennially protected.

**Partial democracy**

Even when the military allowed partial democracy, the Generals resisted even suggestions from NLD leaders to change the military-written Constitution that has reserved a quarter of seats in Parliament and three key ministries in the government – defence, border and home affairs – for the soldiers. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing never committed to full transition. In 2015, a few months before the elections, he said he had no timeline for full civilian rule: "It could be five years or it could be 10 years, I couldn't say." In five years, he ended even the partial civilian rule.

Born in the southern city of Dawei in 1956, Min Aung Hlaing did his school and college education in Yangon. He graduated in law in

## SNAPSHOTS



## Mysterious Moon

An analysis published in *Science Advances* identified key events in the Moon's past, such as the formation of its iron core and crystallization of a sea of molten rock that is believed to have covered the Moon for 100 million years after it formed. The study analysed volcanic rock samples collected during the Apollo missions.



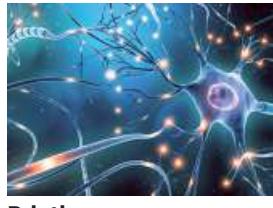
## Slowing currents

The Gulf Stream system conveys warm surface water from equator to the north and the deeper cold, low-salinity water down south. A study in *Nature Geoscience* reconstructing its flow shows that never before in a 1,000 years has it been as slow as it is in the last decade. Increased rainfall and melting of the Greenland Ice sheet likely contributed to this.



## Celestial parking lot

A wayward comet-like object that travelled long distances towards the Sun has found a temporary parking space among 'Trojans', a group of captured ancient asteroids orbiting the Sun along with Jupiter. Such objects, called Centaurs, are icy bodies found between Neptune and Jupiter and warm up and become active as they near the Sun, looking more like a comet.



## Printing neurons

Scientists from Northwestern University, U.S., have discovered a new biomaterial that mimics the brain tissue and can be made by 3D printing. Developed, this can treat neurodegenerative diseases, for instance, by transplanting the tissues. Earlier, the group had shown they can design materials that self-organise to form 'superstructures'. Now they find these can enhance the growth of neurons.

# Kerala's delayed approach towards herd immunity

Unlike the rest of India, Kerala has maintained the same level of daily testing despite a reduction in number of cases

R. PRASAD

From mid-February, a spike in daily new cases was reported from a few States including Maharashtra. For days on end, the Health Ministry kept repeating the message that Kerala too was "witnessing an upsurge of daily new cases". Even as recently as March 6, the Health Ministry wrongly implicated Kerala for the surge in cases when it said "Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Karnataka continue to report a surge in the COVID-19 daily new cases."

Kerala continues to contribute a high number of cases on a daily basis. However, there has not been any surge or spike in daily cases, as seen in other States. In reality, Kerala has been witnessing a steady decline in daily cases since end-January.

"From a second peak of 6,078 seven-day moving average of daily cases as on January 23, we have been seeing a steady decline in cases in Kerala. There has been a 50% decline in the seven-day moving average of daily cases from the fourth week of January to March 4," says Dr. Rijo John, Health Economist and Consultant based in Kochi, Kerala. "The seven-day moving average of daily cases in Kerala as on March 4 was 2,996. The absolute number of daily cases on March 4 was 2,616."

While other States have reduced the number of daily tests in recent months, Kerala has been continuing with

the same number of daily tests. "The seven-day average daily tests conducted was over 60,000 when the test positivity rate was 15% during the peak in the first half of October last year. Now, even when the test positivity rate is under 5% seven-day average, the average testing has increased to 70,000 since the first week of February," says Dr. John.

"Keeping daily testing at high levels even when daily cases are declining inspires more confidence that the decline in daily cases is real and is not due to reduced testing," Dr. John adds. Maharashtra and Gujarat have not increased testing despite reporting more cases on a daily basis.

While the rest of the country witnessed a peak in mid-September when the daily fresh cases touched nearly 98,000 on September 16, Kerala witnessed a peak a month later in mid-October. Unlike other States that witnessed a steady decline in daily cases, there were a reduced number of daily cases in Kerala since mid-October, but the numbers continued to stay high and did not steadily decline to low levels.

## First wave

"The first wave is yet to decline in Kerala. The daily cases have plateaued in the State for a long time and are now seeing a decline," says Dr. Raman Gangakhedkar, former chief epidemiologist of ICMR who was a part of the national COVID-19 task



**Seeking out:** We have been undertaking active case finding in the State. Anyone with influenza-like illness is tested for coronavirus infection, says Dr. Khobragade. ■ GETTY IMAGES

force till he retired in June last year. "There has not been any resurgence of cases lately [in Kerala]."

According to Dr. Giridhara Babu, epidemiologist at the Public Health Foundation of India, Bengaluru, the decline in cases since late January could be due to high infection rate that is close to herd immunity needed for the decline to begin.

As on March 5, over 0.8 million people have been vaccinated in the State. "It is too early to say that vaccination could have contributed much to the decline. The number of people vaccinated is not large enough to have significantly contributed to the decline," says Dr. Babu.

"If the seven-day average

test positivity rate stays below 5% for a few weeks it indicates that the pandemic is under control," says Dr. Gautham Menon, Professor of Physics and Biology at Ashoka University and co-author of COVID-19 modelling studies. Dr. Menon attributes the decline in daily cases to the long duration of background seroprevalence across the State, and so new infections are only expected to decline.

The long plateauing of cases has ensured a good fraction of people have experienced an infection. In the circumstances, one can expect a decline in daily numbers across the State. But the only way to check this is through serosurvey," Dr. Menon adds.

"My guess is that about 40% of the population would have been infected. This is just my guess." Based on anecdotal evidence, Dr. Menon says aggressive tracking and quarantining would have contributed to the decline in cases. "Unlike Kerala, other States have not been able to pick up a steady increase in cases in the rural areas," he says.

## Herd immunity?

Refuting the possibility of widespread infection in the population taking it close to herd immunity contributing to the decline in cases, Kerala Health Secretary Dr. Rajan N. Khobragade says that as per the third countrywide serosurvey conducted by the

ICMR between December 17, 2020 and January 8, 2021, the seropositivity in the State was only about 11.5%. "So nearly 82% of the population in the State have not got infected," Dr. Khobragade says.

Dr. Khobragade's assertion of low seroprevalence in the State is supported by Dr. Anurag Agrawal, Director of the Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB), a CSIR lab in Delhi. "The second serosurvey carried out across CSIR labs found Kerala had the lowest seropositivity," says Dr. Agrawal.

"The State has managed to stretch the curve such that the new infections are spread out over a longer period of time. The State also continues to undertake more testing and reporting," Dr. Agrawal says.

"For the first six months, the outbreak was minimal in the State. We have been undertaking active case finding in the State. Anyone with influenza-like illness is tested for coronavirus infection," Dr. Khobragade says.

Dr. Khobragade also cites 30-40% bed occupancy for patients with COVID-19 as proof that the State did not experience large-scale spread of the virus in the population.

"Our healthcare system was never overwhelmed by COVID-19 patients. There has been not one instance when COVID-19 patients have been denied admission in a hospital due to bed shortage," he says.

