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GO PUBLIC RATHER
THAN PRIVATISE

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CAPSULE

FARMERS ANNOUNCE MANY PROTEST EVENTS

New Delhi: Protesting farmers Sunday announced a series of events from February 23-27 to further intensify their agitation against the three agricultural laws as they accused the Government of adopting "repressive" measures against them.

FIVE DIE AFTER DRINKING 'ILLICIT LIQUOR' IN BIHAR

Muzaffarpur: Five persons have died allegedly after consuming suspected spurious liquor in the past three days in Muzaffarpur district of Bihar where sale and consumption of alcohol are banned.

PLEAS SEEKING SHIFTING OF MOSQUE ADMITTED

Mathura: A court here on Saturday admitted two suits seeking the shifting of a 17th century mosque away from a temple which the devotees believe marks the birthplace of Lord Krishna, according to a district government counsel.

MINIMUM TEMP IN DELHI SETTLES AT 10.1 DEG C

New Delhi: The national Capital witnessed shallow fog on Sunday, with the minimum temperature settling at 10.1 degrees Celsius, the India Meteorological Department said.



Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal meets UP farmer representatives on Sunday in New Delhi **See P3**

New strains can reinfect Covid -ve

Even those with anti-bodies not immune to new variants, AIIMS director sounds the alarm; 14,264 coronavirus cases in 24 hours

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

While Covid-19 cases are steadily rising in Maharashtra and Kerala, AIIMS director Dr Randeep Guleria has sound the alarm, warning that the new Indian strains of infection found could be highly transmissible and dangerous.

He also added that the new variant can even cause re-infections in people who have developed anti-bodies to the virus. After reporting decline in cases in last few months, India has reported close to 87,000 cases of the coronavirus in the last seven days, with the highest addition on Sunday when the country saw 14,264 fresh infections within a span of 24 hours.

Incidentally, the rise in infection has come in the backdrop of identification of new variants in Maharashtra.

India now has all three coronavirus variants that have caused a massive resurgence of cases globally — B.1.1.7, first discovered in the United Kingdom; B.1.351, dominant in South Africa; and P.1, from Brazil. These have a unique collection of mutations, which make them spread more readily or cheat vaccine-immunity, said the experts.

Dr Guleria stated that herd immunity for coronavirus is a

"myth" in the country because at least 80 per cent people need to have antibodies for the whole of the population to be protected.

India has been witnessing a rise in the Covid-19 active caseload over the past few days which is pegged at 1,45,634 as on date and now consists of 1.32 per cent of India's total infections.

"More than 74 per cent of the active cases of the country are in Kerala and Maharashtra. Of late it is seen that there has been a spike in the daily cases in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh also. Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir too are witnessing a surge in daily new cases," the Ministry said.

In the last four weeks in Kerala, the average weekly cases have fluctuated between a high of 42,000 and a low of 34,800. Similarly, in the last four weeks, the weekly positivity in Kerala has ranged from 13.9 per cent to 8.9 per cent.

In Maharashtra, in the last four weeks, the weekly cases have shown a rising trend and have increased from 18,200 to 21,300; while the weekly positivity has also increased from 4.7 per cent to 8 per cent.

The areas of concern are the Mumbai suburban areas where the weekly cases have risen by 19 per cent. In Nagpur, Amravati, Nashik, Akola and



People visit the Juhu Beach, even as Maharashtra sees renewed spike in coronavirus cases in Mumbai on Sunday **PTI**

Yavatmal, the weekly cases have increased by 33 per cent, 47 per cent, 23 per cent, 55 per cent and 48 per cent, respectively, the Ministry underscored.

Punjab is rapidly assuming critical dimension in respect of the spread of Covid-19 infection, the Ministry highlighted adding in the last four weeks, the weekly positivity rate in the State has increased from 1.4 per cent to 1.6 per cent, while the weekly cases in the last four weeks have seen a rise from 1300 to 1682.

The Centre has advised all these States to improve the overall testing numbers by focusing on increasing the proportion of RT-PCR tests.

Continued on Page 2

Night curfew in Pune, no gathering in Maharashtra

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Taking cognisance of the increasing Covid-19 cases in the State, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray announced temporary ban on political, religious and social events, even as he gave an ultimatum to the people that after eight days he would decide on re-imposing the lockdown if they did not mend ways and follow pandemic norms strictly.

Meanwhile, the authori-

ties on Sunday clamped night curfew in Pune city and the neighbouring Pimpri-Chinchwad.

"Movement of people will also be restricted between 11pm and 6am when only essential activities like medical services, milk supply will be allowed," Pune's divisional commissioner Saurabh Rao said. "Schools and colleges in Pune and its sister city of Pimpri-Chinchwad will remain closed February 28.

Detailed report on P5

Covid -ve report for flying to India

Except for fliers coming from UK, Europe, West Asia from today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

All international fliers except the ones coming on flights originating from the United Kingdom, Europe and the West Asia will have to submit a self-declaration form on the Air Suvidha portal before their scheduled travel from Monday night.

As per the Ministry of Civil Aviation's new guidelines for international travellers, the new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) will be in effect from 11pm on February 22. The South African coronavirus strain has been found in four people in India, while the variant from Brazil has been detected in one person. In light of these developments, the Government has decided to implement the new guidelines.

The new guidelines said international passengers will also have to upload a negative Covid-19 RT-PCR report with exception to those traveling to



India in the exigency of death in the family. For seeking exemption, the travelling entity will have to apply to the online portal [newdelhairport.in](#) at least 72 hours before boarding.

The test should have been conducted within 72 hours prior to the journey and each passenger will also have to submit a declaration with respect to the authenticity of the report. At the time of boarding the flight, only asymptomatic travellers will be allowed to board after the thermal screening.

Continued on Page 2

Wife of Mamata's nephew gets CBI summons in scam

We're not afraid of jails: Bengal Chief Minister

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The CBI probing the multi-crore coal scam on Sunday issued notices to the wife and sister-in-law of Diamond Harbour MP Abhishek Banerjee who is also the nephew of the Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. The CBI swung into action a day after a local court asked Home Minister Amit Shah to appear in person or through a lawyer on February 22 in a defamation case filed by Abhishek.

Both the notices were served under the Section 160 of CrPC asking the respondents to appear before the investigating agency as witnesses to a number of cases, including some alleged transfer of money in banks situated in Thailand. Reacting over it, the Chief Minister said, "Some people are



trying to threaten us with jail... they are trying to break my backbone as they have done to many leaders... but let me tell them that we are made of different material... we have fought against bullets so we are not afraid of jails."

Comparing herself with tigers, Mamata said, "We are tiger cubs and have fought with more dangerous enemies... what these rats will do to us... we are not at all afraid. Let them do whatever they want."

Continued on Page 2

Will win 200 seats in Bengal, says BJP at Modi-workers meet

DEEPAK K UPRETI ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of elections in four States and one Union Territory, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday addressed the meeting of BJP national office-bearers which expressed confidence of winning more than 200 seats in West Bengal Assembly polls. The Prime Minister is visiting West Bengal on Monday.

The meeting decided to launch a country-wide "atnirbhar movement, promote 'swadeshi' and propagate 'vocal for local' mantra from April 6, coinciding with the party's foundation day.

The key leaders of all national office bearers, State presidents, State-in-charges and organisational general secretaries, discussed farmers agitation and maintained that the three new agriculture laws were in the interest of the farmers and the agitation has been "kept alive" by the Congress and the Left.

Addressing the party lead-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks during the inauguration of a meeting of Bharatiya Janata Party's national office-bearers at the NDMC convention centre in New Delhi on Sunday **PTI**

ers, Modi asked them to improve the quality of organisation so that the party could fulfill its mission of "making the country great."

The Prime Minister said his Government is running on the principle of "sabka saath sabka vishwas" and uninterruptedly moving with reforms be it farm laws or the GST.

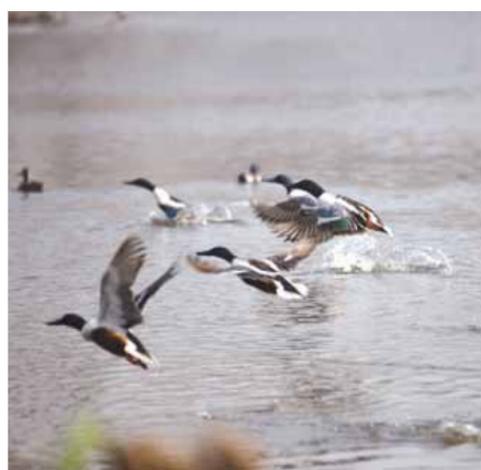
Continued on Page 2

Winged guests flock Delhi's seven wetlands this winter

SAPNA SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

Many migratory birds from Europe, Siberia, Central Asia and China visited Delhi this winter. On Sunday, on the Big Bird Day-2021 (BBD-2021), the bird count was held at seven wetlands which host Pied Avocet, Marsh Harrier, Ferruginous Pochard and Grey Headed Canary Flycatcher and it was reported that the Yamuna Biodiversity Park (YBP) gained first rank in hosting winged guests with total bird count at 101.

"Today, there are seven biodiversity parks in Delhi spread over 3,000 acres in which Yamuna Biodiversity Park is the oldest (2002) and the South Biodiversity Park is the youngest (2019)," said Dr Faiyaz Khudsar, DU Professor.



Migratory birds at Yamuna Biodiversity Park in New Delhi **Pioneer photo**

2 more MLAs quit on Narayanasamy trust test eve

PTI ■ PUDUCHERRY

Two more MLAs of the Congress-Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam alliance in Puducherry resigned on Sunday, delivering yet another jolt to Chief Minister V Narayanasamy, a day before he is scheduled to face a floor test in the Assembly to prove his majority.

The resignation by Congress MLA K Lakshminarayanan and DMK legislator Venkatesan further reduced the strength of the ruling alliance to 11, while the Opposition has 14 MLAs in the 33-member Assembly, which has seven vacancies. Lakshminarayanan and Venkatesan submitted their resignation letters separately to assembly speaker V P Sivakolundhu at his residence here, the both said.

Continued on Page 2

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FARMERS' PROTEST

Will soon visit Gujarat to mobilise support: Tikait

PTI ■ GHAZIABAD

Farmer leader Rakesh Tikait on Sunday said he will soon be visiting Gujarat to drum up support for the movement against the Centre's contentious farm laws.

He said this as he met visiting groups of supporters from Gujarat and Maharashtra at Ghazipur on the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border where he has been camping along with his supporters since November.

The Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) national spokesperson also claimed that farmers will eventually not be able to take any part of their farm produce because the new laws will favour only the corporations.

Citing an example, he said, "The milk produced in villages cost around ₹20-22 per litre but when it reaches cities through corporations, it costs consumers anywhere above ₹50 per litre."



"Now the corporations are building large storage houses and warehouses to store food-grains and once there will be shortage in market, they will sell it at rates of their choice," Tikait said, according to a statement issued by the BKU.

"We will not let such a situation arise. We are only concerned about this and will not let corporate control crops in the country," he said.

Tikait was presented with a "charkha" (spinning wheel) by the visiting group from Gandhidham in Gujarat.

"Gandhiji had used charkha to drive the British out of India. Now, we will use the charkha to drive out corporates. We will soon go to Gujarat and mobilise support for the farmers' protest for repeal of the new laws," he added.

Meanwhile, over 20 women from Rohtak district of Haryana also joined the stir at Ghazipur and assured their support to the movement.

Thousands of farmers are camping at Delhi border points of Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur with a demand that the Centre repeal the three new farm laws and make a new one guaranteeing minimum support price (MSP) for crops, fearing the legislations would hurt their livelihood.

The Government, which has held 11 rounds of formal talks with the protesting farmers unions, has maintained the laws are pro-farmer.

India, Maldives to further boost synergy in combatting cross border terrorism

Male: India and the Maldives on Sunday agreed to further strengthen coordination in enhancing regional maritime security, combatting cross border terrorism and maintaining peace in the region to ensure freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held talks with top Maldivian leadership including his counterpart Abdulla Shahid in a warm and friendly atmosphere, reflective of the renewed dynamism over the past two years in the traditionally close relationship, said a joint statement issued at the end of his two-day visit.

Underscoring the importance of defence and security cooperation, both ministers agreed on the importance of maintaining peace and security in the Indian Ocean Region, it said.

"They further agreed to strengthen coordination in enhancing regional maritime security, including on combat-

ting terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including cross border terrorism and maintaining peace in the region to ensure freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean," the joint statement said.

It said the two ministers also agreed to work together to convene the first meeting of the Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism, countering Violent Extremism and Deradicalisation at the earliest.

According to a recent report of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on the threat posed by the Islamic State, the terror group's new leader Shihab al-Muhajir reportedly heads ISIS operations in Afghanistan, India, Maldives, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and States in Central Asia.

He is said to have had an earlier affiliation with and to maintain familial ties to the Haqqani Network, which is accused of targeting Indian interests in Afghanistan. **PTI**

One more body recovered from tunnel at NTPC's Tapovan-Vishnugad project site

Tapovan: One more body was recovered from a tunnel at the NTPC's flood-ravaged Tapovan-Vishnugad project site on Sunday, taking the toll in the disaster that struck Chamoli district a fortnight ago to 68.

The body recovered from the "intake adit" tunnel was identified as that of 27-year-old Sunil Bakhla from Lohardaga district in Jharkhand, official sources said.

It takes the number of bodies pulled out of this tunnel so far to 14.

There is another tunnel in which around 35 people are suspected to have been trapped, but rescuers have not been able to reach it till now, said officials, adding the route to the second tunnel goes via this "intake adit" tunnel.

Five bodies were recovered from the Tapovan barrage site on Saturday.

They were identified as those of Amrit Kumar and Jyotish Wasla of Jharkhand, Munna Kumar Singh of Bihar, Jalal of Lakhimpur Kheri in



Uttar Pradesh and Jivan Singh of Kalsi in Dehradun district.

Chamoli District Magistrate Swati S Bhaduria on Sunday pressed into service additional excavators at the Tapovan barrage site to speed up search operations.

The toll in the calamity that hit the Rishiganga valley on

February 7 has now risen to 68 while 136 people are still missing.

The NTPC's Tapovan-Vishnugad hydel project had been extensively damaged in the flash flood while the Rishiganga hydel project was totally destroyed. **PTI**

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VEHICLES FOR SALE

1) ASHOK LEYLAND ECOMET 1212 REG. NO. HR74A1718 YOM 2012

2) TATA 3118 REG. NO. HR55M2683-YOM

3) TATA 3118 REG. NO. HR55L4747-YOM

4) MARUTIS ECCO GOODS REG. NO. DL1LW1680 YOM 2015

5) CB_ALECOMET1214 REG. NO. UP25CT6923 YOM 2018

6) CB_TATA LPT 2518 CAB CHASSIS GOODS REG. NO. HR38S8046-YOM 2013

7) CB_ASHOK LEYLAND REG. NO. HR55AE3874 YOM 2018

8) ASHOK LEYLAND LIMITED - CB_ASHOK LEYLAND REG. NO. HR55AE6553 YOM 2018

9) ASHOK LEYLAND LIMITED - CB_ASHOK LEYLAND REG. NO. HR55AE7828 YOM 2018

10) ASHOK LEYLAND LIMITED - CB_ASHOK LEYLAND REG. NO. HR55AE6713 YOM 2018

11) ASHOK LEY AL V451 REG. NO. HR55AE7903 YOM 2018

12) ASHOK LEYLAND LIMITED - CB_ALPSV 4.56 VIKING REG. NO. HR55AE8750 YOM 2018

13) TATA MOTORS LTD. - CB_LPT 3718 REG. NO. HR55AE2219-YOM 2018

14) TATA MOTORS LTD. - CB_LPT 3718 REG. NO. HR55AE3113-YOM 2018

15) ASHOK LEYLAND LIMITED - CB_AL1214 REG. NO. UP17AT3340-YOM 2017

16) EICHR_VECVVE1075FB REG. NO. UP45T2205 YOM 2012

17) TATA 2515 REG. NO. UP14ET5220-YOM 2015

18) EICHER 20.16 REG. NO. HR55S6829

19) BOLPIKUP REG. NO. MH02ER4054-YOM 2018

20) BOLCAMPUR REG. NO. MH02ER4028-YOM 2018

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Female leopard radio-collared at Sanjay Gandhi National Park

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

For the first time in the history of Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) located in north Mumbai, a female leopard was radio-collared, as part of a project involving GPS telemetry that is being used to study behavioural patterns of leopards at the SGNP.

Located in the metropolitan limits, the SGNP has the highest leopard density.

Christened as "Savitri", named after social reformer Savitribai Phule, the wife of social reformer and thinker Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, the

female leopard was red-collared under the guidance of SGNP's Conservator of Forests and Director G Mallikarjuna.

The project involves GPS telemetry where radio collars that communicate via satellite will be used to understand leopards inhabiting SGNP and surrounding areas to "understand them better", a thing that will come in handy in preparing better conservation models for their protection.

During the next two years, as many as five leopards — three females and two males — will be collared with GPS collars which are similar to the

one the leopard Ajoba wore.

"We are hoping that this Savitri will also enlighten and educate us and show us a way ahead in terms of knowledge about the leopards in Mumbai," Mallikarjuna said.

Undertaken in collaboration with Wildlife Conservation Society - India and Wildlife Conservation Trust, the project is being supported by Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies (RNP) and the Reliance Foundation.

The SGNP and its peripheral areas is home to 45-odd leopards — and is a matter of animal-human interaction studies.

MP: Woman gangraped, BJP man among accused, party sacks him

Shahdol (MP): A 20-year-old woman was gang-raped allegedly by four persons, including a BJP functionary, in Madhya Pradesh's Shahdol district, police said on Sunday.

The ruling party later in the evening issued a statement that the accused office-bearer had been removed from its primary membership.

She was abducted in a four-wheeler, forced to drink liquor in a farmhouse in Gadaghat area under Jaitpur police station limits and then gang-raped on February 18 and 19, said Shahdol

Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Mukesh Vaish.

"On February 20, the four accused dumped her in front of her house. She filed a police complaint on Sunday. The victim was first taken to Jaitpur health centre and then shifted to the district hospital for treatment," he added.

Soon after news broke out that the name of BJP Jaitpur mandal chief Vijay Tripathi figured in the FIR as one of the accused, the BJP issued a release informing that he had been thrown out of the party. **PTI**

Kamal Nath, others unhurt as lift collapses in MP hospital

Indore: Madhya Pradesh Congress chief Kamal Nath and around a dozen other people escaped unhurt after an overcrowded lift plunged from a height of 10 feet in an Indore hospital and its doors got jammed on Sunday.

"The grace of Lord Hanumanji has always been with me. Jai Hanuman," Nath tweeted later. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan called up Nath to inquire about his health and also ordered Indore Collector Manish Singh to start a probe into the incident, officials said. **PTI**

Wife of Mamata's nephew gets CBI summons in scam

From Page 1

The first notice was served at Banerjee's Shantiniketan Building residence on 188 Harish Mukherjee Road --- within a few hundred metres from the Chief Minister's house --- asking his wife Rujira Banerjee to respond to the CBI's call by 3 pm on Sunday.

The second notice was served at the house of Maneka Gambhir his sister-in-law who lives at Panchashay in south-eastern Kolkata. Gambhir has been asked to appear before the CBI by 11 am on Monday.

Both Rujira and Maneka were not present at their residences when the notices were served. But Abhishek Banerjee acknowledged the receipt of the notices saying "I have faith in the law of land" and alleged "I am being threatened... but no amount of threat can cow me down."

The notices triggered a political storm in the poll-bound Bengal politics with most Trinamool Congress leaders accusing the BJP of vendetta politics. TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh

said, "Sunday's development is the fallout of the court notice sent to Home Minister Amit Shah in a defamation case related to 2018 when he had defamed Abhishek Banerjee in a public meeting."

Earlier Suvendu Adhikari, who recently joined the BJP leaving the TMC, had publicly shared details of a bank account in Bangkok where the proceeds from illegal smuggling of coal were deposited.

"This account belongs to Madam Narula and everyone knows who she is," Adhikari has said leading Banerjee to retort "as he cannot fight with me he is attacking my wife."

Incidentally the CBI is for the past one month looking for one Vinay Mishra the Trinamool Yuva (youth wing) vice president in the coal and cow trafficking cases. Mishra is considered close to Abhishek Banerjee the president of TMC Yuva.

Mishra who reportedly enjoyed Y category security has multiple passports is known to have fled the country. The CBI is also in the lookout for one Anup Maji alias Lala the mastermind of the coal racket

case with "close connection" with highest level of the ruling outfit.

New strains...

It has asked them to refocus on strict and comprehensive surveillance as well as stringent containment in selected districts and conduct regular monitoring of the mutant strains through testing followed by genome sequencing, as well as monitoring of the emerging cluster of cases, the Ministry stated. They have also been asked to focus on clinical management in districts reporting higher deaths.

Covid -ve...

From Page 1

"International travellers arriving through seaports/land ports will also have to undergo the same protocol, however, the facility for online registration is not available for such passengers at the moment. All such clauses shall be applicable to travellers coming/transiting through flights originating in the UK, Europe and the Middle East except for clauses on testing, quarantine and isolation. Airlines should identify international travellers

From Page 1

arriving from/transiting through the United Kingdom, Brazil and South Africa (during the past 14 days) and segregate them in-flight or while disembarking to facilitate the authorities to follow the due protocol in respect of these travellers," it said.

According to the guidelines, all travellers arriving from/transiting through flights originating in the United Kingdom, Europe or the Middle East shall be mandatorily subjected to self-paid confirmatory molecular tests on arrival at the Indian airports concerned (port of entry).

2 more MLAs...

From Page 1

Speaking to reporters, Lakshminarayanan said, "this government led by Narayanasamy has lost majority."