Talking about the pioneer-

ing efforts undertaken by the State, Dr. Khobragade cites the post-COVID-19 care and management provided to people experiencing problems after recovering from COVID-19 disease. "Kerala is the only State to provide post-COVID care and management to people. As a result, we have collected sufficient post-COVID-19 data," Dr. Khobragade asserts. There are 1,284 post-COVID-19 clinics at primary health centres, taluk and general hospitals and medical colleges.

## Genome sequencing

Kerala in collaboration with IGIB was the first to begin sequencing the genome of samples collected from all the 14 districts to identify any variants/escape mutants.

"We began discussion with the State government in Sep-

tember, and the programme became operational in December," says Dr. Agrawal. "They collect 25 samples from each district per week from people with high viral load, extract the RNA and ship the samples at low temperature. This really helps the operations as we can begin sequencing immediately on getting the samples. Their support is outstanding."

Over 1,000 samples sent from Kerala have been sequenced so far. "This is the largest number sequenced from any State," adds Dr. Agrawal. "We did not find anything of concern, in terms of variants/mutations in the genomes we sequenced from Kerala."

## JNCASR team develops potential drug candidate for Alzheimer's

The team observed that the small molecule TGR63 reduced amyloid plaques in mice brains and reversed cognitive decline

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

Researchers from Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR), Bengaluru, have developed a small molecule that helps disrupt and reduce formation of amyloid plaques in the brains of mice with Alzheimer's Disease. The group is planning to take this molecule, which is a potential drug candidate, forward for clinical studies. The results of their study were published in the journal *Advanced Therapeutics*.

**Alzheimer's worldwide** The World Alzheimer Report 2015 which was an analysis of the prevalence, incidence, cost and trends in Alzheimer's Disease documented the fact that in 2015, over 46 million people worldwide were living with dementia. The re-

port estimated that this number would increase to more than 131.5 million by 2050. Alzheimer's Disease is a progressive and irreversible disorder of the brain, which affects memory and thinking skills. One main feature of the disease is the deposition of amyloid plaques and neurofibrillary tangles in the brain.

Amyloid precursor proteins play a role in the pathophysiology of Alzheimer's disease by producing the Amyloid-beta peptides of which in particular Amyloid Beta peptide 42 is particularly toxic in the formation of the amyloid plaques. This was targeted by the researchers, using the small molecule TGR63.

Usually, in people, the symptoms start manifesting when they are in their sixties, though the onset is much earlier.

**Effect on mice** Mice are often used as model animals to study Alzheimer's



**Brain scan:** A key feature of Alzheimer's is deposition of amyloid plaques and neurofibrillary tangles. ■ GETTY IMAGES

The data from *in vitro*, cellular assays revealed superior activity of the small molecule.

T. GOVINDARAJU  
JNCASR

and, furthermore, was not toxic to the mice. In one of the tests, the animals were let to swim in relatively large pool of water. A small plank was placed in a specific spot and the mice learnt to swim towards the spot and save themselves by climbing on to the plank.

Later the mice were made to repeat the task, but the plank had now been removed. The behaviours of four categories of mice were observed - mice without Alzheimer's, mice without Alzheimer's which had been treated with TGR63, mice with Alzheimer's which were treated with TGR63 and mice

with Alzheimer's which had not been treated with TGR63. In the above task, while the first three categories of mice swam back to the spot where they had learned to find the plank, the last category - mice with AD and no treatment - did not remember the way back.

## Brain analysis

"Further, reduction of amyloid plaques was studied by brain analysis," says Prof. Govindaraju. The ten-year-long research broadly evolved in five stages, according to him: design of the set of molecules; *in vitro* evaluation, *in cellulo* evaluation, computational study and *in vivo* evaluation and cognitive assessment.

"I am in discussion with pharma companies to take TGR63 to clinical studies," says Prof. Govindaraju.

## Clustering educational institutes and research centres

Clustering is a promising model to achieve a critical mass in a university to invigorate research

R. B. GROVER

National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) envisions establishing large multidisciplinary universities to promote research directed to solve contemporary national problems, and provides the option of setting up clusters of higher education institutes. Cluster-based universities would increase faculty strength, both in terms of numbers and diversity of disciplines, and facilitate conduct of research on real life problems.

**Mainstay of research** Doctoral students are the mainstay of research in universities. In many countries including India, universities also conduct off-campus doctoral programmes in research laboratories. The Indian Institute of Science pioneered a variant of off-campus programme called External Registration programme which enabled employees working in laboratories or industries to register for a doctoral programme under the supervision of its faculty and carry out a major part of research at their workplace. The external registration

programme has now been adopted by more higher education Institutes. The topic of research taken up under off-campus programmes is always of relevance to the workplace. One could go a step further and make workplaces pursuing knowledge-based work a part of a cluster-based university.

Homi Bhabha National Institute (HBNI), Mumbai, established in 2005, by the Department of Atomic Energy, is a cluster-based university and I have had a long association with it. Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), California, U.S., is a federally funded research and development centre managed by California Institute of Technology (Caltech). The intellectual environment and identity of JPL are profoundly shaped by its role as a part of Caltech. A large laboratory, JPL has about 6,000 full time employees, and Caltech was placed eighth in the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) by Shanghai Rankings in 2020.

SOKENDAI (the Graduate University for Advanced Studies) established in Japan in 1988 and running only doctoral programmes, brings to-

gether several research institutions and museums such as the National Museum of Japanese History. The Paris-Saclay University was placed fourteenth in ARWU by Shanghai Rankings in 2020. It is now one of the Europe's biggest research universities. The Paris-Saclay University received its legal status in 2019, though it has been functioning as a "university system" since 2015. The university shares 275 laboratories with several research organisations, including CEA (Atomic Energy and Alternative Energies Commission), INSERM (French Institute of Health and Medical Research) and others. Though more could be encouraged to do.

**Common objective** All countries have their unique legal framework for establishing universities, and therefore, while there are differences in the structure of HBNI, SOKENDAI, Paris-Saclay University, and Caltech, the objective is to benefit from synergies. It enables conducting academic research on focussed areas. It

also enables pursuit of academic research and post-academic research in the same university, and results in faster deployment of results of research. Benefits can be seen from the growth and success of HBNI, which was ranked fourteenth among NIRF-2020. Nature Index ranked HBNI at second position among all academic institutions in India during the period October 1, 2019 to 30 September 2020. Another example of a cluster-based university in India is the Academy of Scientific and Innovative Research established in 2011. Nature Index has ranked it at eighth position in India.

**Different concepts** India needs to earnestly pursue this model. Institutions for clustering in a university can be selected based on different concepts; some examples could be institutes managed by a Department or a Ministry or a Public Trust, institutes located in close proximity, institutes pursuing similar objectives etc. Many industry associations have established research centres and more could be encouraged to do.

R. B. Grover is Emeritus professor, Homi Bhabha National Institute, Mumbai, and Member, Atomic Energy Commission, Government of India..

caution as well. In a cluster-based university, the 'rewards system' has to recognise all aspects of talent and all knowledge-based output. One may recall the advice given by P. B. Medawar to young scientists that "technicians are colleagues in a collaborative research", and "despite their paper degrees", young scientists have a lot to learn about research. This advice is more important today when complexity of experimental facilities is growing, and need not only competent technicians, but highly competent engineers, called scientific officers in national laboratories, for their design, construction, safe operation and maintenance. Scientific officers have deep insights about research capabilities of facilities.