He said he has also resigned from the party membership.

Later, Venkatesan told the media that he had quit the post of MLA only and continued to be in the DMK.

"... I was not able to meet the needs of the people in my constituency since there was no allocation of funds under the MLA Local Area Development fund," he said.

Four Congress MLAs—including ex-ministers A

'Love school' in Osho's name to come up in Bhagalpur

Patna: Prof Matuknath Chaudhary, who became known as "Love Guru" after his affair with a student less than half his age came out in 2006 and led to his sacking from a Patna college, has announced that he had decided to open a "love school" in his native village Jairampur in Bhagalpur district.

Interacting with reporters in Bhagalpur, he said that the school, which will be named Osho International School, is expected to start in April this year and students of Bihar as well as from across the world are eligible to take admission and get courses in love study.

Asked why he was naming the school after Osho, he said:

"There is only one and the greatest Love Guru of the world and that is Osho. I have learnt love study from him. Compared to him, I am nothing. Still, people recognise me as Love Guru."

"I cannot be the Love Guru similar to him but yes I am surely be his student. Hence, I have decided to open a school on his name (Osho)," Chaudhary said.

Asked whether his former girlfriend Julie Kumari would also be the part of school, he said: "Julie is currently living in an Ashram in the Caribbean island nation of Trinidad and she is fully dedicated toward spirituality." **IANS**

Winged...

From Page 1

Illustrating the features of wetlands in Delhi, Dr Khudsar said Delhi has two life supporting landscapes — River Yamuna Basin and the last spur of Aravalli Hill Ranges and both have lost their life supporting characteristics.

Delhi biodiversity parks have assumed global importance as models for replication not only to conserve the vanishing natural heritage from urban centres but also to provide environmental sustainability and resilience.

Yamuna Biodiversity Park and Kalindi Biodiversity Park are in the floodplain of Yamuna River Basin and now known for their functional wetland ecosystems migratory birds. During

winter we receive about 30 species of migratory birds from Europe, Siberia and Central Asia and China in Yamuna Biodiversity Park in which Red Crested Pochard and Ferruginous Pochard are noteworthy among wintering ducks. Aravalli Biodiversity Park is known for its beautiful restored scrub jungle, thorn forest and Kullu and Dhawa, typical Aravalli vegetation which is home to many migratory and resident terrestrial bird species.

Yamuna Biodiversity Park recorded Pied Avocet, Marsh Harrier, Ferruginous Pochard and Grey Headed Canary Flycatcher as noteworthy sightings. Aravalli Biodiversity Park recorded White Capped Bunting as a noteworthy sighting. Whereas Tilpath Valley Biodiversity Park known for its mythological value and valleys with various ecological niches recorded Chestnut shouldered Petronia (Yellow throated Sparrow). Tughlagabad

Biodiversity Park recorded Sirkeer Malkoha as a noteworthy sighting. Northern Ridge (Kamla Nehru Ridge) recorded Booted Eagle. Yamuna Biodiversity Park, Aravalli Biodiversity Park, Tilpath Valley Biodiversity Park, Northern Ridge (Kamla Nehru Ridge), Neela Hauz Biodiversity Park, Tughlaqabad Biodiversity Park and Kalindi Biodiversity Park are the host wetland popular for bird sighting among the ornithologists.

BIRD COUNTS-2021

Biodiversity Parks	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Special
Yamuna Biodiversity Park	102	103	98	83	101	Pied Avocet, Marsh Harrier
Aravalli Biodiversity Park	51	63	46	54	46	White capped bunting
Tilpath Valley Biodiversity Park	64	45	53	43	49	Chestnut-shouldered petronia
Northern Ridge (Kamla Nehru Ridge)	54	49	59	59	60	Booted Eagle,
Neela Hauz Biodiversity Park	26	27	22	33	38	
Tughlaqabad Biodiversity Park	69	55	49	53	51	Sirkeer Malkoha
Kalindi Biodiversity Park				40	80	Ferruginous Pochard

Will win 200...

From Page 1

In the meeting, the first after almost a year following coronavirus pandemic outbreak, the Prime Minister sought workers to work with the spirit of "the nation first".

The party passed a resolution thanking Prime Minister Modi for his leadership during the Covid-19 crisis even as it said Opposition, particularly, the Congress tried spreading "disinformation" on the issue but "failed".

Speaking with news persons after the meeting, BJP General Secretary Bhupendra Yadav, gave details of the resolution saying it condemned the role played by the Congress by opposing all what the Modi Government did including the farm laws, GST, Ram temple or even the vaccine. "They are

doing so as they are receding into darkness," he said.

The resolution expressed confidence of winning more than 200 seats in West Bengal Assembly polls and ousting "ruthless, anti-democratic government" pursuing "appeasement" politics.

The resolution said the party will again win in Assam, Form Government in Puducherry and consolidate its footprints in Tamil Nadu in alliance with AIADMK that will score victory in the State and emerge as an alternative third-pillar in Kerala.

The resolution which dealt with the topics of Assembly elections, coronavirus crisis, farm bills and labour reforms was proposed by former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister and party vice-president Raman Singh and was seconded by Haryana BJP president Om Prakash Dhankar.

Laws death warrants to farmers: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday met the farmer leaders from Western Uttar Pradesh at the Delhi Legislative Assembly and discussed the three "anti-farmer" laws passed by the Central Government. Kejriwal said that the Central Government should immediately withdraw all the three laws and the legal guarantee of MSP should be granted to all the 23 crops following the recommendations of the Swaminathan Commission.

The Chief Minister said that these three anti-farmer laws are death warrants to the farmers with the implementation of these laws the crop will go to the hands of a few industrialists. "The Central Government should talk to the farmers, if the government does not listen to the farmers then who will listen," he said.

Farmer leader Chaudhary Rohit Jakhar said that Kejriwal has broken all the barriers of caste, religion and sect and welcomed the entire Chaudharata of Western UP to the assembly. Farmer leader Chaudhary Shyam Singh said that he heard a lot about Arvind Kejriwal and after meeting him, we have received the same confidence.

Another farmer leader Chaudhary Yashpathe Singh said that Kejriwal has assured us full support. Our protest will



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal during a meeting with UP farmer representatives regarding the three agri-laws in New Delhi on Sunday. Pioneer photo

IF THESE FARMER LAWS ARE IMPLEMENTED THEN THE FARMERS OF INDIA WILL BECOME LABOURERS IN THEIR OWN LAND

continue till the demands are met.

The meeting was attended by Delhi Assembly Speaker Ram Niwas Goel, Cabinet Ministers Kailash Gohil and

Rajendra Pal Gautam along with Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh and MLA Dilip Pandey. Apart from this, farmer leaders Chaudhary Rohit Jakhar, Chaudhary Yashpal Singh, Virendra Gujjar, Chaudhary Udham Singh, Rahul Bedi, Kuldeep Tyagi, Chaudhary Baba Shyam Singh, Chaudhary Sanjay, Chaudhary Shokhendra, Thakur Puran Singh, Sirajuddin Chauhan and Chaudhary Dalbir were also present.

Kejriwal said, "Today several farmer leaders from western Uttar Pradesh came to the Delhi legislative assembly to discuss the three anti-farmer laws passed by the BJP ruled central government. The BJP is continuously saying that these laws will benefit the farmers but the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has not yet clarified how these laws will be beneficial to the farmers."

"These three laws are death warrants to the farmers. If these farmer laws are implemented then the farmers of India will become labourers in their own land. Today all the farmer leaders have again demanded immediate rollback of these three anti-farmer laws. The farmers also demanded that the BJP ruled central government should give a legal guarantee to the MSP. They demanded that MSP should be implemented in all 23 crops," he said.



Members of UP farmer representatives during a meeting with Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal. Pioneer photo

MCD BYPOLLS

AAP will defeat BJP by huge margin: Rai

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Terming the municipal by-elections scheduled on February 28 as the "semi-final" to overthrow the corrupt 15-year rule of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the corporations, Delhi Cabinet Minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Delhi convener Gopal Rai on Sunday said that the BJP has done politics of hatred during Delhi Assembly elections and its candidates will be defeated by a huge margin in all the wards.

Addressing a booth Karyakarta Sammelan at the Chauhan Bangar ward of Seelampur constituency, Rai said that this by-election in five wards of MCD is going to write the future of Delhi for the next five years.

"This is not just the election of five wards, but also the semi-final to overthrow the corrupt 15-year rule of BJP in the MCD. The BJP did politics of hatred during Delhi Assembly elections but people again formed the AAP government under CM Arvind Kejriwal. He said that the AAP will defeat BJP in a historical majority in the MCD by-election just the way we did in the Delhi Assembly election," he said.

The bypolls according to election body will be held for two wards under the North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) and three under the East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC).

The wards are: Ward No. 32N, (Rohini-C); Ward No. 62N, (Shalimar Bagh North) in north Delhi and Ward No. 02-E (Trilokpuri); Ward No. 08-E



(Kalyanpuri) and Ward No. 41-E (Chauhan Bangar) in east Delhi, it said.

"At the time when the politics of hatred of the BJP was reaching every state of India then Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal was the only leader who stopped these politics of hatred of the BJP in Delhi and the AAP government was formed again last year. The BJP sent all the senior leaders, the chief ministers and cabinet ministers to campaign for its candidates but still faced humiliating defeat," he said.

Rai said, "The citizens of Delhi stood together against such hatred and reminded the BJP that this is Delhi and the politics of hatred will not work here. For several years the people of Seelampur have voted only for the Congress party but in return, the Congress party has not given anything to the people of Seelampur. Today various development works

are happening in the area under AAP rule which has not happened in the last 25 years and has happened in the last five years." The AAP leader further said, "The Kejriwal government is continuously working for the development of the citizens. Quality education, quality healthcare, zero electricity bill, zero water bill, CCTV cameras and various other works were done by the Kejriwal government. "The Kejriwal government is working relentlessly for the development of Seelampur and whatever work is remaining will also be done within the stipulated time," he said.

"This by-election is more important than the Vidhan Sabha election. I appeal to the people of Seelampur to vote for AAP. I appeal to everyone that this time the AAP councillor should win in the historic majority," he added.

11 kids working as bonded labourers rescued: DCPCR

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR), along with officials of various other departments, conducted a rescue operation at seven places under the jurisdiction of Police Station-Samaypur Badli and rescued 11 children from their work station.

"These children were working in hazardous conditions as bonded labourers in bakery units, kharat machine units and auto center units of Alipur area of North Delhi District. One child was rescued from a residential place where he was working as a domestic worker. The rescued children were exposed to all kinds of physical and mental trauma, especially in the times of a Covid pandemic. The raid was conducted on February 19," the DCPCR said in a statement.

The team consists of Ajit Singh Thakur, SDM Alipur, Police team from Samaypur Badli police station, Labour Department, North West District, NGO, Sahyog Care for You and officials of Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR).

Anurag Kundu, Chairperson, DCPCR, said, "The Commission's aim of making Delhi Child-labour free by 2023 can be realized only through proper social reintegration and rehabilitation of the rescued children and collective efforts of all citizens civil society and the state."

"All the 11 rescued children were minor, the youngest one being barely eight years old. The Civil Defence team deployed by the District Magistrate (North) did a splendid job in ensuring the safety measures required during the course of the operation.



Additionally, they made sure that all the rescued children felt secure in the premises and were well taken care of," he said.

In another rescue operation conducted on January 28 in which 51 minors rescued were led by Neha Bansal, DM, West and Nishant Bodh, SDM, Punjabi Bagh. Out of these 51 innocent children, 10 were boys and the rest 41 were girls. The rescue mission was undertaken at sawmill, shoe and scrap units of Nangloi area, West Delhi, it said.

"The children have been placed in child care institutions and will be restored with their parents and families at the earliest. DCPCR would continue to work towards ensuring that children are provided with back-wages and compensation as well as necessary action is taken against the offenders which might act as a deterrent to such persons and conditions that exploit children," it added.

DCPCR played the role of coordination in both the raids and rescue operations. In both the rescue operations, the children were mostly found to be working for over 12 hours a day and were paid a bare minimum amount of ₹100-150 per day.

In its efforts to making Delhi a Child Labour free city by 2023, DCPCR is looking for support from the citizens of Delhi and have launched a WhatsApp number (9599001855) where information of child labour can be shared and reporting citizens will be awarded for sharing the correct information.

Rinku Sharma murder case: 4 more arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police on Sunday arrested four more men in connection with the killing of 25-year-old Rinku Sharma in outer Delhi's Mangolapuri area. They were nabbed by the Crime Branch of Delhi Police which is currently probing the case.

The accused have been identified as Deen Mohammad (40), Dilshan (22), Fayaiz (21) and Faizan (21), all residents of Mangolapuri. In total, nine men have been arrested in connection with the incident so far.

According to Anil Mittal, the Additional Public Relation Officer (APRO) of Delhi Police, after examination of witnesses and CCTV, crime branch team probing the case has arrested four more men in connection with the killing of Rinku Sharma.

"The accused were identified and arrested based on a



footage where they could be seen attacking Sharma," he said.

A day after the fifth accused was arrested in connection with the killing of Sharma, the police had transferred the case to the crime branch.

According to police, on the night of February 10, when both the victim and the accused men were attending a birthday party, an argument broke out between them over their food joints in Rohini.

They also allegedly slapped and threatened each other at the party, following which they left. The two parties had similar tussles over the same issue sometime back as well, police had said.

Later, the four men went to Sharma's house where the victim along with his elder brother were already standing outside with sticks. A scuffle broke out between the two sides again during which the accused stabbed Sharma and fled from the spot, a senior police officer had said.

Sharma's brother Mannu (19), however, had alleged that Rinku Sharma was killed as he was actively participating in the donation drive for the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya.

However, the Delhi Police had denied any communal angle to the murder and said the fight at the birthday party took place over a business rivalry.

GDA junks its own proposal to develop residential colony

STAFF REPORTER ■ GHAZIABAD

The Ghaziabad Development Authority (GDA) has turned down its own proposal to develop a residential scheme on the vacant plot of 10,000 square meter in posh Nehru Nagar residential locality.

Earlier this plot was used as the warehouse of GDA to store raw material. About five years ago, the GDA stopped storing raw material. Since then the plot was lying vacant and GDA was considering to develop a residential scheme so the proposal to convert its land use was put in the agenda before the board.

The board further passed a budget to increase the revenue at ₹607 crore in 20 21-2022 from ₹606 crore in 2020-21. The expenditure for the coming 2021-2122 session has been speculated at ₹1,001/- crore.

in the densely populated residential colony of Nehru Nagar," said the chairperson.

In the meantime a plot was allowed to be subdivided to develop a house society in Kaushambhi residential locality on Delhi border. Justifying the decision the chairperson said being a huge plot, no big builder came to participate in auctions so the GDA decided to sell it after altering it in small size plots.

The board further passed a budget to increase the revenue at ₹607 crore in 20 21-2022 from ₹606 crore in 2020-21. The expenditure for the coming 2021-2122 session has been speculated at ₹1,001/- crore.

Proposed Delhi-Mumbai expressway to boost Sohna's real estate business

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

The construction of the Delhi-Mumbai expressway which will pass through Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra will help Sohna, in Gurugram, to emerge as another new business hub, as the project will help in boosting investment with improved road connectivity.

There are several sectors around the under construction Dwarka Expressway and on the Delhi-Alwar expressway (NH-248A) where there has been a spurt in affordable housing. Also affordable and plotted colonies are being developed in Sohna region. With this expansion, Sohna will also be able to

compete with Cyber hub, Golf Course Road and Golf Road Extension Road.

Sohna's sector-28A and 36 have evolved into affordable and mid-segment hubs. Group housing, builder floors and villas are being built in the region.

Sectors around Dwarka Expressway have started gaining momentum in addition to group housing projects from several major developers such as Signature Global, as well as Plotted Development Affordable Housing Projects.

Real Estate experts said that urbanisation, evolving infrastructure and better connectivity are the main reasons for the growth of the Gurugram real estate sector. Due to this, investment in properties around Dwarka Expressway is

getting higher.

At the same time, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has been ordered by the Central Government to complete the Dwarka Expressway project by the end of 2022. Due to the construction work of this project is going on in full swing. This has led to rising property prices around the expressway. Thus, the Dwarka Expressway has also become a new realty hotspot for affordable housing in the NCR.

Affordable houses with better facilities are being built by major developers around both the expressways. It is estimated that a private developer has invested more than ₹65,000 crore in residential and commercial projects in Sector-103, 107.

Cops take initiatives to spread word on vital services

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a bid to establish better communication with public and to create awareness, the Delhi Police has launched two people-friendly initiatives — JanSampark Vahan and Prabhodini — across the national Capital. Police said that the vehicles in these two initiatives will halt for an hour at a spot where the officials deployed in these vans will explain to the general public about the services, before moving to the next spot.

According to Chinmoy Biswal, the Public Relations Officer (PRO) of Delhi Police, Jan Sampark Vahan (Dil Ki Police Rath) was launched by on the 74th Raising Day this year with a view to strengthen the police public relations and to publicize the various online



services, mobile applications, helpline numbers and other facilities providing to the citizens of Delhi.

"This Jan Sampark Vahan will show Delhi police heritage, good work especially during Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown. There will be a facility to inform the public about various online services on LCD screen installed in the vehicles," said the PRO.

Three Jan Sampark Vahans have been allotted to each zone, Southern, Northern and Central zones, of Delhi Police which is doing rounds at various residential areas and other prominent locations of each district," said the PRO.

"One Liaison Officer and a PFO are in the Vahan who interacts with the public and

make aware them about various community policing and Citizen Centric Schemes launched by the Delhi Police," said the PRO

adding that Jan Sampark programmes are also being organised to connect with the citizens at the halting places of the Vahan across the city.

Meanwhile, Police this year, in an initiative towards economic offences, launched its Economic Offences Awareness

Rath - 'Prabhodini' in collaboration with State Bank of India for public awareness.

This vehicle is equipped with all necessary and modern Audio-Visual Aids. "With the help of this awareness rath, sincere efforts will be made at the malls, parks, colleges, schools and other public places to make the public aware and alert about the economic offences by providing them the latest information," said police.

"Prabhodini will play vital role in establishing active communication with the public at various places for imparting knowledge through short films, course material and mass interactions. The various economic offences will be explained in detail with regard to the preventive measures to be taken against them," said police.

"The questions and doubts of the people pertaining to these offences will also be addressed appropriately. The representatives of Reserve Bank of India, SEBI and other Financial Institutions will also be included in this Awareness Campaign. This is a special initiative of Delhi Police for value based Social Consciousness and Meaningful Engagement with more and more people," police added.

Sisodia holds padyatra in Kondli, Trilokpuri



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Sunday held a massive padyatra in Kondli and Trilokpuri in support of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) candidates for the upcoming municipal corporation by-elections.

The AAP candidates, along with local MLAs and a large number of volunteers, joined the padyatra and sought votes from the public. During the public dialogue, the public openly praised the AAP Government and expressed tremendous support for the AAP in MCD by-elections.

Cabinet Minister Satyendar Jain also held a meeting at Rohini Sector-24 and party senior leader Rajendra Pal Gautam campaigned in Kondli and appealed to the people to vote for AAP candidates

Party leaders talked to

the citizens of Delhi by going door to door before the MCD by-elections. During the door to door campaigns, the AAP leaders told them about the rampant corruption done by the BJP ruled MCD for the last 15 years. "The citizens of Delhi are well aware of the corruption of the BJP ruled MCD and how the BJP has made the MCD bankrupt. The citizens of Delhi have made up their mind to throw BJP out of the MCD and to elect the AAP," they said.

The bypolls according to the election body will be held for two wards under the North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) and three under the East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC).

The wards are: Ward No. 32N, (Rohini-C); Ward No. 62N, (Shalimar Bagh North) in north Delhi and Ward No. 02-E (Trilokpuri); Ward No. 08-E (Kalyanpuri) and Ward No. 41-E (Chauhan Bangar) in east Delhi.

TO EASE TENSION AT LAC Another India-China round of military-level talks soon

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Focusing on reducing tension at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) at the earliest, India and China will soon have another round of talks at the military level. It may firm up the mutually acceptable process to pull back troops from the friction points including Hot Springs, Gogra and Depsang plains.

These were the takeaways from the marathon 16-hour long talks between the Corps Commanders of India and China on Saturday at Moldo in Chushul sector of Ladakh. Meeting for the first time since withdrawal of the troops from the Pangong Tso (lake) on Thursday last week, the two senior military officials also reviewed the pull-back and appreciated the smooth withdrawal.

A joint statement issued by India and China later on Sunday said "On February 20, the 10th round of China-India Corps Commander Level Meeting was held on the Chinese side of the Moldo/Chushul border meeting point. The two sides positively appraised the smooth completion of disengagement of frontline troops in the Pangong Lake area noting that it was a significant step forward that provided a good basis for resolution of other remaining issues along the LAC in Western Sector."

"They had candid and in-depth exchange of views on other issues along the LAC in the Western Sector. The two sides agreed to follow the important consensus of their state leaders, continue their communication and dialogue, stabilize and control the situation on the ground, push for a mutually acceptable resolution of the remaining issues in a steady and orderly manner, so

as to jointly maintain peace and tranquility in the border areas."

The smooth pull back at the Pangong lake and the two sides lauding it was seen as the first step in the long process to restore normalcy at the LAC in Ladakh after the ten-month long face-offs. Efforts were now on the lend momentum to withdrawal from the other friction points and the two Commanders held extensive discussion on Saturday in this aspect, sources said.

The 16-hour long talks beginning at ten am on Saturday and ending at two am on Sunday primarily focused on hasten up disengagement from the Hot Springs, Gogra and Depsang, they said. India was represented by Lt General P K Menon while Major General Liu Lin headed the Chinese delegation.

On Saturday evening, sources had said bringing down the tension in the region was the broad priority of the talks. India has all along been maintaining that disengagement at all the friction points was necessary to de-escalate the situation in the region.

Officials were hopeful of early agreement to mutually pull back troops from Patrolling Point 15 and 17A in Gogra as normalcy was restored to a large extent in the adjacent Pangong region.

However, a mutually acceptable plan to disengage from the Depsang plains could take longer, sources said. This region in the past also saw stand-offs and intervention at the higher levels were resorted to defuse tension, they added.

Sources said the tension in the Depsang Plains was due to China blocking Indian patrol parties from accessing Patrol Points (PP) 10, 11A, 12 and 13. That was due to the reason that the Indian patrols

have to go beyond a feature called Bottle neck area on foot.

Also, the region is strategically important for India as it has the advantage of monitoring all activities at the Karakoram range and highway and nearby regions. Moreover, the Daulat Beg Oldie airfield there has added muscle to India's military strength as it can shore up its logistics by air in a short time.

Given the smooth withdrawal of troops from Pangong, sources said India was hopeful that pull back could take place soon from the other friction points too.

On February 11, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh announced in Parliament that India and China reached an agreement on disengagement in the North and South banks of Pangong lake that mandates both sides to "cease" forward deployment of troops in a "phased, coordinated and verifiable" manner.

Under the agreement, he said China will pull back its troops to east of Finger 8 areas in the northern bank of Pangong lake while the Indian personnel will be based at their permanent base at Dhan Singh Thapa Post near Finger 3 in the region. Similar action would take place on the south bank of the lake as well, he said.

The sources said troops of both sides have retreated to positions in line with the agreement.

The disengagement process began on February 10.

In his statement in Parliament, the defence minister also said it was agreed to convene the next meeting of senior commanders of both sides within 48 hours of completion of the disengagement in the Pangong lake areas so as to resolve all other remaining issues.

Sonia accuses Modi Govt of profiteering off people's misery



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress President Sonia Gandhi on Sunday accused the Government of "profiteering" off "people's misery" and demanded an immediate rollback of the increase in prices.

In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, she said the truth is that as GDP "nosedives", the prices of gas, diesel and petrol continue to rise unchecked.

"I write to you to convey every citizen's anguish and deep distress regarding the spiralling fuel and gas prices. On one hand, India is witnessing systematic erosion of jobs, wages and household income. The middle class and those at the margins of our society are struggling. These challenges have been compounded by runaway inflation and an unprecedented rise in price of almost all household items and essential commodities," the Congress chief said.

Stressing that fuel prices are at an "historic and unsustainable" high, Sonia Gandhi said petrol has breached the ₹100 per litre mark in many parts of the country and the surging price of diesel has added to the escalating woes of millions of farmers.

"Sadly, in these distressing times, the Government has chosen to profiteer off people's misery and suffering," Sonia Gandhi said.

The increase pushed the petrol price to ₹90.58 a litre in Delhi and to ₹97 in Mumbai. This was the 12th straight day of price hike and the largest daily increase since oil companies started to revise rates on a daily basis in 2017.

After verification of documents shown by Bhaker, the security officials informed her that the document required for exemption of payment of handling charge for carriage of arms, as per laid down norms, is not there.

And, they said fixed charges for the carriage of arms would have to be paid, the airline clarified in the statement.

It was explained to Bhaker that the document for exemption shown by her was not "valid" as it was signed only by the assistant secretary of the National Rifle Association.

As per rules, details of which are available on the Air India website, signature of only the secretary or president of a bonafide association is recognised for waiver of the charges, Air India said.

"Subsequently, the applicable charges - that is ₹5,000 along with 5 per cent GST; for two, a total ₹10,200 - were conveyed to Bhaker, who requested for 10-15 minutes from our personnel to procure the required document for waiver of charges for carriage of her arms on board," said the statement.

The moment she furnished the required document to the Air India check-in and security personnel, her baggage including the arms were accepted for carriage, the statement said.

Air India said though the DGCA permit allowed her carriage of arms from February 20, in view of the Rifle Association certificate with bonafide signature, it extended courtesy to have her on board with the arms on February 19 itself.

"Subsequently, Bhaker with her mother proceeded for their security check and were facilitated to board the aircraft," the airline added.

Air India has always encouraged and has the highest respect for sports and sportspersons, it said.

To set the record straight, domestic crude oil production has fallen to an 18- year low in 2020, Sonia Gandhi said

"What baffles most citizens, is that these prices have been increased despite moderate prices of international crude oil. To put it in context, the crude oil price is nearly half of what it was during the UPA government's tenure. Therefore, your Government's act of raising prices (continuously for 12 days till February 20th) is little less than a brazen act of profiteering," she said.

What is equally distressing is that despite being in power for almost seven years now, the government continues to blame previous regimes for its own economic mismanagement, she said in her letter to Modi.

To set the record straight, domestic crude oil production has fallen to an 18-year low in 2020, Sonia Gandhi said.

Governments are elected to ease the burden of people and at the very least, not work directly contrary to their interests, the Congress chief said.

"I urge you to roll back these increases and pass on the benefit to our middle and salaried class, our farmers and poor and our fellow citizens. It is they who are battling an unprecedented economic slowdown, widespread unemployment, wage reductions and job losses, high prices and erosion of income," she said.

"I hope you will agree that it is time for your government to focus on solutions instead of looking for excuses. India deserves better," Sonia Gandhi said.

Health Ministry urged to include PwDs in priority group for Covid vaccination

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, under the Union Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry, has written to the Union Health Ministry to include the PwDs as one of the priority groups for its ongoing Covid vaccination programme.

KVS Rao, Director of the DePwD, in a letter to Gayatri Mishra, Joint Secretary in the Union Health Ministry, urged for inclusion of PwDs including Thalassemia-major patients in the priority list of Covid-19 vaccine to ensure their safety from the infection.

According to health experts, persons having comorbidities like diabetes as well PwDs are vulnerable to the Coronavirus because of their low immunity. Hence they need to be immunised on the priority basis, said the experts.

In fact, last month around 30 disability rights organisations had written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Health Minister Harsh Vardhan in this regard.

The disability rights groups, including the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People, Ektha and Sama



Foundation, counted reasons like physical vulnerabilities, preexisting medical conditions, communication barriers, close contact needed with others for personal care (activities of daily living), social isolation and disruption in social networks, discrimination in access to healthcare facilities resulting in deprioritisation in times of limited resources.

"It is vital for personal care attendants, health workers and persons with disabilities, chronically ill people to have access to the vaccine. They should (also) be part of decision-making about vaccine priorities and planning for how future public health emergencies are handled," said Arman Ali, Executive Director, NCPEDP.

Further, collectively, the sector has demanded clarity on scheduling the Covid-19 vac-

cine for persons with disabilities. Ektha co-founder Rajiv Rajan said persons with disabilities are the most vulnerable groups when it comes to the pandemic.

"Many of us lack immunity. Most of us cannot maintain social distancing because we need support for our day to day activities. Many of us cannot understand what is going on around us as modes and means of communication are not accessible to many of us," he said.

Following approval of two vaccines - Covaxin developed by Bharat Biotech and Covishield from the Oxford/AstraZeneca stable being manufactured by the Serum Institute of India - for emergency use in the country, currently the government is vaccinating healthcare workers and frontline workers.

Centre focused on promoting rural industries, aims to take annual turnover to ₹5L crore: Rajnath

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Master artisans and craftsmen can contribute big time to the country's economy and the Central Government's aim is to take the rural industries' annual turnover of about ₹80,000 crore to ₹5 lakh crore within the next two to three years, Union minister Rajnath Singh said on Sunday while inaugurating the 26th edition of 'Hunar Haat' here.

More than 600 artisans and craftsmen from over 31 states and Union Territories are participating in the Minority Affairs Ministry's 'Hunar Haat' being held at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here on the theme of "Vocal for Local" from February 20 to March 1.

The official inauguration, however, was held Sunday.

The artisans and craftsmen have a very important role in contributing to the country's economy and GDP, Defence Minister Singh said.

"This is the irony that our rural industries did not get the kind of encouragement they should have. But our government is focused on promoting rural industries," he said.

"The turnover of rural industries per year is approximately ₹80,000 crore and our government aims to take this turnover to Rs 5 lakh crore within the next two to three years," he said.

Hailing the 'Hunar Haat' initiative of the Minority Affairs Ministry, Singh said it would go a long way in achieving the objective of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'.

Singh said the 'Hunar Haat' brings together indigenous artisans and craftsmen from across the country.

This Haat is a beautiful exhibition of our traditional art and craft and more importantly our cultural mosaic," he said.

Artisans and craftsmen from states such as Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chandigarh, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, are participating in 'Hunar Haat' to display and sell their products.

Even strong suspicion cannot take place of proof: SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Suspicion, however strong, cannot take the place of proof, the Supreme Court has said, stressing that an accused is presumed to be innocent unless proved guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

There has to be a chain of evidence so complete as to show that in all human probability the act must have been done by the accused, a bench of justices Indra Banerjee and Hemant Gupta observed while upholding an order of the Orissa High Court which acquitted two men accused of murdering a home guard by electrocuting him.

"It is well settled by a plethora of judicial pronouncement of this court that suspicion, however strong cannot take the place of proof. An accused is presumed to be innocent unless proved guilty beyond a reasonable doubt," the bench said.



As per an FIR lodged with

the police by Gitanjali Tadu, her husband Bijay Kumar Tadu had been working deputated at Chandabali police station.

The woman has alleged that the accused Banabihari Mohapatra, his son Luja and other accomplices killed her husband with an electric shock after administering some poisonous substances to him.

The apex court said the post mortem report reveals that the cause of death was

electric shock and there is no conclusive evidence that the death was homicidal.

"The mere fact that the deceased was lying dead at a room held by the accused respondent No 1 and that the accused respondents had informed the complainant that the deceased had been lying motionless and still and not responding to shouts and calls, does not establish that the accused respondents murdered the deceased," the bench said.

Sreedharan's impact likely to be 'minimal'; BJP not serious contender in Kerala: Tharoor

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With E Sreedharan throwing his hat in the political ring by deciding to join the BJP, senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Sunday said the technocrat is likely to have a "minimal" impact on the upcoming Kerala Assembly polls, and asserted that the BJP is not a serious contender except in a few seats in the State.

Tharoor also said it will be very difficult for the BJP to improve upon its performance of winning one seat in the 2016 assembly polls and the high

point of Sreedharan's impact on Kerala elections will turn out to be the announcement of joining the BJP itself.

In an interview with PTI, Tharoor said he was surprised at the announcement that Sreedharan was going to enter the political fray and join the BJP.

He said Sreedharan's entry came as a surprise to him because the technocrat had a long innings executing engineering projects, not making or implementing policies in a fractious democracy. "It's a very different world," he added.

Asked what kind of impact

Sreedharan could have on the Kerala Assembly polls, the MP from Thiruvananthapuram said, "Since he has no political background or experience, I think his impact is likely to be minimal."

"When I joined politics at 53, I thought I had left it too late to make the kind of impact I felt I was capable of. What can I say about someone who is 88?" Tharoor said.

On whether Sreedharan's entry will make the Kerala polls a three-way contest and the BJP will emerge as a serious contender alongside.

AI denies shooter Bhaker's charge of 'harassment' at Delhi airport

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Air India (AI) on Sunday denied allegation of "harassment" of Tokyo Olympic prospect Manu Bhaker by two of its staff at the Delhi airport and said its assertion was based on CCTV footage.

In a statement, AI claimed that "legitimate" documents were asked for from Bhaker when she was boarding its flight along with her mother for Bhopal from Delhi on February 19, contrary to the allegations made by her against the airline.

The 19-year-old Commonwealth Games and Youth Olympics gold medalist pistol shooter had sought action against two employees of

the airline, for alleged "harassment" and "insulting" her.

She had alleged that she had to go through the "ordeal" despite carrying all valid documents and clearance from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) for travelling with her weapons and ammunition.

Stating that as a responsible airline, it always "adheres" to the rules and regulations governing operations, it said that "in this case also, Air India was only following the protocol regarding such a sensitive activity like the carriage of arms on board."

"Our employee Manoj Gupta was at the counter throughout and had, at no point, communicated directly

with Bhaker. This is also corroborated by the CCTV footage. Hence, the allegation of misbehaviour by him simply does not arise," Air India said in the statement.

The CCTV footage also nullifies the passenger's allegation of bribes being asked for and snatching of mobile phone, it said.

According to Air India, during check-in at the Delhi airport counter, Bhaker told its check-in employees that she was carrying an Air Pistol and a 0.22-bore gun.

"She was advised by our counter personnel to get the documents, mandatory to carry arms and ammunition, verified by Air India security officials," said the statement.

Cow Science exam postponed



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The much awaited Cow Science exam known as 'Kamdhenu Gau Vigyan Prachar-Prasar Examination', for which there is no registration fee, has been postponed. It was earlier scheduled for February 25, 2021. No information on the new date has been provided yet. A note on kamdhenugvppexam.org says, "Please note that online Kamdhenu Gau Vigyan Prachar Prasar Exam /Pratiyogita which was scheduled for 25th Feb 2021 including Mock Examination on 21st Feb 2021 has been postponed."

The University Grants Commission has earlier written to Vice Chancellors of 900 universities in the country to encourage the students to write the Central govern-

ment's "indigenous cow science" examination.

The brainchild of the Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog set up in 2019 under the Central Animal

Husbandry ministry, study material on its website says almost what Bengal's BJP chief Dilip Ghosh had said. That Indian cows have something special in their humps that turn sunshine into gold which gives their milk its yellow colour."

For the one-hour online examination, the study material shared by the Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog says that cow dung is used as a protection against radiations in nuclear centres in India and Russia. It had protected Bhopal residents from the gas leak too. The material also states that Indian cows have a special power to absorb the sun's energy with the help of the solar pulse situated in their humps. As a result, making Indian cow milk, cow dung, and cow urine nourishing.

CBI takes over Ranchi 'planned accident' case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Special Crime Branch (SCB) of CBI, Patna has taken over a 2017 case of Argora police station in Ranchi following a directive from Jharkhand High Court where-

in the complaint (victim's mother) had alleged that her husband Dr Subhashish Sannigrahi had killed their son Antariksh in a planned road accident on July 25, 2016.

The victim had met with a road accident on July 25, 2016 and succumbed to his injuries two days later on July 27, 2016.

The complainant Rupali Mohanty, mother of the victim, has claimed that the said accident was a planned one and was allegedly conspired by his husband Dr Subhashish Sannigrahi and other members of his family.

The Argora Police Station, Ranchi had registered a case in 2017 against the complainant's husband and other relatives, Debashish Sannigrahi, Sujoy Chandra Sannigrahi and

Jharna Sannigrahi under Indian Penal Code (IPC) Sections relating to murder, criminal conspiracy and common intention.

In response to a Writ Petition (Criminal) No 419 of 2017 seeking direction to the CBI to take over the probe into the Argora police station case number 180/2017, the Jharkhand High Court in an order in December last year directed the CBI to take over the probe following which the agency on Thursday re-registered the case.

"The facts mentioned in the complaint discloses commission of offence under IPC Section 302 (murder), 120-B (criminal conspiracy) and 34 (common intention). Hence Regular Case (FIR) RC 0922021S0001 dated 18.02.2021 is re-registered and entrusted to Rajesh Kumar, Inspector of Police, CBI, SCB, Patna for investigation and report," reads the order by Additional Superintendent of Police/Head of Branch, CBI, SCB, Patna, Rajesh Kumar Sinha.

New education policy reflects Modi Govt's commitment towards empowerment of all Indian languages: Shah

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Sunday that the new education policy reflects the commitment of the Modi Government towards the preservation, development and empowerment of all Indian languages.

In a message on the occasion of the International Mother Language Day, Shah said the mother tongue is a powerful medium of expression.

"Our new education policy reflects the commitment of the Modi government towards the preservation, development and empowerment of all Indian languages," he tweeted in Hindi.

The home minister said maximum efforts should be made for the use of mother tongue and foster the wisdom passed on by it to strengthen the foundation of the country's culture in children.

"Greetings on the occasion of the International Mother Language Day. This day inspires us to stay connected with our cultural heritage," he tweeted.

INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY

Say Jay Bangla instead of hello: Didi to people

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Addressing a rally to celebrate International Mother Language Day or Matribhasha Diwas on Sunday, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said, "Even if they put me in jail I will continue to shout from there Jai Bangla, Jai Bangla like the Banga Bandhu (Mujibur Rehman)."

She asked the audience to "respond saying 'Jay Bangla instead of hello whenever you pick up a phone call to emphasise your feeling as a Bengali.'"

In what critics called a bid to fan up "Bengali sentiments" ahead of the elections, Mamata said how her Government had submitted the proposal of renaming Bengal as "Bangla" four years ago but "they are sitting on it and have not yet cleared it," apparently on the ground that there is a separate country called Bangladesh.

"So what if there is a coun-



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee addresses an event to mark International Mother Language Day in Kolkata on Sunday PTI

try called Bangladesh ... that is a country after all and we are a State that wants to be renamed as Bangla ... why the Centre will not respect our sentiments? Why if there can be States called Odisha and

Andhra Pradesh ... why if there can be a Punjab in India when there is a separate Punjab in Pakistan we cannot call our State as Bangla," Mamata said adding "this is not the only instance when they treat us in a step-motherly manner ... there are numerous other occasions too."

Whenever someone refers to Bengal in Delhi "they say O forget it is the worst place ..." Banerjee said wondering "why this treatment to Bengal ... why this perception problem regarding Bengal when will it change."

Referring to how "our icons like Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Rabindranath Tagore, Vidya Sagar, Shyam Prasad Mukherjee, Raja Ram Mohan Roy have always been ignored by them ..." Mamata said, "This is a clear example of how if anyone from Bengal goes up they will pull that person down."

Yogi: CPM, Congress promote 'love jihad', terrorism in Kerala

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The CPI(M) and the Congress were hands in glove to appease the minorities in the State of Kerala according to Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh.

"While the Government of Uttar Pradesh has brought in laws banning Love Jihad and terrorist activities, the Kerala Government is taking steps to encourage love jihad and help terrorism. The CPI(M) Government is also encouraging setting up of Halal Bank in the State," said the UP Chief Minister while inaugurating the Vijay Yatra of the Kerala BJP from Kasaragod in the north to Thiruvananthapuram in the South.

The Yatra being led by K Surendran, Kerala BJP chief, would pass through all assembly constituencies in the State, getting ready for the upcoming assembly election. A huge crowd had gathered at Kasaragod to greet Adityanath and listen to him.

The UP Chief Minister who flew down to Mangalore from Lucknow travelled by car to Kasaragod to flag off the rally. Most leaders of the faction-ridden Kerala BJP were present at the inaugural function. P C Thomas, a leader of the Kerala Congress faction who was with the Congress-led UDF till last week had

turned up for the inaugural function. Thushar Vellappalli, who had been grilled by the UAE Police in connection with a case of financial embezzlement too was present to greet the rally.

Adityanath reminded the audience that the people of Tripura had dumped the CPI(M) which ruled the State continuously for more than 25 years and voted for the BJP in the last assembly election because of the authoritarian and corrupt CPI(M) government. "It is for the people of the State of Kerala to vote out the corrupt CPI(M) government in this State. The government led by Pinarayi Vijayan is enmeshed in corruption while thousands of youth are demonstrating in front of the Secretariat for jobs due to them. But the CPI(M) is violating all norms and appointing relatives and associates of party leaders into government service," said Adityanath.

The BJP had opened its account in the Kerala Legislative Assembly for the first time in 2016 when its non-nagarian candidate O Rajagopal won from Nemam in Thiruvananthapuram district.

Though BJP leaders claim that the party would win considerable number of seats in the State, factionalism and charges of corruption have dampened the spirit of the cadre.

Maha CM warns of lockdown if Covid norms flouted

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Taking serious cognisance of the increasing Covid-19 cases in the State, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray announced temporary ban on political, religious and social programmes, even as he gave an ultimatum to the people that after eight days he would decide on re-imposing the lockdown if the people did not mend ways and follow pandemic norms strictly.

Interacting the people across the state via Facebook live, the chief minister wondered: "I would like to know from you whether we should re-impose lockdown or not ... I am waiting for feedback from you for the next eight days. How will I get your feedback? No. But I will observe those who do not want re-imposition of lockdown would wear masks, wash hands and maintain social distancing. Those who want lockdown will roam around freely without masks and not adhere to norms. Let's see what happens during the next eight days."

Expressing serious concern over the changed attitude of a section of the people who have lowered their guard and are not following the Covid-19 norms, Uddhav said: "Corona is once again swinging like a sword over heads. We will get to know in the next 10 to 15 days whether there is a second wave of Covid-19 in the state. This is especially so after the increase in Corona cases in the western countries."

"Lockdown may and may not be the answers, but I would like to tell you we have to break the chain of the virus. Hence we need to follow the restrictions," he said.

Announcing the ban on political, religious and social programmes, the chief minister said: "Time has come for us to stop crowds in public places. As the heads of political parties, all of us want our respective parties to grow which we want to do by going to the people. But this is not the time for that. Our priority now is fight Corona. My appeal to all political parties to suspend/cancel political meetings, rallies, marches and protests, where there would be crowds. Similarly, we have decided to ban on religious and social programmes... In some places we are intensifying restrictions. Night curfew is being imposed in Amravati district where the number of cases have gone up."

The chief minister's interaction with the people across the state came on a day when the authorities imposed several restrictions in cities like Mumbai, Pune and Nashik, while a week-long night curfew was imposed at

Amravati in eastern Maharashtra, where there has been increasing incidence of Covid-19 case in the last few days.