For moving away from single-discipline institutions to multi-disciplinary universities, clustering is a promising model to achieve a critical mass in a university to invigorate research.

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in



**Synergy:** The intellectual environment and identity of Jet Propulsion Laboratory are profoundly shaped by its role as a part of Caltech. ■ GETTY IMAGES



## Question Corner

## Understanding human brains

## How do modern human and Neanderthal brains differ?

Using brain organoids - mini brains developed in a lab - built using stem cells, University of California San Diego School of Medicine researchers have been able to compare modern humans to other primates, such as chimpanzees and bonobos, which until now was not thought possible, particularly when the species is already extinct.

The researchers catalogued the differences between the genomes of diverse modern human populations and the Neanderthals and Denisovans, who lived during the Pleistocene Epoch, approximately 2.6 million to 11,700

years ago. Mimicking an alteration they found in one gene, the researchers used stem cells to engineer 'Neanderthalised' brain organoids.

The team initially found 61 genes that differed between modern humans and our extinct relatives (*Science*). One of these altered genes - NOVA1 - caught the researchers' attention because it is a master gene regulator, influencing many other genes during early brain development. The researchers used CRISPR gene editing to engineer modern human stem cells with the Neanderthal-like mutation in NOVA1. Then they coaxed the stem cells into forming brain cells and ultimately Neanderthalised brain organoids, says a University press release.

Neural network changes in Neanderthalised brain organoids parallel the way newborn non-human primates acquire new abilities more rapidly than human newborns.

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in



## 'Red Echo' over India

When did Chinese malware target Indian power grid utilities and why is it a matter of concern?

P.J. GEORGE

**The story so far:** On March 3, Maharashtra Power Minister Nitin Raut announced that a State Cyber Cell probe had found 14 Trojan horses in the servers of the Maharashtra State Electricity Transmission Company. These malwares had the potential to disrupt power distribution in the State. The announcement came in the wake of a report from Recorded Future, a U.S.-based cybersecurity firm, stating that a group linked to the Chinese government, which it called 'Red Echo', had targeted 10 vital nodes in India's power distribution system and two seaports. Recorded Future claims the cyber intrusions from China began in May 2020 amid heightened tensions at the border. It also suggested that these malwares could be the cause of the massive power outage in Mumbai last October. On Monday, the Power Ministry said Chinese hacker groups had targeted various Indian power centres but these groups had been thwarted after government cyber agencies warned it about their activities. The Ministry said there had been "no data breach" from the threat.

### How did Recorded Future track malware in Indian systems?

Recorded Future did not look directly into the servers of India's power system. Instead, it found a large number of IP addresses linked to critical Indian systems communicating for months with AXIOMATICASYMPTOTE servers connected to Red Echo. These servers had domains spoofing those of Indian power sector entities configured to them. For example, it had an 'nptc-co.com' domain, which spoofs the original 'nptc.co.in'. AXIOMATICASYMPTOTE servers act as command-and-control centres for a malware known as ShadowPad.

**Cybersecurity firm Recorded Future says the kind of infrastructure sought to be accessed by 'Red Echo' has minimal espionage possibilities but poses 'significant concerns over potential pre-positioning of network access to support Chinese strategic objectives'**

**What is ShadowPad?** ShadowPad is a backdoor Trojan malware, which means it opens a secret path from its target system to its command-and-control servers. Information can be extracted or more malicious code delivered via this path. Mr. Raut had said that there was an attempt to "either insert or remove around 8 GB of data from the server".

**Security firm Kaspersky says** ShadowPad is built to target supply-chain infrastructure in sectors like transportation, telecommunication, energy and more. It was first identified in 2017, when it was found hidden in a legitimate software produced by a company named NetSarang. Trojanised softwares, or softwares that have dangers hidden in them, like the eponymous Trojan horse from Greek mythology, are the primary mode of delivery for ShadowPad.

### How are ShadowPad and Red Echo linked to China?

Kaspersky states that several techniques used in ShadowPad are also found in malware from Winnti group, "allegedly developed by Chinese-speaking actors". Security analysis firm FireEye links ShadowPad to a group known as 'APT41', which it says overlaps with the Winnti group. Microsoft has been tracking another group under the name 'Barium'. In September 2020, the U.S. Department of Justice announced that a federal grand jury had indicted "five computer hackers, all of whom were residents and nationals of the People's Republic of China (PRC), with computer intrusions affecting over 100 victim companies in the United States and abroad". The U.S. Department of Justice confirmed that these were the intrusions that various security researchers were tracking using different threat labels such as 'APT41', 'Barium', 'Winnti', 'Wicked Panda', and 'Wicked Spider'. The Department of Justice statement said the "defendants also compromised foreign government computer networks in India and Vietnam".

Security firm FireEye also "assesses with high confidence" that 'APT41' "carries out Chinese state-sponsored espionage activity in addition to financially motivated activity potentially outside of state control", i.e., the group not only spies for the Chinese government but also does cybercrime when it suits them. The group has been known to target the video-game industry.

Recorded Future in its report notes large overlaps in the systems used by Red Echo and 'APT41/Winnti/Barium'. "At least 3 of the [Red Echo] targeted Indian IP addresses were previously seen in a suspected APT41/Barium-linked campaign targeting the Indian Oil and Gas sectors in November 2020," it says.

### What were Red Echo's targets?

Recorded Future lists these as suspected targets: Power System Operation Corporation Limited, NTPC Limited, NTPC Kudgi STPP, Western Regional Load Despatch Centre, Southern Regional Load Despatch Centre, North Eastern Regional Load Despatch Centre, Eastern Regional Load Despatch Centre, Telangana State Load Despatch Centre, Delhi State Load Despatch Centre, DTL Tikri Kalan (Mundka), Delhi Transco Ltd (substation), V.O. Chidambaram Port and Mumbai Port Trust.

### What is the objective of Red Echo?

Recorded Future says the kind of infrastructure sought to be accessed by Red Echo, such as Regional Load Despatch Centres, has minimal espionage possibilities. However, it adds, "we assess they pose significant concerns over potential pre-positioning of network access to support Chinese strategic objectives." Prepositioning in cyber warfare means to have malware assets in crucial places that can be called on when an actual attack is launched.

# What changes after COVID-19 vaccination?

How long does immunity last and why do experts insist that people should continue wearing masks?

RAMYA KANNAN

**The story so far:** Nearly 20 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in India so far. However, as the vaccination drive gains momentum, questions have emerged about appropriate behaviour after being vaccinated. In the United States, last week, Texas removed its mask mandate and lifted all other COVID-19-related restrictions. In India, the Union Health Ministry on Friday said six States – Maharashtra, Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi – were reporting a surge in new cases. Health officials said the rise in the number of cases across States could be because of the negligence that has set in regarding established COVID-19 protocols.

### Can the mask come off?

Whether it is okay to lose the mask now is a question that some people have been asking; others feel confident in shedding their masks, after two, or even just one shot of the vaccine. However, not wearing a mask would be a bad idea, say experts. At various places, infection clusters have been reported that are linked to people who participated in group events, such as marriage ceremonies, without wearing masks or maintaining physical distancing.