Alluding to the first phase of vaccination, Uddhav said that as many as 9 lakh frontline Covid-19 workers had been administered vaccines. "My appeal to all such Covid workers who have so far not received the vaccine should immediately avail the vaccine. As far as the administration of vaccines to the rest of the people in the state, I cannot say for sure when it will happen, since it is not my hand."

During the course of his interaction, the chief minister announced that the state government was launching a new initiative 'Mi Jawabdar' (I am Responsible) to fight the pandemic. "Last year, we had launched 'Majhi Kutumb, Maji Jawabdari' (My Family, My Responsibility). We implemented that well. Now with the increase in the Covid cases, we are launching a new initiative 'Mi Jawabdar' (I am Responsible), which obligates each and every person to take care of himself or herself."

Dwelling upon the increase in the number of cases, Uddhav said: "Today, cases have risen by nearly 7,000 whereas the same was between 2,000 to 2,500 a fortnight ago while on the other hand the active cases that were around 40,000 now the figure has gone up to 53,000"

"There are indicators that the cases are rising but we cannot stop running the economy. We have the people's demands like opening of restaurants, reopening of temples, restarting of local trains for the general public in Mumbai since the situation improved. But at the same time, I would like to point out that people have stopped taking precautions and not wearing masks," he said.

Meanwhile, Deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar announced that schools and colleges were in Pune and its sister city of Pimpri-Chinchwad would remain shut till February 28. "Movement of people will also be restricted between 11pm and 6am when only essential activities like medical services, milk supply will be allowed. The hotels, restaurants and bars will not be allowed to operate beyond 11 pm," he said.

"One-week complete lockdown remains in force in Amravati district excluding Achalpur city, beginning 8 pm Monday," women and child welfare minister Yashomati Thakur said. Meanwhile, in an effort to check the spread of Covid-19, the authorities on Sunday clamped night curfew in Pune city and the neighbouring Pimpri-Chinchwad.

Rajnath inaugurates 'Hunar Haat' at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Delhi

NEW DELHI: Defence Minister

Rajnath Singh on Sunday inaugurated the 26th "Hunar Haat" of indigenous artisans and craftsmen from across the country at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi.

Lok Sabha MP Meenakshi Lekhi graced the occasion as the Guest of Honour. Secretary, Union Minority Affairs Ministry P. K. Das, other senior officials and dignitaries were also present on the occasion.

On the occasion, Rajnath Singh said that "Every region of the country has an amazing talent and brilliance. The artisans of "Hunar Haat" are not only "Ustad" of art and craft; they

are also "Ustad" of destiny. Rajnath said that "Hunar Haat" has been playing an important role in strengthening the country's economy.

Modi Govt is promoting the indigenous artisans and craftsmen of the country. "Hunar Haat" brings together indigenous artisans and craftsmen from across the country.

Rajnath Singh said that, "Hunar Haat" is a beautiful exhibition of our traditional art and craft and more importantly our "cultural mosaic". "Hunar Haat" is doing branding of traditional legacy of artisans, craftsmen.

Sasikala fights lonely battle to regain ADMK control

CHENNAI: It has been more than

a fortnight since V K Sasikala, the former aide to J Jayalithaa, walked to the free world after her four year-long imprisonment in connection with the disproportionate asset case. Though TTV Dhinakaran, general secretary of the Amma Makkal Menetra Kazhagam had claimed that Sasikala's return to Tamil Nadu would have a cascading effect in the AIADMK politics, nothing of that sort has happened. Not even a single office bearer of the AIADMK, Sasikala's parent party, has bothered to pay a courtesy call to Chinnamma at her mansion in Chennai's T-Nagar.

Last Monday marked Edappadi Palaniswami completing four years as chief minister of Tamil Nadu.

Palaniswami and his cabinet colleague D Jayakumar reiterated that Sasikala and her relations were not welcome to the AIADMK. "Dhinakaran's declaration that he and Sasikala would retrieve the AIADMK from Palaniswami and others has been proved to be a hollow exercise and nobody is believing it anymore," said Kolahala Srenivas, author and political commentator.

He said Palaniswami had consolidated his position as chief minister and the co-coordinator of the steering committee which administers the party. "He had been appointed as chief minister by Sasikala in February 2017 as she had to surrender to the prison authorities in Bangalore to serve her jail

term. But Palaniswami, through hard-work, perseverance and pragmatism established himself as the leader.

The looks of a farmer and openness in communicating with the people are his forte and this has compensated for the lack of charisma associated with MGR and Jayalithaa, his predecessors," said Srenivas.

With no known leaders bothering to call on her, Sasikala had approached the Madras High Court to speed up the hearing of a civil petition filed by her in 2017 challenging the authority by which Palaniswami, O Panneerselvam and others in the AIADMK operate. The case has been scheduled for March 15. PNS

LADAKH GEARS UP FOR TOURIST SEASON

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The disengagement of troops of the Indian Army and China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) from the LAC in the eastern Ladakh sector has raised hopes of tour operators waiting eagerly for the tourists to flock the cold desert region in the coming weeks.

On its part the Union Territory administration in Ladakh is also fully geared up for the long tourist season and focusing more and more on promoting adventure tourism. On Sunday the Tourism department, Ladakh also launched the second edition of Ladakh Winter Conclave. The major attraction of the event was the heritage walk in Old Leh town.

"The heritage started from LAMO Centre and ended at the Leh main market. The guests also enjoyed traditional delicacies at the Central Asian

Museum. There were also dance performances at Leh Palace", spokesman of the UT administration said.

Earlier, three parallel sessions on different themes such as mountaineering & trekking, discovering Ladakh's landscape, and rural tourism-homestay, were organised.

Representatives from All Ladakh Tour Operators Association (ALTOA) spoke about realising the full potential of the scope of mountaineering and trekking in Ladakh. There were discussions on the potential of Ladakh becoming a hot-spot for adventure tourism, provided there are adequate infrastructure and policy on adventure tourism, training of mountain guides, the availability of equipment and ease of issuing permits for tourists interested in adventure tourism.

A case study on the Chadar trek was also presented during the presentation.



In the session on discovering Ladakh's landscape, panellists Pranay Lal, Tara Sharma, Sonam Wangchuk and Munish Pandit, discussed the importance of Ladakh's landscape and its relevance to the culture of the region.

Similarly, panellists Tsewang Namgyal, Manisha Pande, Kumar Anubhav, Gaurav Gaur and Sonam Parvez stressed the need to develop a resilient homestay or village tourism model in Ladakh during the session on rural tourism-homestays.

Post-lunch, there were three more parallel sessions. In the session on extreme sport, there was a discussion on promoting Ladakh as a destination for extreme sports such as rock climbing & bouldering, mountain biking, and ice climbing.

Similarly, panellists King Jigmed Namgyal, Darshan

Dudhoria, Yutaka Hirako, Neeraj Bhagat, Shoba Mohan and Monisha Ahmed discussed the need to keep heritage alive through the restoration of old traditional homes and the economic viability of such projects.

Administrative Secretary, Ravinder Kumar stressed the need for a comprehensive policy for UT Ladakh. He also highlighted facilities provided by the Administration for tourists, such as choppers during rescue operations and 100 satellite phones in case of emergency.

Director, Tourism Department, Ladakh, Kunzes Angmo, informed that the Tourism Department is formulating a comprehensive tourism policy for Ladakh. She also highlighted the importance of working towards responsible and sustainable tourism.

Karnataka's Panchamasalis seek quota in Govt jobs, education

IANS ■ BENGALURU

Members of the Panchamasali sect of Karnataka's powerful Lingayat community held a massive rally in the city's Palace grounds on Sunday to seek inclusion in the 2A reservation category for Government jobs and seats in state-run educational institutes.

"If the state government does not include our community in the 2A reservation category for government jobs and educational seats, we will intensify our agitation and lay siege to the state Secretariat," Panchamasali seer Basava Jaya Mruthyunjaya Swami warned.

Over a lakh of the politically-dominant community's members reached the city since Saturday from Kudalasangama in the state's Bagalkot district after a 37-day march (padayatra) in support of their demand.

"We took police permission to stage the march from Kudalasangama and other 17 districts to hold the rally peacefully for ensuring social justice to us, as we have been neglected over the last 70 years," Lingayat Panchamasali Mahasabha president Vijayanand Kashappanavar told reporters here.

Besides scores of the sect's pontiffs, community leaders, legislators from the ruling BJP, including minister Murgesh Nirani, and opposition Congress and JD-S participated in the rally and addressed the gathering.

In his speech, Nirani said Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa

was committed to ensure reservation to the Lingayat sect and efforts would be made to amend the law soon to include the community in the 2A category.

State Information Minister C.C Patil, senior rebel BJP leader Basangouda Yatnal and Congress legislator Lakshmi Hebbalkar and others spoke at the rally and urged the state government to include the sect in the 2A category.

Another seer Vacahnanda Swami, who marched to the city along with hundreds of the community from Basavakalyan in Bidar district, said though the previous BJP government in the state had set up a sub-committee for drafting the law during its 2008-13 tenure, they have not been given reservation as members of other communities. "When Jagadish Shettar was the BJP's third Chief Minister after Yediyurappa and D.V. Sadananda Gowda, a legislative panel was set up in 2012 to study our demand. The panel report said Panchamasalis should be included in 2A," he said.

Of the 108 sub-sects in the Lingayat community, 34 are in the 2A category, while about 70 are in the OBC (Other Backward Classes) category.

Earlier this month, Yediyurappa told reporters that he would do his best to provide reservation to the communities, including Panchamasalis and Kurbas.

"I will not ask the pontiffs leading the agitations to stop their fight, but give me some time. I will work hard to meet their demand," he said.

UP primary schools get makeover to welcome children

IANS ■ LUCKNOW

Primary Government schools in Uttar Pradesh are gearing up to welcome children from March 1 -- almost after a year -- after Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath ordered reopening of schools for classes 1 to 5.

Preparations are going on in full swing to decorate schools with colourful balloons, flowers and festoons to welcome students on the first day of the reopening of the schools following a year-long break due to the pandemic.

The Basic Education Department has directed all schools to create an environment that would encourage students to return to classes.

Students who have been away from school for about a year and have been attending online classes during this period, can expect many surprises when they revisit their schools.

Apart from finding colourful decorations of the classes and gates, the students will also get corona vaccine shots.

According to Lucknow BSA (Basic Shiksha Adhikari) Dinesh Kumar, teachers have been instructed to decorate schools in order to create a festive atmosphere so that children do not hesitate to re-enter school premises due to the long gap.

The schools are also making arrangements for providing safe running drinking water for children.

The schools have been directed to install submersible pumps for the purpose.

It is noteworthy that over 1.83 crore students study in 1.5 lakh schools run by the Basic Education Department in the state.

Besides, over one lakh schools have already undergone transformation during Covid-19 pandemic on the initiative of Yogi Adityanath.

Schools have been decorated with colourful paintings and meaningful slogans.

Schools have also been equipped with the facilities for smart classes and libraries.

Northeast India's first 'Kargil Vijay Smarak' in Assam

Silchar (Assam): A 'Kargil Vijay Smarak' was unveiled in southern Assam's Silchar town to remember the Indian Army martyrs in the Kargil war against Pakistan in 1999.

Renowned sculpturist Swapan Pal made the fibre sculpture of Indian Army martyrs in seven months and installed them as the 'Kargil Vijay Smarak'.

Ruling BJP MLA Dilip Kumar Paul has taken the initiative to build 'Kargil Vijay Smarak' at a cost of Rs 17 lakh. "From my MLA Local Area Development fund, I have given Rs 7 lakh and Rs 10 lakh sanctioned from the Assam Chief Minister's discretionary fund," Pal said.

that the newly-erected 'Kargil Vijay Smarak' in Silchar is the first such memorial in the entire northeastern region. Senior Army officer Pankaj Yadav, retired Army officials and family members of martyrs jointly unveiled the memorial on Sunday.

On July 26 in 1999, the Indian armed forces had recaptured posts in the Kargil sector that had been occupied by Pakistan.

Codenamed 'Operation Vijay', the Kargil war was fought at an altitude of around 16,000 feet wherein 1,042 Pakistani soldiers and militants were killed and 527 Indian soldiers made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty. IANS



Youngsters create a wall mural using used plastic bottles, as part of an awareness campaign, in Mumbai on Sunday PTI

No Ganga Aarti sans permission now

Varanasi (UP): Social organisations and even individuals, performing 'Ganga Aarti' at various ghats will now have to get registered with the Varanasi Municipal Corporation (VMC).

The decision has been taken by the district administration to check encroachments on the riverfront, which is a public property.

The municipal authorities have also been asked to prepare the records of the 'Ganga Aarti'.

District magistrate Kaushal Raj Sharma has asked the municipal authorities to prepare the records of the Ganga aarti and complete the registration process by March end.

Thereafter, no such activities would be allowed on the ghats without the registration and prior permission of the

VMC. "The riverfront is a public property owned by the state government and being looked after by the Varanasi Municipal Corporation," said the district magistrate in a letter to VMC.

"It has been noticed that quite often that some people indulge in disputes over holding Ganga Aarti. The municipal corporation should make a specific regulation for organising the Ganga Aarti along the ghats. The VMC should register the aarti organisers with the allotment of space, which should be renewed every year.

Besides, it should also be ensured that no aarti is organised by any individual or organisation without the VMC's permission," he said. IANS

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PAPER WITH PASSION

'Atmanirbhar' mantra

'Ram Rajya' as a concept is good but the nation wants to see positive changes on the ground

One can only imagine what 'Ram Rajya' would be like, a term that the BJP espouses and its leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, use quite regularly in their public addresses. But it's comparatively easier to understand Mahatma Gandhi's concept of 'Gram Swaraj', which Modi touched upon in his recent speech at the Visva-Bharati convocation. During the event, just ahead of the announcement of the Assembly election dates in the politically sensitive West Bengal, Modi mentioned Rabindranath Tagore several times but it would certainly be in bad taste to read politics into it as the Nobel laureate was the university's founder and the Prime Minister is the Chancellor. However, thankfully, unlike 'Ram Rajya' for which no time frame has been set, the Prime Minister seems to have a blueprint or a road map for realising the concept of 'Atmanirbhar' villages (self-reliant villages), somewhat akin to Gandhi's 'Gram Swaraj'. He called upon the students to frame a "vision document" with 25 major targets and work towards it in the next 25 years so that when the nation celebrates the centenary of its Independence in 2047, Visva-Bharati would have achieved these milestones. He suggested that the project should start by making the villages adopted by the university 'Atmanirbhar'. Further, the students should strive to make the village youth, artisans and farmers self-dependent by helping their products reach big markets across the world. However, with big corporate houses ruling the roost in world economy, it is easier said than done.

Moreover, the reality is quite the opposite. Most of such projects launched by the IITs and other varsities see no light beyond the pilot trials which are mostly confined to few villages or pockets in adjoining areas. These are not expanded and, thus, fail to have a wider reach or impact. No doubt, engaging universities and educational institutes to empower the rural population and making it self-reliant is an excellent idea but it needs a coordinated, calibrated and comprehensive approach with knowledge and resource sharing among the institutes across India. Such institutes have the potential of becoming the torch-bearers of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' but the foundation for it has not been laid yet, nor have any sincere attempts been made in this direction. That said, these plans should not accumulate dust in Government files or fall casualty to bureaucratic red tape, else these would meet the same fate as other similar plans. However, with the Centre providing ₹50,000 crore in Budget-2021 for research, we should have no reason to doubt what the Prime Minister says. His approach appears to be in the right direction. However, in a country where rhetoric often overshadows the reality, we can only hope that the Gandhian philosophy of 'Gram Swaraj' or Modi's 'Atmanirbhar' villages become a reality, not something like 'Ram Rajya' (which, according to Gandhiji, ensures equal rights to both, a prince and a pauper) with virtue, morality and justice at its core but nowhere in sight. Courtesy, vote bank politics!

PICTALK



Water trickles from a fire hydrant in Austin, Texas

Go public rather than privatise

The PSUs which the Govt desires to privatise should be managerially toned up, which only industrial managers, and not bureaucrats, can do



PRAFULL GORADIA

In India, it is better to go public fundamentally because we do not have sufficient number of entrepreneurs with enough free wealth to pay for the public sector undertakings (PSUs). Many houses, although efficient, have already borrowed more than ideally desirable, which explains why the Government's privatisation push has so far been behind schedule. At this stage, a brief look at history would be useful.

At Independence in 1947, India had many more traders than industrialists. Take the textile mills, of which India had a fairly large number. How many have survived? With most mills, the problem was with the weaving looms. They were outdated and needed to be changed. Alternatively, the mills could be trifurcated into one, carding/spinning, two weaving and three finishing/packing. Instead, they carried on as long as possible and when they could not, the owners surrendered to closure. That the National Textile Corporation (NTC) inaugurated the expansion of what could be called the hospital sector of industry; it was really not public sector although the bureaucrats chose to mix up the two.

When the NTC could not absorb more sick mills, they were allowed to wind up, sell their fixed assets including the land, pay the employee dues, and then compensate the shareholders. New hotels, office buildings or residential flats have come on the graves of the wound-up mills. Yet people continue to dress up well, better than earlier. Spinners, new weavers called power looms and finishers are functioning profitably in place of many of the expired mills. The little industrial tragedy is one reflection of the industrial limitations of some of our entrepreneurs.

On the other hand, there were business houses which were functioning laudably well but their hands and legs were tied down by Nehruvian socialism, also vigorously practised by Indira Gandhi. Her plea was that the only way of co-existence for the



rich and the poor was socialism. Apart from clamping down on business growth with the Monopolies Commission and other such laws, she nationalised 19 banks, the entire coal industry as well as general insurance. Little did she realise that the whole public sector represented State capitalism and not socialism at all. It would have socialism, provided the common people were given an opportunity to invest and obtain dividends. Even according to Karl Marx, socialism was "from each according to his ability, to each according to his opportunity".

Thus Indian businessmen were denied the scope to grow and mature into industrialists. Those who did, managed to set up small and medium industries by even over-borrowing from the nationalised banks. Then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao did yeoman's service to the economy by liberalising the procedures and abolishing many a restriction. But in his temptation to get re-elected for another five years, he went easy on his reforms in the second half of his term. If one looks at his years in supreme power, he did more for India politically than economically. Ayodhya was his biggest achievement



MOST OF OUR BUREAUCRATS ARE FIRST-RATE ADMINISTRATORS BUT THEY ARE UNLIKELY TO BE EFFECTIVE MANAGERS. THE FORMER ARE PRIMARILY WEDDED TO RULES WHEREAS THE LATTER'S PRIORITIES ARE DECISIONS, PRODUCTION AND PROFITS

and the first step in national revival in centuries.

Keeping all Indian conditions in mind, the PSUs which the Government desires to privatise should be managerially toned up. Only industrial managers, and not bureaucrats, can do that. If they are structurally imbalanced, some of them may have to be merged with other suitable PSUs. The treatment of toning up would differ from unit to unit. The toned-up units should offer through one or more public issue of shares as per the SEBI and stock exchange rules. So long as the Indian State retains at least 40 per cent shares, let the public have shares. Many individuals have savings that they wish to invest but do not find suitable avenues. On debt instruments, the interest rates have fallen so low that they have been rendered unattractive.

Let us clarify that most of our bureaucrats, IAS and others, are first-rate administrators but they are unlikely to be effective managers. The former are primarily wedded to rules and procedures whereas the latter's priorities are decisions, production and profits. The two cultures are quite distinct. Therefore, a PSU managing director should not be

reporting to a bureaucrat but to his shareholders. The solution lies in the President of India parting with the shares of all PSUs to financial institutions like the LIC, GIC and its subsidiaries, banks, Unit Trust of India, and so on. When this happens, these new holders would behave like investors and not zamindars. Moreover, politicians would not any longer have ready access to recommend their candidates, use their guesthouses and cars, and so on. The PSUs would then operate like business and industries, not like jagirdaris.

If for nothing else, for taking share investments in companies from the panelled offices of the upper classes to the masses, the late Dhirubhai Ambani needs to be honoured. The best way to do so is to have the public as partners in preference to banks. His logic was that loans cost interest, shares do not. Shares compel the management to perform and deliver lucrative dividends, which is what Indians expect of the PSUs. Karl Marx believed that religion is the opium of the masses. It can be that loans are the opium of the classes.

(The writer is a well-known columnist and an author. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CONGRESS IS KING, AT LEAST IN PUNJAB

Sir—This refers to the editorial 'King Cong' (February 20). The anti-incumbency factor notwithstanding, the Congress bagging as many as 1,373 out of 2,218 seats in the recently-concluded civic polls in Punjab has really come as a shot in the arm of the party that is already on the wane following the internal faultlines and the damages consequent upon it.

The poll strategies of all other Opposition parties including the SAD, BJP, AAP and BSP seem to have fallen flat. With this thumping win, Captain Amarinder Singh's popularity has strengthened while the AAP's hopes of resurgence it had pinned on these civic elections in Punjab have taken a severe beating.

But with the AAP overtly and instrumentally standing by the ongoing Kisan Andolan all this while, the party's bounce-back in Punjab cannot be ruled out either. Interestingly, AAP chief and Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal has already made public his ambition of fielding candidates in Punjab a month back. On the other hand, the BJP has met with defeats even in its bastions. What it boils down to is that the Grand Old Party has emerged as an interim king in Punjab; whether or not the party succeeds in keeping its kingdom intact in the forthcoming Assembly polls is yet to be seen. But BJP's prospects in Punjab politics are certainly bleak seeing the present situation and the stand which the saffron party has taken over the farmers' agitation.

Azhar A Khan | Rampur

SWATI MOHAN MAKE US FEEL PROUD

Sir—It is matter of pride for every Indian that Swati Mohan is among about a dozen scientists and engineers of Indian origin in NASA's Mars exploration team, attesting to the diversity of US scientific and technological prowess that rests largely on its expansive immigration history.