Tamil Nadu's Health Secretary, J. Radhakrishnan, is leading the efforts to stem a gradually rising COVID-19 graph in the State. "To not wear masks would be nothing short of criminal now. Just as in the case of Maharashtra, we have identified family clusters of COVID-19 cases in a couple of cities here. In most instances, it has been because of attending weddings or other family functions, and not wearing masks or being in close proximity to others. We are reinforcing the absolute need to continue wearing masks. Even a vaccine is a secondary tool for us, many may not have got it yet, but everyone can wear a mask and remain safe," he said.

### What does being vaccinated really mean?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), being fully vaccinated means a period of two weeks or more following the receipt of the second dose in a two-dose series, or two weeks or more following the receipt of a single-dose vaccine. In India, currently, both vaccines being used – Covishield and Covaxin – follow a two-dose regimen. Typically, the immune response takes a while to build up after a vaccine shot.

In an episode of *Science in 5*, Katherine O'Brien of the World Health Organization (WHO) said after the first jab of a two-dose vaccine, a good immune response kicks in within about two weeks. It is the second dose that boosts the immune response "and we see immunity get even stronger after that second dose". But it is still unclear how long immunity lasts from the vaccines at hand now. She said whether or not the immune response is durable, how it performs with the passage of time, and how long it lasts can be found out only by monitoring people who have already been vaccinated over a period. While clinical trials have demonstrated that vaccines protect people against the disease, it is not clear if they prevent getting the infection or a severe form of the disease, or if those vaccinated can transmit the virus to others. If the vaccinated individual is still carrying the virus, the vaccine may provide immunity from severe disease for him or her, but the individual could still transmit the virus to someone who is not yet vaccinated, and therefore, vulnerable.

The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's FAQ document on vaccines says, "Protective levels of



A mural in Mumbai raises awareness against flouting safety measures for COVID-19. ■ AFP

Experts say currently, there is limited information about the extent to which the vaccines might reduce transmission and how long the protection lasts. The efficacy of the vaccines against emerging virus variants is also not known

antibodies are generally developed two weeks after receiving the second dose of COVID-19 vaccine."

In a tweet, United States' White House adviser and top infectious disease specialist Anthony Fauci said, "Currently we do not have enough data to say with confidence that the vaccines can prevent transmission. So, even if vaccinated, you may be able to spread the virus to vulnerable people."

### What changes after you get a vaccine shot?

"After vaccination, your risk of severe disease from COVID-19 goes down dramatically. Once 70-80% of a population has been vaccinated, many current restrictions may be lifted," said Priya Sampathkumar, infectious diseases consultant and medical director, infection prevention and control, Mayo Institute, U.S. However, there is concern that vaccinated people may get asymptomatic COVID-19 and transmit it to others. "So, until a large proportion of the population is vaccinated, please wear a mask to protect others," she added.

The CDC on its website also highlights the need to continue with masks: "While available COVID-19 vaccines have demonstrated high efficacy at preventing severe and/or symptomatic COVID-19, there is currently limited information on how much the vaccines might reduce transmission and how long protection lasts. In addition, the efficacy of the vaccines against emerging SARS-CoV-2 variants is not known. At this time, vaccinated people should continue to follow current guidance to protect themselves and others, including wearing a mask, staying at least six feet away from others, avoiding crowds, avoiding poorly ventilated spaces, covering coughs and sneezes, washing hands often..."

Dr. O'Brien pointed out in the episode that while we are still learning about what vaccines can do, there is out-of-control transmission in many countries.

There is not enough evidence yet of vaccine response for some age groups, and vaccines are in short supply in the community. Hence, following COVID-19 protocols is essential, she added.

Dr. Sampathkumar dealt with another question in a Twitter thread recently – what if everyone in a small family or social group is vaccinated? "In a small group in which everyone has been vaccinated, it is okay to meet without masks. The risk is low. In work settings, masks are still recommended as verifying vaccination and the health status of co-workers is tricky," she said.

She added that one may visit a fully vaccinated family member if they have also been fully vaccinated. However, travelling freely might not yet be safe. "Also, a lot depends on what we learn about the ability of vaccines to prevent asymptomatic infections and stay effective against COVID-19 variants," she said. However, if you have been fully vaccinated, as per the recommended dosage, you can safely go eat indoors in restaurants, and the risk would be extremely low.

The CDC urges that even fully vaccinated people who get exposed to COVID-19 but do not quarantine should watch for symptoms for 14 days following the exposure. If they experience symptoms, they should be clinically evaluated for COVID-19, including SARS-CoV-2 testing, if indicated.

### For how long should we continue following safety protocols?

"Time is going to tell. Once we get broad vaccination coverage ... we can slowly start taking our foot off the pedal," said Dr. O'Brien. Meanwhile, with cases rising in India, States are hustling to reinforce COVID-19 protocols, impose fines for violations, and reintroduce a diluted version of restrictions. After rules were relaxed gradually following an exhaustive year-long campaign and pandemic fatigue set in among people, safety measures were overlooked. However, unless there is evidence that vaccination prevents transmission, or until herd immunity is achieved with a combination of vaccination and natural immunity from infection, it is clear that giving the mask up or other safety measures is dangerous. To do so would be to keep alive the cycle of transmission of the virus in the community.

# Spectrum sale, price test and the road ahead for 5G

What was the response and how much did the government earn from the recently concluded auction?

SRI RAM SRINIVASAN

**The story so far:** Tuesday saw the end of India's first auction of telecommunications spectrum in five years, with the government generating a revenue of ₹77,815 crore from the exercise. Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Jio accounted for close to 60% of the spectrum bought, followed by Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea. On offer was over 2,308 megahertz (MHz) of spectrum valued for the auction by the government at ₹3.92 lakh crore, and bids were successfully received for 37% or 855.6 MHz. The auction lasted less than two days.

### How has the industry been since the last auction?

A lot has changed in the industry since 2016, when the previous auction took place. The participants then included Tata Teleservices, Idea Cellular, Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel, Vodafone India, Reliance Communications and Aircel.

In the last few years, there has been a consolidation in the industry, as a result of which there are only three major players now – Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea. An IIFL Securities report last December suggested that Jio and Bharti Airtel are, by increasing their market share, shaping the industry toward "a near two-player structure". On the other hand, Vodafone Idea, it said, is struggling financially.

In recent years, while the user base has grown, the industry itself has witnessed unforeseen financial stress in the form of an important court case against it. The reference is to the Supreme Court verdict last September that ordered telecom players to share revenues coming from even non-telecom services with the government. It gave telecom companies 10 years to pay their adjusted gross revenue (AGR) dues to the government, with 10% of the dues to be paid by March 31, 2021. Vodafone Idea and Bharti Airtel were the worst-hit by this order.

All three players needed to renew some of their spectrum as the validity was set to expire later this year.

### Wasn't this for the 5G rollout?

No. The auction for that is likely to happen later. In the auction that was held on March 1 and 2, the government offered spectrum for 4G in the following bands: 700 MHz, 800 MHz, 900 MHz, 1,800 MHz, 2,100 MHz, 2,300 MHz and 2,500 MHz.