She has played a critical role in NASA's step towards exploration of life on the red planet. Though Swati grew up in Washington DC and Virginia after her parents moved to the US from Bangalore

Increase the green cover of cities



It's a moment of pride for all the residents of Hyderabad as, in a unique distinction, the city has become the only city in India to be recognised as a "Tree City of the World" by the Arbor Day Foundation and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations. This achievement is no mean feat as Hyderabad was placed alongside 119 other cities from 63 countries. The United States, Canada and the United

Kingdom are the countries with the maximum cities featured on the list, with 38, 15 and 11 cities, respectively.

It shows the commitment of the State Government and the Centre in growing and maintaining urban forests in Hyderabad, thus making it a healthy, resilient and green city. Trees and forests are a vital component of healthy livable and sustainable cities and towns around the globe. Hyderabad's commitment to effective urban forest management is helping to ensure better future for its residents. It should be an inspiration for all other cities across the nation. We must do whatever we can to plant city forests and increase the green cover. Trees are natural filters, that not only filter out pollutants but also give us oxygen which is vital for the survival of humans and other species. There should be organised and coordinated planning for increasing the green cover, without which our cities will be like ghost towns.

Sreelakha P N | Hyderabad

WATER SCARCITY IS A MAJOR ISSUE

Sir—Climate change and pollution have negative impacts on lives and livelihood. In the backdrop of over-exploitation of nat-

ural resources, the most gruesome reality is the scarcity of water. Across the globe, from Cape Town to Michigan, and from rural, sub-Saharan Africa to Asia's largest urban centres, all are reeling under the shadow of water crisis.

About 844 million humans have no or limited access to clean drinking water around the world. The tale of two cities, Chennai, India, and Cape Town, South Africa, has showcased the bleak future of 'Day Zero', when one fine morning, cities just run out of drinking water.

A country such as India, known for its water resources and dotted with life-giving rivers like the Ganga, Narmada, Tapi, Mahanadi and many more is under the clutches of "water scarcity". Though, several Government programmes offer hope, a lot more is required to be done.

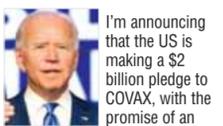
Debasis Behera | Sambalpur

SOUNDBITE

Rapid industrialisation of State is possible only if special status is accorded. This was a commitment made on the floor of Parliament and was a pre-condition to the bifurcation.



Andhra Pradesh CM — YS Jagan Mohan Reddy



I'm announcing that the US is making a \$2 billion pledge to COVAX, with the promise of an additional \$2 billion to urge others to step up as well.

US President — Joe Biden



I feel that theatres have their own magic, so I am waiting to see people going to theatres and watching films in large numbers.

Actor — Aditi Rao Hydari



Are the Australian selectors wrong in Aaron Finch being our 20-20 captain or is every IPL franchise wrong? I can't believe this.

Australia Test captain — Michael Clarke



I have been waiting for investment and expansion and I want to see the private sector show its animal spirits.

Finance Minister — Nirmala Sitharaman

Beating the blues

Stars like Virat Kohli and Deepika Padukone will hopefully inspire society to discuss mental health

What do Amitabh Bachchan, Shah Rukh Khan, Dilip Kumar, Rajesh Khanna, Deepika Padukone, Tiger Shroff, Sanjay Dutt and Virat Kohli have in common? Well, apart from being celebrities, they all have battled mental health issues like depression one time or the other. However, all that the world sees is the glitz and glamour of their lives and not the extreme mental pressure such personalities go through as they publicly battle with fame, success and failure. For most of us, the burden of expectations of our families is heavy enough, so it does not take much imagination to understand the weight of the expectations of 137 crore people. Kohli has revealed that he battled depression during a harrowing tour of England in 2014 where he felt like the "loneliest guy in the world" after a string of failures with the bat. "I won't say I didn't have people who I could speak to but not having a professional to speak to, who could understand what I was going through, I think is a huge factor. I think I would like to see it change," Kohli told commentator Mark Nicholas. "Lot of people suffer with that feeling... it carries on for months, for a whole season, people are not able to get out of it," he rued.

In coming out and talking about the issue, Kohli has done yeoman's service to fellow cricketers because, save for a few celebrities in the past like Guru Dutt and Parveen Babi, none ever had the courage to discuss the issue publically owing to social stigma till Bollywood A-lister Deepika Padukone talked about her battle with depression while going through failed relationships. Despite being at the top of her career then, she took the bold step of coming out. Since then she has tried to educate the nation on how it is okay to seek help and that there is no shame in admitting that one is facing a mental health issue. The level of lack of understanding and empathy for people facing mental health issues in India can be gauged by the fact that Deepika was mocked for talking about her depression by none other than her Bollywood colleague Kangana Ranaut on Twitter. To her credit, Deepika stood firm in her belief that she needed to use her celebrity status to help millions of Indians fight their mental disorders. Now Kohli has done the same for the cricketing world. And not just cricket, all sports federations should take note and have professionals on board to help their athletes. Hopefully, Padukone and Kohli will inspire the 7.5 per cent Indians suffering from mental health issues to seek help and beat the stigma. It's time we talk about it.

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

STRIVING FOR A DRUG-FREE INDIA

The Govt's commitment towards this is evident from the increased outlay of ₹260 cr from ₹49 cr in 2017



RATTAN LAL KATARIA

Every year, the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi is observed as the National Anti-Drug Addiction Day to honour his commitment towards eradicating the menace of drug and substance abuse. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also time and again highlighted the perils of substance abuse and stated that it is a dangerous disease which traps a person in a never-ending vicious cycle. Unfortunately, this menace is on the rise as is evident from the findings of the 'National Survey on Extent and Pattern of Substance Use.' Even after 73 years of Independence, we frequently come across news reports of college students getting addicted to drugs or police nabbing drug peddlers near a school. It is seen that addiction typically starts with alcohol, moves towards nicotine and ganja and then graduates to hard substances like cocaine, MDMA and so on. The situation is grave and demands immediate attention. It is in this spirit that a concerted three-pronged attack in the form of the 'Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyan (NMBA)' has been launched to crush the hydra-headed monster of drug abuse.



The NMBA, which was launched on August 15, 2020, targets 272 districts which have been identified as most vulnerable, based on inputs collected by the Government. Considering the heightened adverse impact of drug abuse on the youth, the focus of the NMBA is more on schools, higher education institutions and university campuses. Consequently, youth groups such as the NSS, NYKS and NCC have been roped in to reach out to the target population. Modi's message that "drugs are not cool" is being effectively delivered through these channels.

Also, community-based services are being provided for the identification, treatment and rehabilitation of addicts through voluntary organisations. The Government is providing financial assistance to NGOs for running de-addiction centres. A 24x7 national toll free helpline has been instrumental, especially during the lockdown period, in providing help to victims of drug abuse, their family and society at large. Outreach and drop-in centres (ODICs) with provisions of counseling, assessment, screening to provide safe and secure drop-in space for drug users are being developed. Apart from these facilities, referral and linkage to rehabilitation and treatment services to work for various dependents will also be offered.

Taking cognisance of the fact that addressing the problem of drug abuse requires concerted action at different levels of the Government, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has asked State Governments to plan specific initiatives, taking into account local considerations and devise specific and suitable strategies for drug demand reduction in their identified areas. Accordingly, a decentralised monitoring mechanism in the form of district-level committees has been formed to maintain the pace and momentum of the NMBA.

The commitment of the Government towards eradicating this social evil is evident from the increased outlay of ₹260 crore from a meagre ₹49 crore in 2017-18. The Ministry is implementing a comprehensive National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction through the multi-faceted approach of education, de-addiction and rehabilitation. With the programme picking up pace, the mission is gradually turning into a social movement involving the youth and society at large.

With the hard work, commitment and concerted efforts of the Government, society and voluntary organisations, India will be able to celebrate the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking in the month of June in right earnest and realise the vision of Mahatma Gandhi of a drug-free society in coming years.

(The writer is Minister of State for Social Justice & Empowerment and Jal Shakti. The views expressed are personal.)

Time to mainstream madrasas in India

Apart from modern education, we have to orient the mindset of students so as to attune it to social realities and sensitise them towards emerging socio-cultural paradigms



MOIN QAZI

Should State-run madrasas be shut and converted into regular schools like some States have proposed or its better if Muslim scholars and educationists prepare a road map to initiate modern education in Islamic seminaries across the country? The Assam Government has decided to close the 740 State-run madrasas and convert them into general educational institutions. Madrasa education was introduced in the Assam education curriculum in 1934 and the State Madrasa Board was also created then.

If we examine the history of Muslim education we find madrasas have been part of the Islamic learning system since very early times. They were usually part of mosques. These mosques became social focal points for growing communities; they doubled up as schools for learning the *Quran*, basic instruction in Muslim rituals and language instruction in Urdu, with accommodations for education and social needs. Throughout much of Islamic history, madrasas were the major source of religious and scientific learning, just as church schools and the universities were in Europe. It is only lately that education in these seminaries became ossifying and there were calls for reforms.

The reformists of madrasa education insist that knowledge in Islam is one whole, and that the division between *dini* (religious) and *duniyavi* (worldly) knowledge — with the two opposed to each other and which many contemporary *ulema* seem to have accepted — has no sanction in the *Quran*. The *Quran* is quoted as repeatedly exhorting the believers to ponder over the mysteries of creation as signs of the power and mercy of God. In the entire scripture, there are about 600 verses directly commanding the believers to reflect, to ponder, and to analyse God's magnificence in nature, plants, stars, and the solar system, and far from leading to doubt and disbelief, scientific investigation — if conducted within properly defined Islamic bounds — can deepen one's faith in Islam.

But madrasas are not immune to change. Many of them are trying to forge a Muslim identity that is compatible with modern culture and resistant to the blandishments of radicalisation. Likewise, few *ulema* could claim to be completely satisfied with the madrasas as they exist today. Indeed, leading *ulema* are themselves conscious of the need for change in the system.

The negative stereotypes presented in some sections of the media do not present the true picture. The majority of these Islamic schools actually present an opportunity, not a threat. For young village children, these schools may be their only path to literacy. For many orphans and the rural poor, these provide essential social services. They continue to serve parts of developing societies that Governments never reach. For parents mired in poverty and forced to work long hours with limited breaks, madrasas serve a vital role in ensuring their children are supervised, fed and taught to read and write.

As their graduates go out and take up a range of new careers and as pressures from within the community as well as from the State and the media for reform grow, these Islamic schools, too, are changing. Far from typifying one end of the polarising spectrum of traditional versus mod-



MODERN SUBJECTS CAN ALSO HELP THE STUDENTS GAIN A GOOD GROUNDING IN SECULAR SUBJECTS AND TECHNICAL SKILLS SO THAT THEY DO NOT LOSE OUT IN AN INCREASINGLY COMPETITIVE AND GLOBALISED WORKPLACE

The writer is a well-known development professional. The views expressed are personal.



ern and religious versus secular education, the State must continue to use Islamic seminaries as part of the regular educational paradigm. It must evolve an educational grid that allows constant movement between madrasas and mainstream educational institutions.

The policymakers need to pay closer attention to how transitions from madrasas to mainstream spaces can be seamlessly achieved. The State should not interfere in religious instruction, which should be the business of private individuals and associations. Second, those who carry out the inspections should be properly oriented to the traditions of learning in Muslim communities and the history and status of madrasas in particular.

The general consensus is that madrasas can play a vital role in bringing secular and religious education. Since the students are taught in classical and modern science as well as secular and religious thought, they are better able to spot scriptural distortions. They also tend to be more connected to their own communities as well as to the mainstream society and their stable sense of identity, religious and otherwise, shield them from radicalism. The madrasas are allies in India's fight against extremism.

Some recent reform efforts have focused on modernising the teachings. This includes the addition of computer proficiency and

English language classes, which strengthen employment potential for madrasa students. However, the introduction of computer skills at many Deoband-type madrasas is focused only on equipping them with functional literacy and not enabling them to engage with the modern technological revolution.

Thus, apart from equipping madrasas with tools of modern education, we have to orient the mindset of students so as to attune it to social realities and sensitise them towards emerging socio-cultural paradigms. This must be the fundamental objective of the modernisation process of madrasas. The efforts to stay "politically correct" have contributed to an absence of structured debate and discussion on how to make modern education accessible to millions of poor Muslim youth so that they get jobs. We must remember that cultural isolation would only lead to stagnation. The madrasas betray a deeper dissatisfaction and fatigue with a redundant learning system.

Shibli Nu'mani, a renowned 20th century scholar from within the madrasa circles has himself noted: "For us Muslims, mere English (modern) education is not sufficient, nor does the old Arabic madrasa education suffice. Our ailment requires a compound panacea. One portion eastern and the other western."

While it is true that most

madrasas have outlived their role, they need not be decimated. What they need is essentially a makeover in a way that respects traditional sensibilities and attempts to synergise classical and modern learning.

Some of the modern progressive seminaries have turned a new leaf and many more are modernising. Students unfamiliar with the intricacies of their own faith can be swayed by arguments that seem to call for jihad when taken out of context. But students coming out of these new generation religious schools are grounded in both classical and liberal values.

The right approach would be to temper classical and traditional learning with liberal thought. It can foster a culture which will engender the two streams of learning to nourish each other. This will enable the students of these seminaries to lead lives that are as true to their faith as attuned to modern needs. It will build them into empowered stakeholders in the shaping of their own future as well as of their communities.

An enlightened and productive human capital is the most precious asset of a society, and madrasas can certainly be key enablers in this task. Modern subjects can also help the students gain a good grounding in secular subjects and technical skills so that they do not lose out in an increasingly competitive and globalised workplace.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

A NAACHNEY-GAANE WAALI MAHILA (SINGER AND DANCER) LIKE KANGANA IS HURTING THE SENTIMENTS OF OUR FARMERS.
—FORMER MP MINISTER
SUKHDEV PANSE



WHOEVER THIS FOOL IS, DOES HE KNOW I AM NO KATRINA OR ALIA? I AM A RAJPUT WOMAN. I DON'T SHAKE A** I BREAK BONES.
—ACTOR
KANGANA RANAUT

Manufactured histories not limited to developing countries

The current upheaval in the developed world indicates that various issues have been systematically suppressed there as well for years

In various developed countries, the manner in which politics and society have unravelled in the last decade, suggests that certain factors that contributed to this had either been missed or were systematically hidden from the rest of the world i.e. developing countries.

My research in religious extremism, historical distortions in school textbooks, conspiracy theories and reactionary attitudes towards science, has produced findings that are universal. This century's second decade (2010-2020) saw some startling political and social tendencies in Europe and the US, which mirrored those in developing countries. Before 2010-2020, these tendencies had been repeatedly commented upon in the West, as if they were specific to poorer regions. Even though many Western historians, while discussing the presence of religious extremism,



NADEEM PARACHA

Courtesy: Dawn. The views expressed are personal.

superstition or political upheavals in developing countries, agreed that these existed in developed nations too, they insisted that these were present during their teething years.

In 2012, a British political scientist and an American historian emphasised at a conference that the problems that developing countries face, i.e. communal violence, a suspect disposition towards science and continual political disruption, were present at one time in developed nations as well, but had been overcome through an evolutionary process, and by the construction of political and economic systems that were self-correcting in times of crisis.

What they were suggesting was that most developing countries were still at a stage that the developed countries had been 200 years ago. However, eight years after that conference, Europe and the US, it seems,

have been flung back 200 years in the past. Mainstream political structures there have been invaded by firebrand Right-wing populists and dogmatic "cultural warriors" from the Left and the Right are battling it out to define "good" and "evil." In the process they are wrecking the carefully constructed pillars of the Enlightenment era on which their nations' whole existential meaning rests. The most outlandish conspiracy theories have migrated from the edges of the lunatic fringe into the mainstream and science is being perceived as a demonic force.

Take for instance, the practice of authoring distorted textbooks. Over the years, some excellent research cropped up in Pakistan and India that systematically exposed how historical distortions and religious biases in textbooks have contributed (and still are contributing) to episodes of bigotry. However,



this is not restricted to developing countries alone.

In 1971, a study by a group of US and British historians showed that out of the 36 British and US school textbooks that they examined, no less than 25 contained inaccurate information and ideological bias. In 2007, the US sociologist James Loewen surveyed 18 American history texts and found them to be "marred by an embarrassing combination of blind patriotism, sheer misinformation, and out-

right lies." In 2020, historians in the UK wrote an open letter demanding changes to the history section of the British Home Office's citizenship test. The campaign was initiated by the British professor of history and archeology Frank Trentmann. A debate on the issue, through an exchange of letters between Trentmann and Stephen Parkinson, a former Home Office special adviser, was published in *The Spectator*. Trentmann laments that the problem lay in a combination of errors, omissions and distortions in the history section pages, which were also littered with mistakes. Not only are historical distortions in textbooks a universal practice, but the many ways that this is done are equally universal and cut across competing ideologies.

Historian Joanna Wojdon says the methods that were used by the State in this respect

in communist Poland (1944-1989) were similar to the ones that were used in various former communist dictatorships such as the Soviet Union and its satellite States in East Europe, and in China. The same methods in this context were also employed by totalitarian regimes in Nazi Germany, and in fascist Italy and Spain. One can come across various similarities between how it is done in liberal democracies and how it was done in totalitarian set-ups.

I once shared this observation with an US academic. He somewhat agreed but argued that because of the Cold War many democratic countries were pressed to adopt certain propaganda techniques that were originally devised by communist regimes. I tend to disagree. Because if this were so, then how is one to explain the publication of the book 'The Menace of Nationalism in Education' by

Jonathan French Scott almost 20 years before the Cold War?

In a nutshell, no matter what ideological bent is being welded into textbooks in various countries, it has always been about altering history through engineered stories as a means of promoting particular agendas. This is done by concocting events that did not happen, altering those that did take place, or omitting events altogether. This is a problem that is inherent in the whole idea of the nation State, which is largely constructed by clubbing people together as 'nations', not only within physical but also ideological boundaries. This leaves nations feeling vulnerable and fearing that the glue that binds a nation together, through fabricated ideas of ethnic, religious or racial homogeneity, will wear off. Thus the need is felt to keep it intact through continuous historical distortions.

Protests, funeral follow deadly shootings in Myanmar

Stop the genocide. Stop using lethal weapons, said protester Min Htet Naing

AP ■ YANGON

Protesters gathered again Sunday all over Myanmar, a day after security forces shot dead two people at a demonstration in the country's second biggest city. A funeral was also held for a young woman killed earlier by police.

Mya Thwet Thwet Khine was the first confirmed death among the many thousands who have taken to the streets to protest the Feb. 1 coup that toppled the elected Government of Aung San Suu Kyi. The woman was shot on Feb. 9, two days before her 20th birthday, at a protest in the capital Naypyitaw, and died Friday.

About 1,000 people in cars and bikes gathered Sunday morning at the hospital where her body was held amid tight security, with even the victim's grandparents who had traveled from Yangon, five hours away, denied entry. When her body was released, a long motorised procession began a drive to the cemetery.

In Yangon, Myanmar's biggest city, about 1,000 demonstrators honoured the woman under an elevated roadway.

"I want to say through the media to the dictator and his associates, we are peaceful demonstrators," said protester Min Htet Naing. "Stop the genocide! Stop using lethal weapons!"

Another large protest took



The casket containing the body of Mya Thwet Thwet Khine is carried through the crowds towards the cemetery in Naypyitaw, Myanmar on Sunday

place in Mandalay, where police shot dead two people on Saturday near a dockyard as security forces were trying to force workers to load a boat. The workers, like railway workers and truckers and many civil servants, have been taking part in a civil disobedience

campaign against the junta. Shooting broke out after neighbourhood residents rushed to the Yadanabon dock to try to assist the workers in their resistance. One of the victims, described as a teenage boy, was shot in the head and died immediately, while another

was shot in the chest and died en route to a hospital. Several other serious injuries were also reported. Witness accounts and photos of bullet casings indicated that the security forces used live ammunition, in addition to rubber bullets, water cannons and

slingshots. The new deaths drew quick and strong reaction from the international community. "The shooting of peaceful protesters is beyond the pale," said British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab on Twitter. "We will consider fur-

ther action, with our international partners, against those crushing democracy & choking dissent."

Britain last week froze assets of and imposed travel bans on three top Myanmar generals, adding to already existing targeted sanctions.

Singapore, which together with Myanmar is part of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations, issued a statement condemning the use of lethal force as "inexcusable."

Urging "utmost restraint" on the part of security forces, it warned that "if the situation continues to escalate, there will be serious adverse consequences for Myanmar and the region."

Another shooting death took place Saturday night in Yangon in unclear circumstances. According to several accounts on social media, including a live broadcast that showed the body, the victim was a man who was acting as a volunteer guard for a neighbourhood watch group. Such groups were established because of fears that authorities were using criminals released from prison to spread panic and fear by setting fires and committing violent acts.

Another live broadcast on Facebook showed the wife of actor Lu Min describing to neighbours how her husband was arrested and taken away from their home shortly after

midnight. He was one of six high-profile people in the entertainment industry charged last week with inciting civil servants to stop work and join the protest movement, which he and the others have publicly championed.

On Sunday, Facebook announced it took down the page run by the Myanmar military information unit "for repeated violations of our community standards prohibiting incitement of violence and coordinating harm." It had already taken down other accounts linked to the military.

The junta took power after detaining Suu Kyi and preventing Parliament from convening, saying elections last November were tainted by voting irregularities. The election outcome, in which Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party won by a landslide, was affirmed by an election commission that has since been replaced by the military. The junta says it will hold new elections in a year's time.