### What do these bands stand for?

To explain this, we have to begin with the term



'spectrum', which, in this context, stands for the portion of the electromagnetic wave range that is suitable for communication purposes. As this is a huge economic resource, which also provides unimaginable benefits to any population, it is controlled by the government.

Industry organisation GSMA, a body that represents the interests of mobile operators worldwide, says in its blog that one slice of this spectrum is not the same as another slice. The difference is in terms of the frequency of these waves (the number of times the waves repeat themselves in a second). It says, "Spectrum bands have different characteristics, and this makes them suitable for different purposes. In general, low-frequency transmissions can travel greater distances before losing their integrity, and they can pass through dense objects more easily. Less data can be transmitted over these radio waves, however. Higher-frequency transmissions carry more data, but are poorer at penetrating obstacles."

In this context, hertz is a measure of the number of cycles per second, and 1 megahertz stands for 1 million hertz. Telecom providers cover their bases by using both low and high-frequency bands.

### Who bought what in the auction?

Reliance Jio was the biggest spender in the auction. It shelled out ₹57,122 crore, just over 60% of which was to acquire spectrum in the 800 MHz band, according to a report by Edelweiss. It spent the remaining on 1,800 MHz and 2,300 MHz bands.

Bharti Airtel, which dished out ₹18,699 crore, spent half of its money on the 800 MHz and 900 MHz bands. It also spent on the 2,100 MHz and 2,300 MHz bands.

Vodafone Idea, the report said, "was the most conservative of the lot". It used almost two-thirds of its ₹1,993-crore spend on the 900 MHz band. It spent the

remaining on the 1,800 MHz band. The spectrum will be assigned to bidders for a period of 20 years.

### How do analysts view the auction strategy of these three companies?

Though the auction is largely seen as an opportunity to renew expiring spectrum, analysts say Reliance Jio's "higher-than-expected" spend is an attempt to improve network experience. The Edelweiss report says Reliance

Jio could have gone for it because "in recent quarters, Bharti Airtel has onboarded a disproportionately higher share of smartphone subscribers leveraging its superior network". Vodafone Idea's low-key presence in the auction is linked to its balance-sheet constraints. It is also likely that the players are preserving their resources for the upcoming 5G era.

### Why did the 700 MHz band have no takers?

The 700 MHz band, as also 1,800 MHz, 2,100 MHz, and 2,300 MHz bands, are seen playing an important role in the 5G rollout (the fifth generation of mobile networks that promises to connect everybody as also everything much faster and at much lower latency). The 700 MHz band was not expected to find any takers given its prohibitive floor price. Experts see this as an opening for the government to scale down the reserve price when it comes up for bidding in future. What an ICICI Securities report called the "king" in 5G, the C-band, which is the band between 3,300 MHz and 4,200 MHz, was not on offer in this round of auctions.

### How did this auction compare to the last round?

In 2016, about 40% of the 2,355 MHz of spectrum (at a reserve price of ₹5.6 lakh crore) was sold, giving the government ₹65,789 crore in revenue. This time, the Centre has managed to get more.

The government said the revenue generated by the auction has exceeded its expectations, which was about ₹45,000 crore, according to Telecom Secretary Anshu Prakash. The expectations were low because of the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the fact that the top three telecom players were looking to renew expiring spectrum and consolidate holdings in select bands.

## Venezuela plans 1-million bolivar bill

REUTERS

CARACAS

Venezuela's central bank said on Friday that it would introduce a banknote worth 1-million bolivars beginning next week, as years of incessant hyperinflation continue to batter the value of the crisis-stricken South American country's currency.

The new banknote will be worth just 52 U.S. cents at the current official exchange rate. Inter-annual inflation was running at 2,665% as of January, the central bank said.

The OPEC nation's economy has been in a tailspin for the past 7 years, spurred by a collapse in oil prices that led to a drop in imports and a gaping fiscal deficit, prompting the central bank to print more bolivars.

# Govt. open to evaluate, explore cryptocurrencies, says Thakur

High-level inter-ministerial committee on digital currencies submits report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Union Minister Anurag Thakur on Saturday said the government is open to evaluate and explore new technologies, including cryptocurrencies, for improving governance.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself is a strong advocate of embracing technology in various aspects of governance, the Minister of State for Finance said while addressing an event organised by Entrepreneurs' Organisation - EO Punjab.

"Let me say that we welcome innovation and new technology... blockchain is a new emerging technology," Mr. Thakur said. "Cryptocurrency is a form of virtual cur-



**Heads or tails:** The RBI virtually banned cryptocurrency trading in 2018, while the SC struck down the curbs. ■ REUTERS

rency. I firmly believe that we must always evaluate, explore and encourage new ideas with an open mind," he added. A high-level inter-ministerial committee (IMC) was constituted under the chairmanship of the economic affairs secretary on

digital currencies and it has submitted its report.

The government would take a decision on the recommendations of the IMC and the legislative proposal, if any, would be introduced in Parliament following the due process, he said, inviting

suggestions on the issue.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday said the government is still formulating its opinion on cryptocurrencies and will take a calibrated position.

Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das had last week said the apex bank had certain "major concerns" over the impact cryptocurrencies may have on the financial stability in the economy and had conveyed the same to the government.

The RBI had virtually banned cryptocurrency trading in 2018. The Supreme Court had asked the Centre in 2019 to frame policies for crypto, and in 2020, struck down the curbs imposed by the RBI.

The company's total obligation is of ₹200 crore on a 5-year tenure secured term loan at 9.25% per annum from Punjab & Sind Bank, RHTL said in a regulatory filing.

The company has net cash of more than ₹1,500 crore, it said.

## INTERVIEW | SACHIN PILLAI

# 'Affordable housing finance unaffected'

The business, largely rural-based, survived the Covid impact: CEO Pillai

N. ANAND

*Hinduja Leyland Finance, the non-banking finance company of the Hinduja Group, foresees double-digit growth in vehicle finance and is betting big on the housing finance front as it is on a growth path, chief executive officer Sachin Pillai said. Edited excerpts:*



Have you reached pre-COVID levels in disbursements?

■ In the asset classes, we have a presence, especially vehicle and housing finance. With the process of unlocking starting from June, we have seen sequential growth registering on a consistent basis.

On a YTD basis, obviously the de-growth is still significant. However, we have seen a good bounce back in terms of confidence on the ground September onwards. The gap is narrowing and with continuance of the same trend we might see pre-COVID disbursements back in the first quarter of the next financial year.

The mass passenger movement segment continues to be sluggish in line with the overall trend, and we do expect movement in this segment by the end of this quarter, especially with the vaccination drive in place and post that [when] relaxation of social distancing norms is expected.

In housing finance, the last quarter was the best in terms of disbursements. The trends are continuing since January as well... the business is on a high growth trajectory.

How are you managing your fund position?

■ We are closely monitoring the market movements, especially NBFCs valuations. We will wait for the right window to emerge for considering listing.

How are you managing your fund position?

■ We are comfortable on liquidity with undrawn sanctions to the extent of four months of disbursements. Cost of funds have softened in this year by almost 50-75 bps. Our rating and outlook have remained unchanged during this period.

Any update on affordable housing subsidiary?

■ Affordable housing finance witnessed a faster bounce back among retail asset classes. Largely on account of this business being semi-urban/rural based, it was relatively unaffected as compared to urban cities as far as the pandemic is concerned.

For us, we have presence in more than 500 locations and in the current year, we initiated our focus in the low-income housing finance segment, which hitherto we were not active in. We now manage ₹2,190 crore of assets in this business.

Disbursements have grown at 21%, registering an overall book growth of 32% in the first nine months. We have registered a 62% growth in bottomline in the same period.

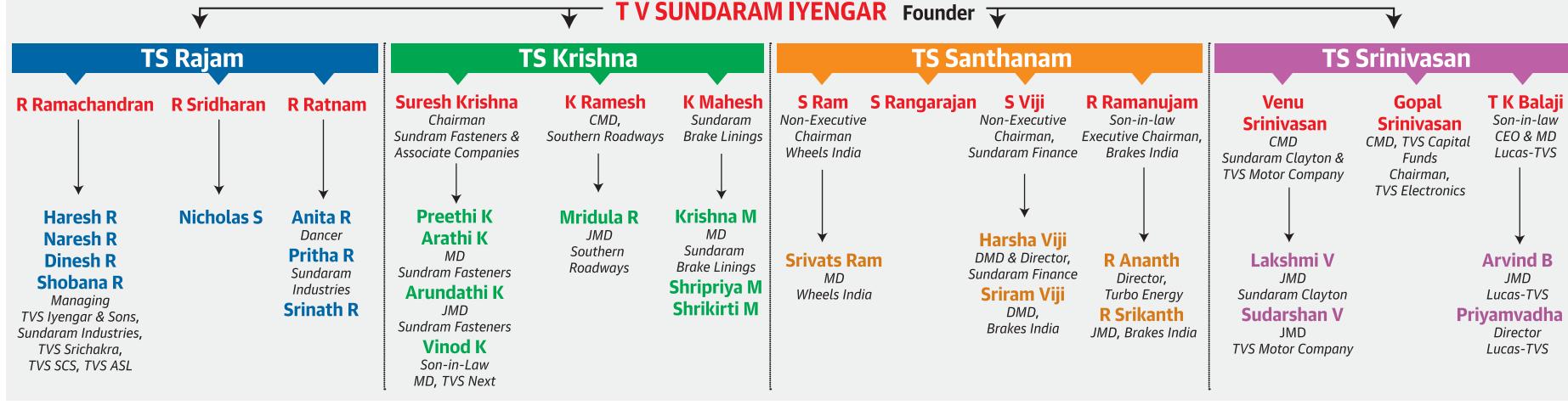
The softening of borrowing cost, along with entry into the low-income housing finance segment, augured well for an uptick in margins.

Operational efficiencies resulted in lower cost as well, cushioning the higher provision impact on account of COVID-related provisions. NPAs remain flat on a proforma basis.

## SPORT

# A look at the TVS Group's proposed recast of holdings

The restructuring will entail a merger and then demerger of each business into the respective family holding company



three firms have funded, and hence hold stakes in, the group companies that have emerged over the years.

The first step of the arrangement is to merge SIPL and SRPL into TVS & Sons on a share exchange ratio based on valuation. Such a merger is necessary as different family arms run different businesses whose stakes are held variously by the 3 holding firms. A merger and then demerger of each business into the respective family holding company would follow.

Family arms also own a piece of the distribution business pertaining to their part of the overall business, which would be demerged into their ownership as part of the process.

At the end of the family arrangement, there would be no single holding company but there would be separate holding companies for each of the family branches that have been managing the respective businesses for decades, sources close to the family said.

Would there be other

agreements that family members would enter into?

■ The sources said that additionally, the arrangement will probably also see a number of ancillary agreements – for example as to how the TVS brand would be used in the future, and a non-compete agreement – as has been the practice for decades in prior family partitions.

What changes would the group's listed firms witness?

■ While the companies that run the businesses themselves are not directly part of the family agreement, their holdings will witness a change. TVS Motor Company is run by Venu Srinivasan and his immediate family members. According to an exchange filing by TVS Motor on January 27, the TVS holding companies hold 63.76% in Sundaram Clayton (SCL), which is the holding company for TVS Motor.

It added that after the merger of the holding companies of the group, the two-wheelers auto parts and die castings business would be demerged into TVS Investments and Holdings Pvt. Ltd. (TVSIHPL). Also, the 63.76% of SCL's shares held by the TVS Holding Companies will vest with TVSIHPL, in which Mr. Srinivasan and his immediate family members hold a majority stake.

Likewise, Sundram Fasteners, run by Suresh Krishna and his family, would witness a demerger of the fasteners business from the TVS Holding Companies into TVS Sundram Fasteners Pvt.

■ The sources said that additionally, the arrangement will probably also see a number of ancillary agreements – for example as to how the TVS brand would be used in the future, and a non-compete agreement – as has been the practice for decades in prior family partitions.

Similarly, K. Mahesh's family runs Sundaram Brake Linings, in which the TVS Holding Companies' stake in Wheels India will vest with SSFPL. Brakes India is held partly by TVS & Sons, Southern Roadways and Sundaram Industries. Post merger of the holding firms, their entire

gar Enterprises Pvt. Ltd. (MAEPL). So, the 32.66% of Sundaram Brake Linings held by the holding companies will vest with MAEPL, in which Mr. Mahesh's family holds a majority stake.

TVS Investments (TVSI) holds 59.84% in TVS Electronics, run by Gopal Srinivasan and family. The TVS Holding Companies hold 85% stake in TVSI. TVSI will merge into this family's holding firm Geeyes Family Holdings Pvt. Ltd. (GFHPL) and the stake held by the TVS Holding companies will vest with GFHPL.

The TS Rajam and TS Santhanam families would only have one holding firm each that would hold stakes in the companies they respectively manage. The TS Santhanam family's holding company is Sundaram Santhanam & Family Pvt. Ltd. (SSFPL). The 29.69% of the TVS Holding Companies' stake in Wheels India will vest with SSFPL. Brakes India is held partly by TVS & Sons, Southern Roadways and Sundaram Industries. Post merger of the holding firms, their entire

holdings in Brakes India will move into TVS & Sons. Via the demerger, TVS & Sons' holdings in Brakes India will come to the holding firm of Mr. Santhanam's arm of the family, as would Sundaram Motors and Madras Auto Service, which are divisions within TVS & Sons.

As per the arrangement, the tyre business, the TVS division of TVS & Sons and TVS Logistics would go to the TS Rajam family.

At the end of the exercise, all shareholders of the TVS Holding Companies shall hold equity shares in the respective family arm's holding firms, but the family which runs the business would own majority in the respective family holding firms.

How was 'fair value' found?

■ "There are so many factors and family history which go into it, so that linking the value of business to the settlement is impossible. It is not that the business value does not matter but it is just a lot more complicated," the sources said.

What is the first step of the family arrangement?

■ The group has primarily three holding companies – T.V. Sundaram Iyengar & Sons Ltd. (referred to as TVS & Sons), Sundaram Industries Private Ltd. (SIPL) and Southern Roadways Private Ltd. (SRPL), referred to as TVS Holding Companies.