The coup was a major setback to Myanmar's transition to democracy after 50 years of army rule that began with a 1962 coup. Suu Kyi came to power after her party won a 2015 election, but the generals retained substantial power under the constitution, which was adopted under a military regime.

GLOBE TROTTERING

ROADSIDE BOMBS IN AFGHANISTAN KILL 3

Kabul: Separate roadside bomb explosions in Afghanistan killed at least three people including a child and wounded 20 others on Sunday. Kabul police spokesman Ferdaws Faramarz said that a roadside bomb explosion targeted a police car, killing the driver and a nearby child as well as wounding five other civilians including children.

ISRAEL BUYS VACCINES FOR SYRIA IN PRISONER DEAL

Jerusalem: Israel paid Russia \$1.2 million to provide the Syrian Government with coronavirus vaccine doses as part of a deal that secured the release of an Israeli woman held captive in Damascus, according to Israeli media reports.

TENSIONS RISE BETWEEN SOMALIA AND UAE

Mogadishu: Two days after violence related to Somalia's delayed elections, the country's foreign ministry has accused "external forces" for contributing to the problems. At least five soldiers were killed and more than a dozen people.

3 DEAD IN GUN STORE SHOOTING IN NEW ORLEANS

Metairie: A person entered a gun store and shooting range in a New Orleans suburb and fatally shot two people Saturday, prompting customers and staff to open fire on the shooter, a sheriff said. The shooter also died. The shooting happened around 2.50 pm at the Jefferson Gun Outlet in the suburb of Metairie, according to a release from the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office.

UN nuclear chief in Iran as it threatens watchdog's cameras

AP ■ TEHRAN

The head of the United Nations nuclear watchdog met Sunday with Iranian officials in a bid to preserve his inspectors' ability to monitor Tehran's atomic programme, even as authorities said they planned to cut off their surveillance cameras at those sites.

Rafael Grossi's arrival in Tehran comes as Iran tries to pressure Europe and the new Biden administration into returning to the 2015 nuclear deal, which President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from in 2018.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who under President Hassan Rouhani helped reach the nuclear deal, said the cameras of the International Atomic Energy Agency would be shut off despite Grossi's visit to follow a law passed by parliament. "This is not a deadline for the world. This is not an ultimatum," Zarif told the government-run, English-language broadcaster Press TV in an interview aired during Grossi's visit. "This is an internal



Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, right, speaks with Director General of International Atomic Energy Agency, IAEA, Rafael Mariano Grossi, back to camera at center, during their meeting in Tehran, Iran on Sunday

domestic issue between the parliament and the government. "We have a democracy. We are supposed to implement the laws of the country. And the parliament adopted legislation — whether we like it or not." Zarif's comments marked the highest-level acknowledgement yet of what Iran planned to do when it stopped following the so-called

"Additional Protocol," a confidential agreement between Tehran and the IAEA reached as part of the nuclear deal. The IAEA has additional protocols with a number of countries it monitors. Under the protocol with Iran, the IAEA "collects and analyzes hundreds of thousands of images captured daily by its sophisticated surveillance cameras," the agency said in 2017.

Trump to speak at CPAC in first post-White House appearance

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Donald Trump will be making his first post-presidential appearance at a conservative gathering in Florida next weekend.

Ian Walters, spokesman for the American Conservative Union, confirmed that Trump will be speaking at the group's annual Conservative Political Action Conference on Feb. 28. Trump is expected to use the speech to talk about the future of the Republican Party and the conservative moment, as well as to criticize President Joe Biden's efforts to undo his immigration policies, according to a person who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the plans.

CPAC is being held this year in Orlando, Florida, and will feature a slew of former Trump administration officials and others who represent his wing of the GOP, including former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem.

Trump has been keeping a relatively low profile since he



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retired from the White House to Palm Beach, Florida, in January, but reemerged last week to conduct a series of phone-in interviews to commemorate the death of conservative commentator Rush Limbaugh. Trump has a long history with CPAC, which played a key role in his emergence as a political force.

UN chief voices appreciation for India's leadership in vaccine assistance

PTI ■ UNITED NATIONS

UN chief Antonio Guterres has voiced appreciation for India's leadership in the global fight against the coronavirus pandemic and its efforts to bring a "much-needed supply" of the Covid-19 vaccines to the world market.

India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador TS Tirumurti tweeted on Saturday that Guterres, in a letter dated February 17, "extends his personal gratitude" to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar for "India's offer of 2,00,000 doses" of Covid-19 vaccines for UN peacekeepers.

The Secretary-General says "India has been a global leader in pandemic response efforts", Tirumurti tweeted, expressing his gratitude to the UN Chief. In an excerpt of the letter tweeted by Tirumurti, Guterres says, "Indeed, India has been a global leader in pandemic response efforts having provided critical medicines, diagnostic kits, ventilators and personal protective equipment to more than 150 countries. "Efforts by India in devel-

oping and manufacturing one of the two vaccines currently granted Emergency Use Listing by the World Health Organization bring a much-needed supply to the global vaccine market. I also appreciate your continued efforts to support and strengthen the COVAX Facility to ensure more equitable access."

COVAX is a global initiative aimed at equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines. On Wednesday, India, which has been hailed as the pharmacy of the world, announced the gift of 2,00,000 Covid-19 doses for UN peacekeepers.

"Keeping in mind the UN Peacekeepers who operate in such difficult circumstances, we would like to announce today a gift of 200,000 doses for them," Jaishankar said, addressing the UN Security Council open debate on the implementation of resolution 2532 (2020) on the cessation of hostilities in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Quoting the Bhagavad Gita, Jaishankar had said "Do your work with the welfare of others always in mind."

He told the meeting that it is in this spirit in which India approaches the COVID challenge and urged the Council to work collectively to address its different dimensions.

The 200,000 doses essentially mean that it will be possible to administer the required double doses of COVID vaccines to all UN peacekeepers across missions.

According to UN Peacekeeping, currently, a total of 94,484 personnel are serving in 12 peacekeeping operations across the world led by the Department of Peace Operations. A total of 121 nations are contributing uniformed personnel to the UN peacekeeping missions. India is traditionally among the largest troop-contributing countries to peacekeeping missions.

Stephane Dujarric, Spokesman for the Secretary-General, had told PTI in response to a question on the Secretary-General's thoughts on the announcement by India, said that Guterres is "extremely grateful" for the gift of 2,00,000 Covid-19 vaccine doses for UN peacekeepers.

Snubbed as Obama high court pick, Garland in line to be AG

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The last time Merrick Garland was nominated by the White House for a job, Republicans wouldn't even meet with him.

Now, the once-snubbed Supreme Court pick will finally come before the Senate, this time as President Joe Biden's choice for attorney general.

Garland, an appeals court judge, is widely expected to sail through his confirmation process, which begins Monday before the Democratic-controlled Senate Judiciary Committee, with bipartisan support. "Judge Garland's extensive legal experience makes him well-suited to lead the Department of Justice, and I appreciated his commitment to keep politics out of the Justice Department," Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, said in a statement. "Unless I hear something new, I expect to support his nomination before the full Senate."

Biden's choice of Garland reflects the president's goal of restoring the department's reputation as an independent body. During his four years as president, Donald Trump had insisted that the attorney gen-

eral must be loyal to him personally, a position that battered the department's reputation.

Garland's high court nomination by President Barack Obama in 2016 died because the Republican-controlled Senate refused to hold a hearing. Garland will inherit a Justice Department that endured a tumultuous time under Trump — rife with political drama and controversial decisions — and abundant criticism from Democrats over what they saw as the politicizing of the nation's top law enforcement agencies. The department's priorities and messaging are expected to shift drastically in the Biden administration, with a focus more on civil rights issue, criminal justice overhauls and policing policies in the wake of nationwide protests over the death of Black Americans at the hands of law enforcement.

Garland plans to tell senators the department must ensure laws are "fairly and faithfully enforced" and the rights of all Americans are protected, while reaffirming an adherence to policies to protect its political independence, with the attorney general acting as a lawyer for the American people, not for the president.

Biden pays a visit to ailing former GOP Sen Bob Dole

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden paid a visit Sunday to former Sen. Bob Dole, days after the World War II veteran and 1996 Republican presidential nominee announced he'd been diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer. Biden, who served in the Senate with Dole for more than two decades, arrived Saturday afternoon at the Watergate complex where Dole, 97, and his wife, Elizabeth, have maintained a longtime residence. The White House described Dole as a "close friend" of the president. "He's doing well," Biden said of Dole, after departing Holy Trinity Catholic Church later Saturday evening. Dole said this week he plans to begin undergoing treatment on Monday. "While I certainly have some hurdles ahead, I also know that I join millions of Americans who face significant health challenges of their own," he said in a statement announcing his diagnosis.

Dole, a native of Russell, Kansas, represented the state in Congress for almost 36 years before resigning from the Senate in 1996 to challenge Democratic President Bill Clinton.

Turkey's Prez wishes to improve testy relations with US

AP ■ ISTANBUL

Turkey's President says mutual interests with the United States outweigh their differences and has called for more cooperation with President Joe Biden's new US administration.

In a video message late Saturday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan acknowledged that Turkish-American relations were "seriously tested" but stressed that their strategic partnership has "overcome all kinds of difficulties."

Erdogan's conciliatory tone follows his strongly worded accusations that the US supported Kurdish militants, days after Turkish troops found the bodies of 13 Turkish hostages held by the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK in a cave complex in northern Iraq.

Ankara has been infuriated by American support for a Syrian Kurdish fighters in combatting the Islamic State group, saying they are linked to the decades-long Kurdish insurgency in southeastern Turkey that the US also lists as terrorists. Erdogan said Saturday the US did not give Turkey the "desired support and solidarity" in fighting the PKK and linked groups, demanding a "clear stance" from Turkey's allies.

Sudan floats currency, part of measures to overhaul economy

AP ■ CAIRO

Sudan took the unprecedented but expected step of floating its currency Sunday, meeting a major demand by international financial institutions to help transitional authorities overhaul the battered economy.

The flotation is the boldest economic measure taken by the joint military-civilian government that has ruled the African country after a popular uprising. The revolt led to the military's overthrow of autocrat Omar al-Bashir in April 2019. The country has since been on a fragile path to democracy with daunting economic challenges representing a major threat to that transition. The flotation move could provoke a popular backlash as the price of goods and services rise in response to the fall of the pound's value and possible hike in the price of fuel and other essential goods.

There were already sporadic protests over dire living conditions in the past couple of weeks in the capital, Khartoum and other parts of the country. The US dollar had been trading at over 350 pounds to the dollar on the black market, while its official rate was at 55 pounds to the dollar. Following the flotation, local media report-

ed banks were selling the dollar at an average of 375 pounds, and buying the U.S. Currency for an average of 390, in an attempt to attract those trading in the unofficial currency market. Sudan's currency will now fluctuate according to supply and demand, according to a statement by the Central Bank of Sudan. It said the flotation is part of measures the transitional government has embarked on to help stabilize the country's economy. The Central Bank said the flotation would help "normalization of ties with international and regional financial institutions and friendly countries to ensure the flow of grants and loans" into Sudan's economy. "Our economy is in a situation that cannot be addressed without making such a decision," Finance Minister Gibril Ibrahim told a news conference in Khartoum.

"It is in our interest, in the interest of the country, and in the interest of the citizen." He said they have taken measures to counter possible hikes in the price of essential goods. He did not elaborate. The US embassy in Khartoum welcomed the "courageous" move, saying it "paves the way for debt relief and significantly increases the impact of international assistance."

UN experts: Trump ally, UAE firms violated Libya sanctions

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

American security contractor Erik Prince, a close ally of former US President Donald Trump, violated the UN arms embargo against Libya along with three United Arab Emirates-based companies and their top managers during an operation to help a rebel military commander take the capital Tripoli, UN experts said.

In a key section of a report to the UN Security Council obtained Sunday by The Associated Press, the panel of experts outlined "a well-funded private military company operation" called "Project Opus"

designed to provide military equipment to eastern-based commander Khalifa Hifter. "The Project Opus plan also included a component to kidnap or terminate individuals regarded as high value targets in the plan was first reported by The New York Times and The Washington Post. Oil-rich Libya was plunged into chaos after a 2011 NATO-backed uprising toppled longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi and split the country between a UN-supported Government in Tripoli and rival authorities based in the country's east, each side backed by an array of local militias as well as regional and foreign powers.

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Pakistan unlikely to exit 'grey list' as FATF meets to decide its fate: Report

Islamabad: Pakistan is unlikely to exit the 'grey list' of the FATF as some European countries have taken the stand that Islamabad has not fully implemented all the points of a plan of action set by it, a media report said on Sunday, on the eve of the plenary meeting of the global watchdog for money laundering and terror financing. The Paris-based Financial Action Task Force had placed Pakistan on the grey list in June

2018 and asked Islamabad to implement a plan of action to curb money laundering and terror financing by the end of 2019 but the deadline was extended later on due to Covid-19 pandemic. The virtual FATF plenary will be held in Paris from February 22 to 25 to consider cases of various countries on the grey list, including Pakistan, and a decision will be made at the conclusion of the meetings, Dawn newspaper reported. PTI

Premji: 90% of tech industry workforce work from home

PTI ■ BENGALURU

IT czar Azim Premji on Sunday said more than 90 per cent of the workforce in the technology industry of the country continue to work from home, and lauded the hybrid model of work.

"Within the first few weeks of the (COVID-19-induced) lockdown, over 90 per cent of the technology industry was working from home and even today over 90 per cent of people continue to work from home," he said.

Addressing an interactive session hosted by the Bangalore Chamber of Industry and Commerce, Premji said the IT industry and the government have appreciated the value of a permanent hybrid model where people would work partly from office and home even after the end of the pandemic. Stating that the hybrid model would have huge comparative advantage, he said it would drive inclusive growth, better participation from all parts of



the country and greater number of women who would have flexibility to work from home.

"Technology is becoming the lifeline for us as individuals and also businesses," he said. If there was any doubt, the year 2020 showed how fundamental technology has become.

Technology played an important role in ensuring that the government's social schemes and assistance programmes reached the mass population, according to him.

Availability of digital infrastructure in tier-2 cities has helped greatly many businesses to thrive, Premji said.

Maruti looking to cash in on increased demand for CNG vehicles

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Amid skyrocketing prices of petrol and diesel, Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) is looking to cash in on the accelerated demand for its CNG vehicles, expecting nearly 50 per cent growth in the ongoing fiscal year, according to a senior company official. The company, which offers CNG options in eight models out of total 14 available in the Indian market, is also actively working to expand the portfolio.

"This year CNG (vehicles) in the industry has grown almost 37 per cent at a time when the overall growth is negative (18 per cent decline) in April-January period. It means CNG is growing very well," Maruti Suzuki India Executive Director (Marketing & Sales) Shashank Srivastava told PTI.

Explaining why the demand for CNG vehicles has gone up, he said as the prices of petrol and diesel as a fuel have gone up dramatically, the running costs have also increased.

"The cost of running CNG is only Rs 1.5 per km whereas for petrol and diesel it is almost Rs 4 per km. People are now preferring CNG as the running cost is very low so there is a growth in sales of CNG vehicles," Srivastava said.

Citing Maruti Suzuki's own example, he said, "In the models that we have CNG, the penetration level is almost 21 per cent. Our CNG volumes last year were around 1,06,000 units. If you look at 2020-21 we have already crossed 1,19,000 units and we will end up the year with about 1,55,000 units. It will be almost 50 per cent increase."

"In Mumbai and Pune, the CNG penetration of Celerio and WagonR is almost 70 per cent. In Delhi, CNG penetration of WagonR is 50 per cent, he added. Stating that the growth of CNG sales was 18 per cent last year, Srivastava said in the last five years, MSI's CNG vehicle sales were at about 75,000 units in 2016-17, which grew to about 106,000 units last fiscal year. Another reason for the rise in

demand for CNG vehicles is the increase in the number of cities under CNG stations network, he said adding four years ago, the number of CNG stations in India was 1,200, which has doubled to 2,400 at present.

"By next year the number of stations will be 4,500. So if you look at it, in four years it will go up from 1,200 to 4,500. Also the number of cities covered will go up. It has already gone up from 145 four years back to 240 this year," he said. Moreover, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said in the Budget that the government would increase it to 100 more cities. In March 2022, it is expected that there will be almost 375 cities covered, he noted.

"The network is also increasing. Thus the availability of CNG is getting better...The government is also helping by expanding the CNG network. We can sell in new cities where CNG was not previously available. Then the waiting time for CNG filling is also going down as the number of stations are going up," he said.

Global cues, GDP data to drive equities coming week

FIANS ■ MUMBAI

As the Indian equity market goes on a consolidation mode, global markets along with the GDP data scheduled to be released later in the week is likely to steer the domestic stock markets going ahead.

Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said that the market was largely in a consolidation phase throughout the week following weak global cues.

Bears took control of the markets across the globe as worries of increasing US Bond yield and inflation kept investors' mood gloomy, he said, adding that PSU banks outperformed during the week due to developments around privatisation, while the sector witnessed profit booking towards the end of the week.

"We expect the domestic market to continue following the global markets in the coming week due to lack of any

major domestic events. The GDP data for the third quarter which is to be released towards the end of next week is expected to show signs of economic recovery adding positive momentum in Indian market," he said. The economy is expected to record positive growth for the October-December quarter after the 7 per cent contraction in the previous quarter.

As per the recent projection by ICRA, India's GDP is expected to record a year-on-year rise of 0.7% in Q3FY21.S. Ranganathan, Head of Research at LKP Securities noted that that week ended Friday belonged to the PSU Bank Index which rose close to 11% with Midcap state-run banks and non-life insurers posting huge gains. "During the coming week we expect investor interest coming back to large banks as FPI flows this month of over Rs 24,000 crore reflects the appetite of foreign funds," he said.

States' GST revenue shortfall may be lower by up to ₹40,000 cr this fiscal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The GST revenue shortfall faced by states is likely to reduce by about Rs 40,000 crore in the current fiscal on improved collections over the past four months, an official said.

The sharp decline in GST collections was estimated to lead to Rs 1.80 lakh crore shortfall in GST revenues of states. This includes Rs 1.10 lakh crore revenue loss on account of GST implementation and Rs 70,000 crore on account of COVID-19 pandemic. The centre had set up a special window to borrow funds and pass on to the states for meeting the Rs 1.10 lakh crore GST revenue loss.

The official said that improved goods and services tax (GST) collections could bring down the total shortfall amount to around Rs 1.40 lakh crore.

"We have done some calculations which show that the shortfall could be lower by about Rs 30,000-40,000 crore in the current fiscal," the official told PTI.

The official further said that Rs 1.10 lakh crore would be borrowed through the special window as planned and higher mop-up would be utilised to compensate for the

loss of revenue due to COVID-19.

The centre has already borrowed and releases to the states Rs 1 lakh crore under the special window.

The official further said that for next fiscal beginning April 1, the GST council will decide on the mechanism for compensating states in its upcoming meeting in March.

"The revenue loss next fiscal would be much less compared to this fiscal. However, meeting the 14 per cent revenue growth would be difficult," the official added.

Under GST law, states were guaranteed to be compensated bi-monthly for any loss of revenue in the first five years of the GST implementation from July 1, 2017. The shortfall is calculated assuming a 14 per cent annual growth in GST collections by states over the base year of 2015-16.

GST collections, which directly reflect the state of economic activity, had plummeted to a record low of Rs 32,172 crore in April 2020, after the government imposed a nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of coronavirus. Since then, collections started picking up; and the four straight months of October to January recorded over Rs 1 lakh crore mop-up.

CAIT writes to PM about GST issues, alleged violation of e-commerce rules by e-tailers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of its 'Bharat Bandh' call on February 26, traders' body CAIT on Sunday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi raising issues related to the GST regime, and alleging violation of e-commerce rules by major e-tailers.

In its letter to the prime minister, the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) called for setting up of a "special working group" at the central level comprising senior officials, CAIT representatives and independent tax experts to review the GST structure and make recommendations to the government. It also suggested that a "District GST working Group" may be constituted in each district to monitor smooth GST implementation and to take steps for widening of tax

base and augmentation of revenue.

In the letter, CAIT said that a few recent amendments in GST have given "arbitrary and unfettered powers" to the government officials.

It said this goes much against the PM's mission for 'minimum government, maximum governance', and these amendments have created a state of 'tax terrorism' in the country. "The principle of natural justice has been greatly violated through such amendments where the traders have been denied any sort of show-cause notice or opportunity of hearing before taking any penal action," the traders' body said in the letter to PM.

It alleged that the domestic e-commerce landscape has been greatly vitiated by some major e-commerce companies

"who are continuously and openly violating the FDI policy, law and rules without any fear of law". They are indulging in predatory pricing, deep discounting, loss funding, controlling inventory and sale of branded products, CAIT alleged. "These e-commerce companies have found various escape routes in Press Note No.2 of the FDI policy and therefore, a fresh Press Note blocking all escape routes and abolishing all such provisions that may prompt these companies to violate the rules or policies should be prepared," CAIT said. It also called for setting up of a regulatory authority for the e-commerce sector. Such authority should be empowered with due rights to take any penal action against those who violate the law or policy, the traders' body said.

Centre plans to permit sale of 50% coal from captive blocks, invites comments

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre plans to permit sale of 50 per cent of coal/lignite produced by captive blocks, a move aimed at augmenting the production and increasing the availability of dry fuel.

The government plans to do so through incorporation of a provision in the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR).

"In the note for consultation of Ministry of Mines, it is proposed to incorporate a provision in the Act to allow sale of 50 per cent of coal/lignite produced by captive mines on an annual basis. Further, an additional amount will be charged on the merchant sales of coal/lignite by the captive

miners," the coal ministry said in brief note.