TVS & Sons holds majority stake in both the other holding companies and the balance in those two is held by the respective arms of the TVS family. Together, these

## Indian women ready for some action

Set to take on South Africa in ODI series from today

### SA IN INDIA

KAMESH SRINIVASAN

LUCKNOW

After months of inaction, the Indian women will be eager to give their best against South Africa in the ODI series starting at the Atal Behari Vajpayee Ekana Stadium here from Sunday.

Captain Mithali Raj said there was a "positive mood" in the camp and assured that all the players, young ones and the "core", will get a fair chance to get into their groove. "It is a very important series. As a team we need to get the momentum right. Hope we can come together as a team," said Mithali, on the eve of the series.

Saying that everybody had found a way to train, Mithali said that the team had had a good work out for four days at the venue, including one session at the



Mithali Raj. ■ TWITTER/BCCI

centre.

South Africa may be better prepared having played Pakistan earlier, but Mithali said that the Indian team was a "confident unit" and that the players were "not rusty". "We are excited to give our best. It is good to start playing some cricket," she said.

On the personal front, Mithali said that she was "looking forward to getting

more runs". When queried about the positive influence of coach W.V. Raman, Mithali said that he had a fine equation with all players.

The team (from):

**India:** Mithali Raj (Capt.), Harmanpreet Kaur (vice-capt.), Smriti Mandhana, Jemimah Rodrigues, Punam Raut, Priya Punia, Yastika Bhatia, D. Hemalatha, Deepthi Sharma, Sushma Verma (wk), Swetha Verma (wk), Radha Yadav, Rajeshwari Gayakwad, Jhulan Goswami, Mansi Joshi, Poonam Yadav, C. Prathyusha, and Monica Patel.

**South Africa:** Sune Luus (Capt.), Ayabonga Khaka, Shabnum Ismail, Laura Wolvaardt, Trisha Chetty, Sinalo Jaftha, Tasmin Britz, Marizanne Kapp, Nondumiso Shangase, Lizelle Lee, Anneke Bosch, Faye Tunnicliffe, Nonkululeko Mlaib, Megan du Preez, Nadine de Clerk, Lara Goodall, and Tumi Sekhukhune.

The schedule: ODIs: March 7, 9, 12, 14 and 17. All matches start at 9 a.m.

## Women's trap team wins silver

SPORTS BUREAU

CAIRO

The Indian women's trap team of Manisha Keer, Rakeshwar Kumari and Kirti Gupta gave a good account of itself before being beaten 6-4 in the gold medal contest in the team championship of the Shotgun World Cup.

## Lanka pulls level

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ST. JOHN'S

Sri Lanka's spinners bamboozled West Indies to claim a 43-run win in the second T20I here on Friday.

**The scores:** Sri Lanka 160/6 in 20 overs (D. Gunaratne 56, P. Nissanka 37) bt West Indies 117 in 18.4 overs (W. Hasaranga 3/17, L. Sanderson 3/10).

**MOM:** Hasaranga. Sri Lanka won by 43 runs; three-match series 1-1.

## Reliance HF defaults on ₹40-crore loan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

# India's Irrepressibles maul the Three Lions, roar into WTC final

Ashwin, Axar split 10 in England's second innings to bowl home side to 3-1 series win; Washington left stranded on 96 after batting the touring side out of the game

## ENGLAND IN INDIA

AMOL KARHADKAR  
AHMEDABAD

Washington Sundar ran out of partners to be left within touching distance of what should have been his maiden Test hundred in the morning session. But by the end of the day, the Chennai charmer was full of smiles, alongside his teammates, as India mauled England to not just win the series but also set up a World Test Championship title clash against New Zealand.

Once Washington and Rishabh Pant had bailed India out of trouble at the Narendra Modi Stadium on the second evening, it was only going to be a matter of whether the weekend crowd would celebrate India's win on Saturday or Sunday.

Thanks to yet another accurate, potent spell from India's spinners and a bizarre batting performance by England, India completed the formalities 42 minutes before the scheduled close of the third day's play.

Washington and Axar Patel's 106-run partnership for the eighth wicket meant India stretched its first-innings lead to 160 before being bowled out for 365 just before lunch.

R. Ashwin and Axar got into the act thereafter to bundle England out for 135 and register a thumping win by an innings and 25 runs to pocket the series 3-1.

### Two in two balls

If England had to extend the game into the fourth day, it required a solid start to its second innings. With openers Dom Sibley and Zak Crawley having survived the three overs before the break, Ashwin was introduced into the attack upon resumption and he struck twice in his first over.

Ashwin first induced a nick off Crawley's blade to Ajinkya Rahane at slip. Off



Perfect finish: India brooked no resistance, registering an innings win in the final Test on Saturday. ■ SPORTZPICS/BCCI

### WTC points table (top-4)

	PCT (%)	Points	Series	Matches		
				Won	Lost	Drawn
India	72.2	520	6	12	4	1
New Zealand	70.0	420	5	7	4	0
Australia	69.2	332	4	8	4	2
England	61.4	442	6	11	7	3

Teams are ranked based on PCT  
PCT is points earned/points available  
Final: June 18 to 22, India vs New Zealand in England  
SOURCE: ICC

the next ball, Jonny Bairstow fell into the 'leg trap' for his third duck in four innings.

Axar then ran through the middle-order, with first-innings top-scorer Ben Stokes sweeping the left-arm straight to leg gully.

While Axar's arm-balls were unplayable, Ashwin bamboozled the hapless England batsmen with his artistry. Since Ishant Sharma did not take the field due to pain in his left ankle, the spin twins shared 46.5 of the innings' 54.5 overs.

Barring Joe Root, who held

the fort for more than an hour, only Dan Lawrence, batting at No. 7, offered any substantial resistance. But with no support from the other end, Lawrence (50) was the last man out, his heave against Ashwin resulting in the ball crashing into the stumps, giving the spinner his 30th five-wicket haul.

Axar had earlier completed the fourth five-for of his maiden series, playing his part with the ball after having done his bit with bat. He was involved in a flawless part-

### SCOREBOARD

ENGLAND – 1ST INNINGS		205
INDIA – 1ST INNINGS		
Shubman Gill	lbw b Anderson O (3b), Rohit Sharma lbw b Stokes 49 (144b, 7x4), Cheteshwar Pujara lbw b Leach 17 (66b, 1x4), Virat Kohli c Foakes b Stokes O (8b), Ajinkya Rahane c Stokes b Anderson 27 (45b, 4x4), Rishabh Pant c Root b Anderson 101 (118b, 13x4, 2x6), R. Ashwin c Pope b Leach 13 (32b, 2x4), Washington Sundar (not out) 96 (174b, 10x4, 1x6), Axar Patel run out 43 (97b, 5x4, 1x6), Ishant Sharma lbw b Stokes O (1b), Mohammed Siraj b Stokes O (3b); Extras (b-4, lb-6, nb-3); 19; Total (in 114.4 overs): 365.	
FALL OF WICKETS		
1-0 (Crawley, 4.4), 2-10 (Bairstow, 4.5), 3-20 (Sibley, 9.6), 4-30 (Stokes, 13.1), 5-65 (Pope, 24.5), 6-65 (Root, 25.1), 7-109 (Foakes, 43.1), 8-111 (Bess, 45.1), 9-134 (Leach, 54.2).		