The ministry said that it has invited comments from the state governments of coal-bearing states and stakeholders/general public on the said proposals.

The Ministry of Mines has also invited comments of the state governments, among others, on the proposals for additional amendments being considered in the MMDR Act.

"The ministry of mines has also sought comments of Ministry of Coal on the said draft proposal. Some of the said draft proposals are applicable in the case of coal/lignite also...Before sending the final comments/response to the Ministry of Mines, it is considered appropriate to seek comments of state govern-

ments of coal bearing states...On issues relating to coal/lignite," the coal ministry said.

In India, the import of coal is increasing on year on year basis. In 2015-16, the country imported 203.95 million tonnes (MT) of coal which was increased to 248.54 MT in 2019-20 and consequent spending of around 1.58 lakh crore in foreign exchange.

Coal being an important input for various core sector industries, increasing availability of coal will lead to Aatmanirbhar Bharat.

Allowing sale of coal from captive mines will help in increase in production of fossil-fuel from captive mines and increase availability of dry fuel in the market, leading to reduction in import of coal.

Nifty earnings may grow at 24% CAGR during FY21-23: Report

FIANS ■ MUMBAI

Nifty earnings are likely to grow at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 24.2 per cent over FY21-23, said an ICICI Direct report.

"Going forward, we expect Nifty earnings to grow at 24.2 per cent CAGR over FY21E-23E."

Using a bottom up approach and giving discount to target weighted average PE, we now value the Nifty at 16,300 i.e. 22x P/E on FY23E EPS of Rs 740 with corresponding Sensex target at 54,600," it said.

It noted that corporate earnings gained momentum during the third quarter of FY21 as economic activity rebounded in the post-Covid unlocking era with optimism fuelled by the festive season.

GeM portal expects procurement of over ₹1 lakh cr in FY22: CEO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Goods and services worth over Rs 1 lakh crore are expected to be procured from the public procurement portal GeM in 2021-22 on account of a sharp increase in buying activities by ministries like defence and PSUs, a senior official said.

The Government e-Market (GeM) portal was launched in August 2016 for online purchases of goods and services by all the central government ministries and departments.

GeM CEO Talleen Kumar said that the order value in 2020-21 is projected at Rs 37,000 crore, up from Rs 22,896 crore last year. "With the onboarding of the Ministry of Railways getting completed by March 2021, GeM is headed towards an order value of more than Rs one lakh crore next fiscal, which will be a '3X' increase over current levels," Kumar told PTI.

The public sector units (PSUs) procured goods and services worth over Rs 3,372 crore on GeM so far this year. Similarly the Ministry of Defence has bought goods

Govt may consider Oriental Insurance or United India for privatisation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

New Delhi: The Government may consider privatising Oriental Insurance or the United India Insurance Co as their financial health has improved after a series of capital infusions, people aware of the development said. To further strengthen their financial health, the government is expected to infuse Rs 3,000 crore in the public sector general insurance companies during the current quarter.

Both Oriental Insurance and the Chennai-based United India Insurance may be able to generate interest from the private sector because of their improved financials, sources

said. The process of choosing a suitable candidate for privatisation has just started and will take some time to decide, sources said while not ruling out the possibility for listed New India Assurance, where government stake stands at 85.44 per cent.

As per the plan, NITI Aayog will make recommendations to the government for privatisation and Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) under the Ministry of Finance will take the proposal to its logical conclusion.

PTI

India-UK ties to touch new high post Covid: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India-UK bilateral relations will touch a new high in the post-Covid world, as India is likely to be a priority country for the UK, leading to an enhanced economic partnership, according to a report.

According to the Britain Meets India report, developed by CII and Grant Thornton Bharat, FDI inflow from the UK to India for a particular year increased from USD 898 million in 2015-16 to USD 1,422 million in 2019-20.

Sandeep Chakravorty, Joint Secretary (Western Europe), Ministry of External

Affairs, said, "Besides a free trade agreement, mobility and an interim trade deal, we are working on a 10-year 360 degree roadmap to strengthen our relationship with the UK. Going forward, we see investments in India's clean energy sector coming from the UK."

Pallavi Joshi Bakhru, Partner and India-UK Corridor Leader, Grant Thornton Bharat LLP said, "Our research identified 572 UK companies in India with a combined turnover of around INR 3,390 billion, tax payment of around INR 173 billion and employing 416,121 people directly.

Fun galore at Garden Tourism festival

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The 34th Garden Tourism Festival organised by Delhi Tourism in association with Government of Delhi was inaugurated by Manish Sisodia, Deputy Chief Minister & Minister of Tourism, Government of Delhi on February 19. With the objective to create awareness about the environment and showcase the rich floriculture of Delhi, this three week festival celebrates the hues of Mother Nature and the fervour of Spring Season, and is themed 'Colours of Nature' this year.

Over the weekend the event witnessed visitors in large number visiting the Garden of

■ Festival scheduled from 19th Feb-13th March 2021

■ Free Shuttle service from Saket Metro to the venue (to & fro)

Five Senses to experience the unique varieties of flowers. His Excellency Mr. Walter J. Lindner, Ambassador, Embassy of Federal Republic of Germany, presided the festival with his presence. He was seen taking numerous pictures at the venue soaking in the ambience and enjoying the visual experience of colors of nature.

FPIs invest ₹24,965 cr in Feb so far

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Continuing their buying spree, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) invested Rs 24,965 crore in Indian markets in February so far as various organisations predicted high economic growth for the country and the Union Budget boosted investor sentiment.

According to depositories' data, FPIs pumped in Rs 24,204 crore into equities and Rs 761 crore in the debt segment, taking the total net investment to Rs 24,965 crore during February 1-19.

In the preceding month, FPIs were net investors of Rs 14,649 crore.

"Various organisations, both national as well as international, have predicted a high economic growth for the upcoming year and the year after for India," said Harsh Jain, co-founder and COO at Groww.

S Ranganathan, head of research of LKP Securities added that FPIs remained positive on Indian markets as IMF predicted India to be the fastest growing economy in 2021.

"A pro-growth Budget aimed at leveraging the digital revolution

is transformational and we expect FPI flows to continue next month as well aided by MSCI rebalancing," Ranganathan added.

In addition, the earnings season also turned out to be good, said Rusmik Oza, executive vice president, head of fundamental research at Kotak Securities.

For emerging markets, Oza said flows have been muted in emerging markets this month to date.

Taiwan have received meaningful FPI flows this month to date, he added.

Regarding debt segment, Himanshu Srivastava, associate director manager research, Morningstar India said, FPIs have stayed away from Indian debt markets for a long time now "mainly on concerns around COVID-19, calibrated support by RBI and low interest rates."

Going ahead, the focus will be on how soon India gains economic momentum.

"However, the way markets are headed and given high valuations, there is a strong possibility of profit-booking at regular intervals, which could slow down the pace of net flows," Srivastava said.

Re-Invitation for Request for Proposal

No. RMSA/AptitudeTest/20-21/1317/2020/29 Dated: 20/2/2021

Samagra Shiksha, Assam re-invites proposal affixing court fee stamp of minimum value Rs 8.25/- containing (a) Qualification expression & Technical Proposal and (b) Commercial Proposal in separate file/folder for Aptitude Test at secondary level through e-procurement system of Govt. of Assam i.e. <https://assamtenders.gov.in>

Detailed bid document may be seen at "<https://assamtenders.gov.in>" for eligibility, scope of work, RFP terms and conditions etc. The RFP document can be purchased by registering at <https://assamtenders.gov.in> " from 20/2/2021, 6.00 PM to 01/03/2021, 1.00 PM and making payment of non-refundable RFP Fee of Rs. 3,000/- (Rupees Three Thousand) only in the form of Demand Draft in favour of Mission Director, RMSA, Assam payable at Guwahati.

Important Dates and Milestone of the RFP:

Sl	Particulars	Date & Time	Particulars	Date & Time
1.	Publishing Date & Time	20/02/2021, 6.00 PM	-	-
2.	Document Download Start	20/02/2021, 6.00 PM	Document Download End	01/03/2021, 1.00 PM
3.	Bid Submission Start	20/02/2021, 6.00 PM	Bid submission end	01/03/2021, 2.00 PM
4.	Technical Bid Opening	01/03/2021, 3.00 PM	-	-
5.	Financial Bid Opening	To be intimated to the technically qualified entity at a later date.		
6.	Earnest Money Deposit(EMD): INR 1,45,000/-			
7.	RFP FEE : INR 3,000/-			

- The bid document can be downloaded from the website <https://assamtenders.gov.in>
- The bid document shall have two covers: (i) Technical Bid & Commercial terms (ii) Financial Bid.
- Online mode of submission of Technical and Financial Bids are mandatory. Manual submission of Financial Bids will not be accepted.
- However original copy of the Tender Fee, EMD and Technical Bid along with Rs. 8.25 court fee stamp to be submitted at State Mission Office, Samagra Shiksha, Assam (RMSA, Assam), Kahlipara, Guwahati-19 before the last date and time of bid submission.

Samagra Shiksha (RMSA, Assam) reserves the right to amend or cancel the bid document without assigning any notice or reason thereof at any stage of the bid. Moreover, in case of non-availability of sufficient bidder (or less than three bidder), authority has the right to take decision without prior notice.

Sd/- Executive Director
Samagra Shiksha, Assam (RMSA & SSA,
Assam), Kahlipara, Guwahati-19

Janasanyog /CF/5211/20



Accurate information is critical to combat Coronavirus. Dr SAMIR DWIVEDI busts some myths and elaborates on facts related to the disease

KNOW THE TRUTH

The pandemic, certainly, created havoc in the entire world and has affected all aspects of human lives. With the unprecedented speed of COVID-19 vaccine development, it has generated a number of misconceptions that have fueled skepticism among people. Now that effective COVID-19 immunisation is rolling out in various countries, accurate information is of utmost importance. So here are some prevalent Coronavirus vaccine myths and facts behind the medicines designed to combat COVID-19:

Myth 1: COVID-19 vaccine is not safe because it was developed quickly.
Fact 1: The COVID-19 vaccine is safe and has been approved or is in the process of being approved by regulatory authorities in many countries.



Millions have now been vaccinated. Reports of serious side effects have been very rare and no long-term complications are reported. The worldwide impact of this pandemic has caused the pharmaceutical industry to invest heavily in research and producing the vaccine. Several phases were

conducted parallelly, thus, shortening the overall development timeline. No shortcuts were taken; every vaccine candidate had to go through the strict process of clinical trials and safety reviews by respective global and national Stringent Regulatory Authorities.

Myth 2: You can get Coronavirus from the vaccine.

Fact 2: For viral diseases to set in, a live virus needs to be able to make enough copies of itself in the body. None of the currently authorised vaccines contain live virus, and therefore, you cannot get the virus through the vaccine. You might experience mild flu-like symptoms after the injection such as fatigue, body aches and fever. It's a normal reaction of your immune system to the vaccine and will stop after a day or two.

Myth 3: I have already had COVID-19 so I don't need to be vaccinated.

Fact 3: Most authorities advise even those who have had COVID-19 infection to take the dose, although, you may be advised to wait for at least 90 days after your infection. Speak to your doctor for an individual recommendation. We do not yet know how long the protection from your immunity developed by a COVID-19 infection will last.

Myth 4: The fatality rate of COVID-19 is so low, so you don't need to be vaccinated.

Fact 4: The vaccine protects

you, your family, colleagues and your community. They reduce the risk of severe infection and hospitalisation. People, who are vaccinated, are probably less likely to transmit the disease. When the majority of the population are vaccinated, it will protect the community, including the vulnerable and those who cannot be vaccinated. While vaccination is voluntary, all those who are medically eligible are encouraged to get it done.

Myth 5: No need to wear a mask or maintain social distancing after receiving the vaccination shot.

Fact 5: While vaccines are effective, they do not stop every case of COVID-19 infection and transmission. Therefore, everyone must remain cautious and continue to wear masks, practice social distancing and observe enhanced hygiene routines.

Myth 6: The vaccine will alter the DNA

Fact 6: One of the first COVID-19 vaccines approved for emergency use is mRNA vaccine (messenger RNA). Upon injection, mRNA vaccine will instruct the cells in the host body to produce the viral protein that triggers an immune response against COVID-19 virus in the body. mRNA does not insert itself into the host body's DNA, thus, it does not alter your gene DNA (it cannot be transmitted to the next generation). The mRNA vaccine will naturally degrade and be eliminated after being used in the host body within 48 to 72 hours.

Myth 7: People with underlying conditions should not be vaccinated.

Fact 7: Some people are not recommended to receive the vaccine. Follow the local health authorities' guidelines in determining your medical eligibility and speak to your doctor for an individual recommendation.

Myth 8: COVID-19 vaccines are not effective against the new variants.

Fact 8: Experts are watching this very carefully. So far, they believe that the current vaccines are still effective. If a change in vaccine needs to be made, the vaccines can be quickly adjusted for new strains, in a similar way that flu vaccines are adjusted each year. It is important to be immunised as soon as possible, and continue to practice preventive measures to break the chain of infection.

Myth 9: Severe side effects of the vaccine is common.

Fact 9: Minor expected side effects, such as a sore arm at the injection site and a mild fever, are common. Reports of serious side effects are very rare. Discomfort usually subsides after a day or two. Side effects may be more pronounced after the second dose of vaccine.

(The writer is the Medical Director at International SOS, India.)

WEBBED



THE BROKEN HEART GALLERY

After being dumped by her boyfriend, Lucy creates a gallery for the items love has left behind and discovers she is not the only one who needs a little help letting go. The film releases on Amazon Prime on February 24.



LUDA CAN'T COOK

Ludacris partners with James Beard Award-nominated chef Meherwan Irani to advance his culinary skills by attempting to master one of his favorite cuisines. Irani gives the rapper a master class in Indian cuisine, teaching him everything from layering spices to making curry while chef Aarti Sequeira swings by to offer some advice. It premieres on discovery+ on February 25.



IMPOSSIBLE ENGINEERING S5

Discover the story of pioneering modern-day megastructures in this series. Behind every seemingly impossible marvel of modern engineering are the historic trailblazers who designed new building techniques, took risks on untested materials and revolutionised their field. Using 3D graphics, archive and specially shot footage, each episode details how record-breaking structures and cutting-edge ships, trains and planes are built and work. It premieres on discovery+ today.

'Make your own rules'

An online dating app partners with actor RADHIKA MADAN, who shares a few tips and tricks

Actor Radhika Madan has partnered with an online dating app Bumble to encourage single Indians to make the first move towards healthy and equitable connections as the app aims to bring fun back into dating in 2021.

She shares dating tips and tricks, and breaks down the barriers around dating.

When asked what dating advice she would like to give to single people in India, Radhika says, "If you are someone who is an old school romantic just like me, don't play by the rules, make your own rules!"

Speaking of her association with the online dating app, she says, "My experience working with Bumble has been really great. They are the change makers, they have broken a lot of taboos. It's always fun partnering up with them and I'm looking forward to working with them again."

"It's very important to normalise women making the first move. It's a very dated concept that guys should make the first move. A lot of times you find someone cute and you want to talk to them. It's not just about dating them but just wanting to know them or having that curiosity but because of the conditioning and social pressure from your friends, you end up not talking to that person, which I feel is a lost opportunity. So, kudos to the app for normalising this and inspiring a lot of women to make the first move," she adds.

Speaking about the partnership, Samarrita Samaddar, Bumble India PR Director shares, "As single Indians overcome challenges and barriers to this new world of dating, we hope people will be inspired by Radhika to make the first move and forge new connections in 2021."

Radhika Madan is wearing a shimmering gold dress.

Since the start of the year, Pooja Hegde has been giving out some major fashion inspirations which make for a perfect go-to look for this wedding season. From the Ala Vaikunthapuramuloo reunion outfit to her purple sparkle let's have a look at top five outfit inspirations for your occasional wear:

THE PURPLE SPARKLE

Pooja's purple floor length straight down kurta with intricate golden embroidery paired with plain mauve trousers under can be a great look for weddings as a bridesmaid, topped with long golden earrings complementing the dress. The right amount of heavy and new design cut in this Anita Dongre outfit completed with a golden *jutti* and a mauve belt around the waist is a comfortable yet elegant look that will definitely make you sparkle.

PASTEL LOVE

The pastel coloured outfit worn by her would make for a perfect choice for those who want to opt for a subtler yet glam look with the pista green short kurta and a similar coloured sharara. The kurta with deep design in pink at the neckline and hems makes it subtly heavy along with the embroidered recurring

TREND TOOL

Simple but significant

Here are five looks inspired by POOJA HEGDE for this wedding season



beautiful combination. This Manish Malhotra outfit includes a green frock kurta with a shade of purple at the bottom and golden *gota* at the hems matched with plain green leggings. The flare in the kurta makes this simple outfit chic paired with a plain lavender and golden bordered *dupatta*. You can complete the look with long mint green earrings and a statement ring.

IVORY AND SEA

The last one worn by Pooja is this Indo-western outfit that pairs a dreamy combination of an ivory blouse with a heavy sea blue skirt. With puffed cut sleeves in the blouse and deep neckline, it has a western touch while the skirt stands out with its intricate silver embroidery from the waist down till the centre while the bottom flows in plain sea blue colour. It makes for a perfect look for the wedding day! As Pooja had, you can finish the look with large diamond studs and a designed bracelet.

print on the sharara. What makes the look stand out is the pretty pastel blue *dupatta* with work done in pink. Pair the sleeveless kurta with *jhankas* and you're all set to dazzle.

FLORAL IN PINK

Donning the baby pink floral outfit for her Ala

Vaikunthapuramuloo first year reunion, Pooja looked delightful as ever. The short pink kurta with matching sharara had intricate thread work done in the shape of flowers in slightly darker pink and yellow colours making the outfit occasion ready. The *dupatta* paired with the outfit was a plain pink with pink thread work while

the border of the sharara lit up with alternating lines of yellow flowers. Just the perfect day time event look topped with pink earrings and a diamond bracelet in one hand.

GREEN DREAM

Pooja's green suit with a touch of purple makes for a

TRENDBLAZER



VIDYA POSES WITH THE GREAT KHALI

Actor VIDYA BALAN has shared a picture posing with Former World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) champion Dalip Singh Rana, popular as The Great Khali. "Finally the big girl looks small..."

With @thegreatkhali!" she captioned the picture she posted on Instagram stories.

Vidya did not share details on why she met the wrestler.

She was last seen in last year's digitally released film *Shakuntala Devi*.

fairtalk

KAJOL



'Mothers are put into a small little box, like a parameter that you can never get out of. You can't put one step out of it. They are superhumans. They make breakfast, dinner, clean the house, send kids to school, go for work, come back, organise your life, their husband's lives, and still manage to be calm, cool, patient and loving. Nobody can be like that.'

dailytalk

REMO D'SOUZA



'B-Live music is an extension of my continued efforts towards nurturing and promoting new talent in an industry which is very hard to break into. From my personal experience, I can say that struggle helps people in becoming stronger, but with these efforts, I am hoping to ease out the struggle a bit for newcomers.'

KIM KARDASHIAN FILES DIVORCE

Reality TV star KIM has filed for divorce from her rapper-husband KANYE WEST, according to reports. Kim and Kanye have been married for about seven years and have four children together.

The news was broken by website TMZ after months of rumours of marital difficulties.

According to reports, Kim has requested joint legal and physical custody of their children.



AN ECHO OF SILENCE

Financial difficulty and social vulnerability have forced the economically deprived sections to marry off their children before the legal age. The brunt is borne especially by girls, shares RAKHI GHOSH

Worldwide, an estimated 12 million girls are wed every year before the age of 18. In India, as per UNICEF, 1.5 million girls get married before the legal age of 18 every year. Fortunately, the combined efforts of the respective state governments and non-government organizations engaging community level workers in remote villages are providing agency to adolescents to fulfill their dream. In Odisha, as per the National Family Health Survey-4 (NFHS-4), underage marriages have reduced from 37.2 per cent to 21.3 per cent over a decade and is better than the national average of 26.8 per cent. Although, there are 16 districts where child marriage is above the state's average percentage, but the sincere efforts are going on to control the situation here.

Two years ago, parents of Kanchan who was just a 15-year-old then, had fixed her marriage against her wishes. A school-dropout, Kanchan was engaged in household works besides helping her mother in agriculture fields.

"In poor families like ours, parents do not seek consent. Girls are considered a burden from which they want to get rid of as soon as possible. My parents were no different when they had fixed my marriage," shared Kanchan over phone, now a 17-year-old pursuing her studies again.

It was the result of regular counseling offered to Kanchan's parents by village Anganwadi worker Geetanjali Rana that helped save her from early marriage. Not just Kanchan, but due to Geetanjali's sincere efforts to fight this menace, not a single child marriage happened in the village Rugudipalli in Odisha's Subarnapur district. Her regular counseling of parents, mothers, older groups, young boys and girls about the repercussions of child marriage made Rugudipalli the first 'child marriage free' village in this Eastern Indian state.

Describing Kanchan's incident Geetanjali said, "I had attended a workshop titled Say No to Child Marriage organised by Action Aid, an international non-government



organisation, in Bhubaneswar in 2018. It was my first encounter to understand the repercussions of child marriage. After returning from the workshop, I decided to start a campaign against this ill-practice in my village Rugudipalli. In the first adolescent group meeting with all the girls of the village, I was informed about Kanchan's marriage."

Geetanjali sensitised all the people of the village on Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006 and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012. She also discussed the impact of early marriages on the health of adolescents and how early pregnancies threaten the lives of young girls.

Within a few months, Geetanjali was able to stop 10-12 child marriages in her village. To make Odisha child marriage free by 2030, the state government has directed all authorities to take appropriate actions. To support the PCMA, state rules have been

amended and a state monitoring committee has been constituted to review the implementation of PCMA. All Child Development Protection Officers (CDPOs) have been designated as Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPOs) and a series of training and capacity building programmes are being organised.