INDIA BOWLING	
Siraj 4-0-12-0, Axar 24-6-48-5, Ashwin 22.5-4-47-5, Washington 4-0-16-0.	
Man-of-the-Match: Pant.	
Man-of-the-series: Ashwin.	

ENGLAND BOWLING	
Anderson 25-14-44-3, Stokes 27.4-6-89-4, Leach 27-5-89-2, Bess 17-1-71-0, Root 18-1-56-0.	
ENGLAND – 2ND INNINGS	
Zak Crawley c Rahane b Ashwin	

nership with Washington in the morning to bat England out of the game.

While Axar rotated the strike, Washington carried on after starting the day on 60.

When Washington was four runs short of the three-figure mark, Axar was late in recovering his ground after

going for a non-existent single to be run out off the last ball of Root's over.

It took Stokes just four balls to see the back of Ishant and Mohammed Siraj and leave Washington agonisingly short. But by then, he had done enough to help power India's magnificent turnaround.

In sticky situations, somebody stood up for us : Ashwin

AMOL KARHADKAR

AHMEDABAD

R. Ashwin, adjudged 'Player of the Series', was ecstatic about India's qualification for the WTC final.

"The WTC qualification is the result of the work we've put in over the last 10 years. The WTC was announced and we obviously really fought hard. We played six series and we've literally got most of the points. We have lost just three [sic: four] of the Tests in the cycle," Ashwin said.

"It means a lot to a lot of them in the dressing room. Some of them have not even played a World Cup. I'm so very happy for someone like Ishant Sharma, who got selected in the 2015 World Cup

but couldn't play because of a last-minute injury. For someone like him to get to the WTC final would mean the world. I was reading somewhere that he called it the World Cup final for himself."

With 32 wickets and 189 runs, including a hundred, Ashwin's performance was one of the talking points of the series. But when asked about the highlight of the series, he picked a team – not an individual – moment.

"The way we came back in the second Test as a group, we found ourselves in some sticky situations in all these Tests and every time somebody has managed to stand up. That's related to how we have managed to bond as a team."



The WTC qualification is the result of the work we've put in over the last 10 years

## They out-skilled us: Root

India found ways of managing turn and non-turn better'

S. DIPAK RAGAV

England skipper Joe Root said he was disappointed with his team's showing especially on the final day and praised Rishabh Pant, calling him a difficult batsman to bowl at.

"It was disappointing but credit to India. They have out-skilled us. They have read the surface well, showed how to bat and were excellent with the ball as well. We just have to keep finding ways of getting better in similar conditions in the future," said Root.

"It was a frustrating way to finish this game. But credit to Rishabh and Washington [Sundar], that partnership was outstanding. The way he [Pant] bats makes it difficult for bowlers to build pressure



derson] with 600 wickets," he added.

Root also felt India exploited the conditions better and managed to grab the key moments in the game often, which proved decisive.

"We did not react to changes in surfaces as well as India did. They exploited it better. They found ways of managing turn and non-turn better than we did. I do think there were periods in the game where we found ourselves at parity and India managed to grab them. Generally in low-scoring Test matches, that is a difference."

## Silver for Sarita, bronze for Kuldeep

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Sarita Mor won silver, while Kuldeep Malik bagged bronze at the Matador Pellicone wrestling event in Rome on Friday.

India now has five medals in the Greco-Roman category.

**The results:** Women 57kg: **Final:** Giulia Penalber (Ita) bt Sarita Mor 4-2; **Bronze bout:** Francesca Indelicato (Ita) w/o Anshu Malik. **68kg qualifying:** Mimi Hristova (Bul) bt Nisha 10-3; **Repechage:** Alexandra Junis Glauze (AUS) bt Nisha 3-2. **75kg:** **Quarterfinals:** Elmira Syzdykova (Kaz) bt Kiran 10-3.

**Men:** **72kg:** **Bronze bout:** Kuldeep Malik bt Chengiz Labazanov (Rus) 10-9. **82kg qualifying:** Richard Perkins (USA) bt Gurpreet Singh 11-12; Salih Aydin (Tur) bt Harpreet Singh by fall.

### TV PICKS

**India vs South Africa:** 1st ODI (Women), Star Sports 2HD & 3, 9 a.m.  
**Premier League:** SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 5.30 p.m. 7.30 p.m., 10 p.m. & 12.30 a.m. (Monday); Star Sports 3 (SD & HD), 10 p.m.  
**Serie A:** Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 5 p.m., 7.30 p.m., 10.30 p.m. & 1.15 a.m. (Monday)  
**ATP 250:** Argentina Open, Eurosport (SD & HD), 11.30 p.m.  
**Swiss Open badminton:** Star Sports 2 & 3 (SD & HD), 3.30 p.m.

### IN BRIEF

**Chennai City FC loses to Sudeva**  
KOLKATA

Former champion Chennai City FC lost to debutant Sudeva Delhi FC 2-1 in a relegation round match of the Hero I-League at the Kishore Bharati Krirangan on Saturday.

In another relegation round contest, Indian Arrows stunned Neroca FC 3-0.

**The results:** Chennai City FC 1 (Jockson Das 6) lost to Sudeva Delhi FC 2 (William Paulankum 34, Sairuktima 47) Indian Arrows 3 (Harish Patre 17, 96, Vanlalratfela Thlacheu 51) bt Neroca FC 0.

### Nine Indians in finals

NEW DELHI  
Nine Indians – six men and three women – advanced to the finals of the 35th Boxam Intl. boxing tournament in Castellon, Spain.

**The results (semifinals):** Men: **69kg:** Vikas bt Ablaikhan Zhusupov (Kaz) 3-2. **63kg:** Manish bt Lounes Hamraoui (Fra) 3-2. **57kg:** Hussamuddin bt Orlando Martinez (Pan) 4-1.

**81kg:** Sumit bt Raphael Monny (Fra) 5-0. **+91kg:** Satish bt Jazevisic (Ltu) 4-1. **75kg:** Ashish bt Dumitru Vicol (Rou) 4-1; **Women:** **75kg:** Pooya bt Athenya Bylon (Pan) 5-0. **57kg:** Jasmine bt Sirine Charabi (Ita) 4-1. **60kg:** Simranjit bt Kiria Tapia (Pur) 3-2. PTI

## Sindhu in final; Srikanth loses

Satwiksairaj and Chirag fall to Danish pair in semifinals

### SWISS OPEN

ANI  
BASEL

Olympic silver medallist P.V. Sindhu dished out a superlative performance to outclass Mia Blichfeldt of Denmark in straight games and enter the women's singles final of the Swiss Open Super 300 tournament here on Saturday.

Sindhu beat fourth-seeded Blichfeldt 22-20, 21-10 in 43 minutes to avenge her first-round loss to the Danish World No. 12 at the Thailand Open in January.

The second-seeded Indian will take on top seed and Rio Olympics gold medallist Carolina Marin in the final on Sunday. "Carolina is a good player so it won't be an easy match, I have to play my 100%," Sindhu said.

Former champion K. Sri-



Sweet revenge: Sindhu avenged her loss against Blichfeldt with a clinical show. ■ FILE PHOTO

kanth, however, couldn't cross the semifinal stage as he went down 13-21, 19-21 to top seed Viktor Axelsen.

World No. 10 Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shet-