□Patriarchy, poverty, social norms and safety issues: The reasons for getting married at an early age are many. Girls being denied proper education is one of the major reasons which makes them vulnerable to child marriage. "It is the patriarchal mindset that does not allow them to continue their schooling. If they will be allowed, it will give them the agency to deny the forced marriages," said Ghasiram Panda, Programme Manager, Action Aid.

In tribal dominated districts, age-old cultures such as *jhinka vivah*, *kania*

jhinka and *udulia* are forcing young girls to get married early.

□Challenges during the pandemic: Suchitra, 16-year-old, hails from a poor family and wanted to complete her studies. Her parents were also supporting her. However, during the lockdown, when her father lost all the opportunities to work as a daily wage laborer, her relatives suggested marrying Suchitra to a man 10 years older to her.

Just a day before the wedding, her close friend called up Childline. The CMPO, Supervisor, Police and officials of Childline visited their house and stopped her marriage.

"There have been many cases where these little girls are convinced that getting married is the right step to minimise the burden on their families," shared Rakesh Pradhan, Subarnapur District Coordinator, Action Aid.

□The need of engaging adolescents: The lack of engaging with adolescents, especially with school dropouts pose a hurdle in their decision making. In remote villages, most of the girls drop out from schools after finishing education till upper primary. They help their mothers in household and agriculture work. As they have no other engagement, they find marriage

as an alternate option.

A scheme, *Advika* (every girl is unique), has been recently started by the Women and Child Development (WCD) Department of the state to engage, sensitise and empower adolescent girls in remote villages. As part of it, girls will be encouraged to participate in different sessions on Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), nutrition, safety, rights, gender-based violence, financial literacy, marriage and relationship. The objective is to equip them with knowledge to take informed decisions about their lives, career, relationships, education and rest everything. Along with knowledge, there is also a need to create infrastructural support to engage them because only sensitisation cannot reduce child marriages.

It was in 2017-18 that the Odisha Government had rigorously started responding to the issue of child marriages but the pandemic severely hampered all the gains made so far. Social vulnerability and financial issues push them into worst situation and girls fall prey to child marriage. Hopefully, the actions taken will set the fight against child marriages back on track.

(The names of girls have been changed to protect the identity.)

—Charkha Features



Earth is a stage

Trying to compete with anybody else's achievements is futile as everyone has their own trajectory, says RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJJI

Recently a veteran actor from the Hindi film industry was given the Highest Civilian Award for his contribution towards spreading cultural values across the globe through his acting career. While he was given the award, everyone in the audience stood up to give him a standing ovation to the legend, who brought so many characters to life on celluloid screen. We all have experienced this euphoria in theatres, while a heroic character makes an entry on screen, there are loud cheers, whistles, applause and more. And at the end of film, the hero wins the audience's hearts and steals the show. Whether he plays a prince or a pauper, it does not matter as his fans through the theatres to catch a glimpse of him. The beauty of his performance lies in his ability to internalise the character to the extent that he and his role seem one to his fans. But even while doing it, he is very much conscious of the fact that he is merely an actor in a particular drama, his role is carved, his dialogues are scripted and the costumes are designed for that particular character. Hence, his greatness lies only in playing the role to the best of his capability. On his long journey to stardom, every actor often turns a spectator and critiques his own work so that he can improve upon his act. It is this element of detachment from the different roles he plays that allows him to progress, play multiple roles simultaneously with clarity and then return to his personal life at the end of the day.



Not many of us know that the world cycle is very much similar to this drama in which all of us are actors with unique parts. Everyone is the protagonist in his life and can become a hero who draws applause. However, today we hardly find anyone cheering for the other person because there is great dissatisfaction either with each other's performance or the script. As a result, the drama appears to have become a tragedy. There is widespread chaos with actors criticising each others' performances instead of theirs. The reason for this trouble is that most of us act without the knowledge that the earth is a stage and we have all come here to play our individual roles. Each actor's role is unique and pre-scripted and hence, trying to match it with anybody else's is futile. The biggest law of the world drama is that it is ever beneficial for everyone. In the absence of this understanding or its consciousness, we get attached to our roles, forget to change our costumes and make-up, and lose the flexibility to adapt to each part.

Take a simple example of a person who plays a son, a husband, a father, a friend and several other roles at the same time. If he is in the consciousness of being a male, he could dominate his wife at home or look down upon his female staff at office. At work, he would stick to his role of being a boss so much so that he forgets to become their colleague when they need his help. On the other hand, if he is conscious that he is an actor and must act like a hero to win everyone's hearts, then he would understand the requirements of his character and become active, accurate and attractive at whatever he does.

Living the peaks and troughs of each character we play, we drain ourselves and are unable to muster enough strength to meet the demands of each role as a result of which, there are emotional upheavals and sorrow becomes a regular visitor when the purpose of the drama is to help the actors experience joy and happiness. On the other hand, if we become detached to the roles we play and keep faith in the eternal law that the drama has been scripted for the universal benefit, the feeling of loss and gain, comfort and pain would begin to dissolve and our mind would stop questioning the developments in every scene and a peaceful equanimity will begin to settle in our mind. It will help us to enjoy the drama, review our performance, be patient and forgiving towards others. So the moral of the story is that we should be detached and yet be involved in the part we are playing. That's the quality to be a superstar in this world drama.

Deep into this pandemic winter, it can be hard to remember what a refuge gardens were last spring and summer. In those frightening early days of COVID-19, victory gardens and household vegetable plots sprang up all over. Seed companies reported shortages. Hardware stores saw a run on garden tools. Millions found comfort, release and a sense of safety outdoors with their hands in the dirt.

That feels like a long time ago. We dreaded this winter, and we weren't wrong: January was the deadliest month yet from the virus. Political violence shook Americans' sense of security and shared purpose. Businesses and household incomes are struggling. And the human interactions that might help us process all this anxiety and grief are discouraged.

Yet the garden is still there, hunkering down too. And it can still help. Even in winter, it can provide solace, inspiration and perspective. Fresh air. And an assurance that spring is coming.

From December to March, there are for many of us three gardens — the garden outdoors, the garden of pots and bowls in the house, and the garden of the mind's eye," Katherine S White, an editor and writer at The New Yorker and an avid gardener, wrote several decades ago.

As we round the bend into February, and with the hope that vaccines will bring real change, all three of those gardens offer a promise of light.

THE GARDEN OUTDOORS

To the eye, there's little in a winter garden that can compare to spring and summer's binge-worthy drama of growing, blooming and buzzing. Only

Play in the dirt

In an anxious winter, the garden still offers consolation, say experts



the most serious gardeners (or those in warmer climates) can keep the growing going outside, using cold frames, fabric or plastic tunnels, and other techniques.

But there are smaller joys to be had. The trees' bare branches make for beautiful silhouettes, and better views of birds and sunsets. Landscape photographer Larry Lederman, author of the recent book *Garden Portraits*, recommends getting to know your garden better in the winter, when

"everything is bare and you can see the bones of the landscape."

More significantly, gardens remind us that winter is just one season in a cycle. Death is everywhere in a garden, all year round, but it makes rebirth possible. The species keep going.

"The return of spring each year can be endlessly relied on, and in (plants) not dying when we die, we have a sense of goodness going forward," Sue Stratis-Smith writes in

her new book, *The Well-Gardened Mind: The Restorative Power of Nature*. "This," she says, "is the garden's most enduring consolation."

Of course, the constancy of the seasons these days can't be taken for granted as in the past. So winter is also a good time for reevaluating our own yard-size battles against climate change. We can start or continue composting. And we can research services, products and methods to help make next year's garden — and those beyond — more sustainable.

THE GARDEN INDOORS

Houseplants are hot now, and Instagram is full of plant influencers posting photos.

New technologies make it easier to grow plants anywhere indoors, with or without soil. The plants offer not only beauty, but the rewards of caring for living things and seeing them grow.

Indoor vegetable gardening, too, has become especially popular both as a food source and as a family activity. For instance, you can buy organic mini-farms in Mason jars, cans and boxes — all intended for the windowsill. You can grow mushrooms in their cardboard box with just a spritzer, or set up a large jar of tomatoes adding nothing but water.

Sales of backyard greenhouses and grow lights are up, and seed companies are already reporting another year of high demand. Johnny's Selected Seeds, a high-end, mail-order seller based in Winslow, Maine, recently suspended orders from home gardeners temporarily, saying that because of COVID, order volume "has exceeded our capacity to pack seed and to ship orders quickly."

Some gardeners have already started planting the seeds of cold-

weather vegetables in flats indoors — seeing the sprouts of cabbage, onions, spinach and more. In just a couple months, perhaps, they can think about transplanting them outdoors if they have the space.

As the Vermont Bean Seed Company says in its 2021 spring catalog: "In each seed and seed-bearing fruit, there is a promise of a new beginning."

THE GARDEN OF THE MIND'S EYE

Which brings us to the third garden: the one we imagine and plan.

"I shall never have the garden I have in my mind, but that for me is the joy of it; certain things can never be realized and so all the more reason to attempt them," the author/gardener Jamaica Kincaid once said.

The new seed catalogs carry the promise that, this year, you can make your garden better. Maybe that means converting more lawn to flowers and vegetables, choosing more native plants, reducing water use, putting in paths and water features. A garden is never finished.

Planning it is creative and hopeful. And as our second pandemic spring approaches, those hopes are being buoyed by the rollout of vaccines, too.

As Amanda Gorman said in her inauguration poem last month, in a shoutout to Lin-Manuel Miranda, who was quoting George Washington and Alexander Hamilton, who were quoting the Bible: "Everyone shall sit under their own vine, and fig tree, And no one shall make them afraid."

The garden as metaphor for peace, safety, prosperity, calm. Not a bad place for the mind's eye to rest, particularly in this most unsettling of winters.

—AP

“ We generate fears while we sit. We overcome them by action. ”
—Dr Henry Link

A LOT OF COFFEE PER DAY UPS CVD RISK

If you drink a lot of coffee throughout the day, it can increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases (CVD), a new study suggests.

The findings, in a genetic-based study, indicate that long-term, heavy coffee consumption, six or more cups a day, can increase the amount of lipids (fats) in your blood to significantly heighten your risk of CVD.



Importantly, this correlation is both positive and dose-dependent, meaning that the more coffee you drink, the greater the risk of CVD, the researchers, including Eilina Hyppönen from the University of South Australia said. "There's certainly a lot of scientific debate about the pros and cons of coffee, but while it may seem like we're going over old ground, it's essential to fully understand how one of the world's most widely consumed drinks can impact our health," said Hyppönen.

IRREGULAR SLEEP CYCLE LINKED TO DEPRESSION

Getting fewer hours of sleep or staying up late most nights can increase the risk of depression, a new study suggests.

"These findings highlight sleep consistency as an underappreciated factor to target in depression and wellness," said researcher Srijan Sen from the University of Michigan.

"The work also underscores the potential of wearable devices in understanding important constructs relevant to health that we previously could not study at scale," Sen added.

"The advanced wearable technology allows us to study the behavioural and physiological factors of mental health, including sleep, at a much larger scale and more accurately than before, opening up an exciting field for us to explore," said researcher Yu Fang from the varsity.



SENSOR-BASED INHALERS IMPROVE ASTHMA

Sensor-based inhalers integrated into health care providers' clinical workflows may help improve medication adherence and support children with asthma, a new study suggests.

The study showed that connected inhalers, which use Bluetooth sensors that attach to participants' asthma inhalers to detect medication use and share the data with physicians, may promote adherence to recommended controller medication use and proactively detect worsening of asthma symptoms.

As a result, this may enable health care providers to intervene more rapidly and improve communication between patients, caregivers and asthma care providers.

"Emerging connected technologies can help improve patient health, with this randomised-controlled clinical trial showing that pediatric asthma patients with access to inhaler sensors report better quality of life than patients who only received a standardised asthma education curriculum," said lead author Ruchi Gupta from Northwestern University.



SPACING BETWEEN BIRTHS REDUCE STUNTING

Adequate spacing between births can help to alleviate the likelihood of stunting in children, a new study suggests.

The study, published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, shows that placing a greater focus on sufficient birth spacing in maternal and child nutritional policies and public health programmes could help to prevent stunting.

Stunting is the impaired growth and development that children experience from poor nutrition, repeated infection, and inadequate psychosocial stimulation.

"Our research suggests that adequately spacing out births can significantly lower stunting and the myriad bad effects it causes," said researcher Sunaina Dhingra from the Tata-Cornell Institute for Agriculture and Nutrition (TCI) in the US.



THERAPY FOR CROHN'S DISEASE IN CHILDREN

Researchers have demonstrated that nanotherapy reduces intestinal inflammation and shrinks lesions in a rodent model of severe Crohn's disease.

According to the team, this approach could become an alternative to biologic antibody therapies that carry many side effects, including increased risk of certain cancers.

"We injected into the intestinal lesion nanomolecules that carry an anti-inflammatory peptide, which is a tiny portion of a protein," said researcher Arun Sharma from Northwestern University in the US.

"The results were phenomenal. We saw reduction in inflammation based upon reductions in pro-inflammatory immune cells and proteins. The lesion size shrank dramatically, which gives us hope that with this therapy we can salvage inflammatory tissue and avoid needing to surgically remove segments of the intestine in severe cases of Crohn's disease," Sharma added.



Undeniable. Unshakeable. Unstoppable

Medvedev was no match for Djokovic in the final as the Serb wins his 9th Aus title in straight sets

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Novak Djokovic's Australian Open dominance is intact - nine finals, nine championships.

And he keeps gaining on Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal in the Grand Slam standings, now up to 18 overall, two away from the men's record shared by his two rivals.

Djokovic used superb serving and his usual relentless returning and baseline excellence to grab 11 of 13 games in one stretch and beat a visibly frustrated Daniil Medvedev 7-5, 6-2, 6-2 on Sunday for a third trophy in a row at Melbourne Park.

The 33-year-old from Serbia improved to 18-0 combined in semifinals and finals on the hard courts of the Australian Open.

Looking at the bigger picture, Djokovic has won six of the last 10 major tournaments and is assured of remaining at No. 1 in the rankings at least through March 8. That will give him 311 weeks in the top spot, breaking a mark held by Federer.

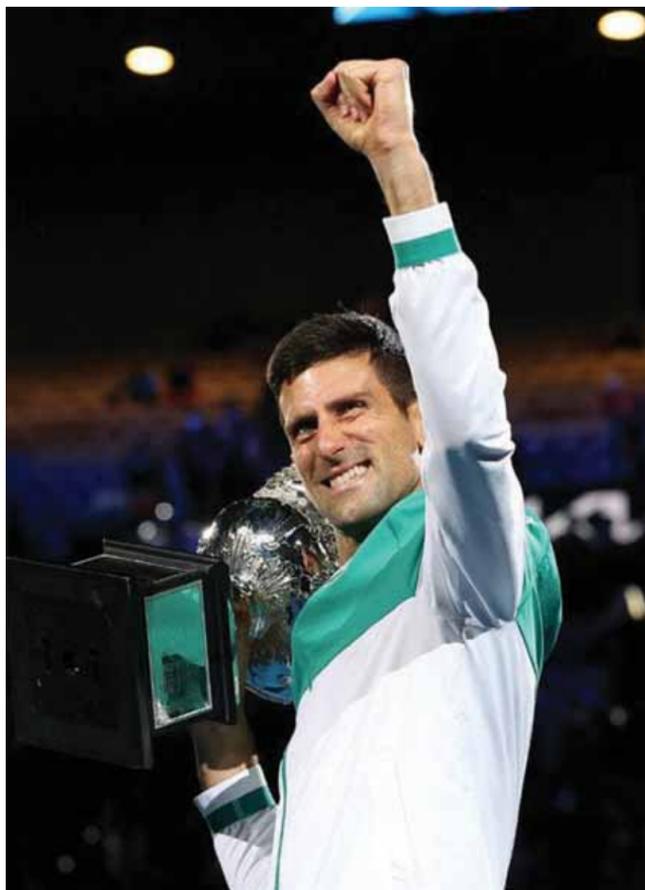
The No. 4-ranked Medvedev was appearing in his second Grand Slam final - he was the runner-up to Nadal at the 2019 U.S. Open - but is still left trying to collect his first such championship.

Djokovic ended the 25-year-old Russian's 20-match winning streak. Medvedev also had won his previous 12 matches against Top 10 opponents.

But going up against Djokovic in Australia is a much different challenge.

By the second set, as things slipped away, Medvedev bounced his white racket off the blue court, then absolutely destroyed it with a full-on spike. By the third, he kept looking up at his coach with palms up as if to ask, "What can I possibly do here?" It is a familiar sentiment in this stadium, on this court, at this tournament. Federer, Nadal, Andy Murray, Stan Wawrinka, Dominic Thiem - all Grand Slam champions, all defeated by Djokovic in semifinals or finals in Melbourne.

So place the nine triumphs in Australia alongside five at Wimbledon, three at the U.S. Open and one at the



Novak Djokovic poses with Australia Open trophy after he beats Daniil Medvedev in the final on Sunday
Aus Open/Twitter

French Open for Djokovic.

The math looks good for Djokovic. He is about a year younger than Nadal and 6 1/2 younger than Federer, who turns 40

in August. Federer hasn't competed in more than a year after having two knee operations but is expected to turn to the tour next month.

Polasek, Dodig bag doubles trophy



Filip Polasek and Ivan Dodig kiss trophy after win in the men's doubles final
AP

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Filip Polasek and Ivan Dodig have won the men's doubles title at the Australian Open with a 6-3, 6-4 win over 2020 champions Rajeev Ram and Joe Salisbury.

Ram, a 36-year-old American who spent two weeks in hard quarantine after arriving in Australia last month, was attempting a double at Melbourne Park after winning the mixed doubles title with

Barbara Krejckikova on Saturday night.

The 35-year-old Polasek dedicated the victory to his newly-born baby daughter.

Ram saved a championship point while serving in the ninth game and held, but Polasek sealed the title in the next game.

Novak Djokovic is bidding for a ninth Australian Open singles title in the final later Sunday against fourth-seeded Daniil Medvedev.

On a cool, cloudy evening, an event delayed three weeks because of the coronavirus pandemic concluded with an announced attendance of 7,426 at Rod Laver Arena. Spectators were barred

entirely for five days earlier in the tournament because of a local COVID-19 lockdown, but they eventually were let back in at 50% capacity. A majority favored Djokovic on

Sunday, so plenty of choruses of his nickname rang out - "No-le, No-le, No-le!" - and Serbian flags dotted the stands, flapping in a swirling breeze.

Medvedev's flat, wrap-the-racket-around-his-neck forehand was iffy at first, missing wide, long and into the net in the initial 10 minutes. Djokovic grabbed 13 of the match's initial 16 points and a quick 3-0 lead.

Soon enough, though, it was 3-0, because Medvedev cleaned up his mistakes, while Djokovic faltered a bit, getting broken after a game in which he flubbed a drop shot, then an overhead, the most glaring - only? - weakness in his game.

But from 5-0, Djokovic stepped up, and Medvedev stepped back. Djokovic held at love, then broke to claim the set when Medvedev slapped a forehand into the net just after someone in the crowd called out during the point.

There were frequent extended exchanges at the baseline, both men capable of covering the court well enough to swallow up each other's potential point-ending shots. Medvedev rarely strayed from the back of the court unless lured forward by one of Djokovic's relatively frequent drop shots.

Djokovic began the second set with a fault into the net, then shook out his left arm and flexed his shoulders. That point ended with him missing a backhand into the net, and he hunched up his shoulders and stared over at his guest box. Another netted backhand gifted Medvedev a break and a 1-0 lead.

There might have been reason to believe Djokovic was just a tad more susceptible this time around. First of all, he wrenched his midsection during a slip in the third round against American Taylor Fritz; after that win, Djokovic said he had torn a muscle, but by the time he played his semifinal, he declared himself pain-free.

Plus, entering Sunday, Djokovic already had ceded five sets through six matches, the most he had dropped in any Grand Slam tournament en route to a final.

Need to be extra focused while batting during twilight: Rohit



PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Set to play in only his second pink ball Test, India opener Rohit Sharma on Sunday said he will be "extra cautious and focussed" while batting during the twilight phase of the upcoming day-night match against England here.

Rohit, who scored a dazzling 161 in the second Test in Chennai, had featured in the first day-night Test held in India against Bangladesh in November 2019 but did not bat during the twilight phase.

"So far I have only heard that it kind of plays on a batsman's mind. I played just one pink ball Test against Bangladesh but didn't get to bat at that (twilight) time when sun was about to set but I have to try and understand what exactly happens during that time," he said during a virtual press conference ahead of the third Test against England, starting here on

Wednesday.

"It's obviously a little challenging, the weather and light suddenly change. You have to be extra cautious and focussed, you need to talk to yourself. All batters are aware of these challenges. We just need to be mindful of the situation and play accordingly."

Apart from this, Rohit is also concerned about adjusting to the lights and surroundings while fielding in the newly-built Sardar Patel Gujarat Stadium in Motera.

"Whenever you play in a new stadium, there's always a challenge to get used to the lights. Tomorrow we will be practising under the lights so the focus will be on getting used to those lights and seats because the seats are new and they will be shiny," he said.

With a World Test Championship final spot at stake, the ongoing series holds great significance for both India and England.

Eng will have advantage in D/N Test: Crawley

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

An "unbelievable seam attack and incredible batsmen" make India formidable but England will have the edge in the pink ball day/night Test here as the tourists are more adept at playing in seaming conditions, feels batsman Zak Crawley.

With the series locked at 1-1, the two teams are set to take on each other in the day/night fixture starting at the Motera Stadium here on Wednesday.



When asked if England were favourites playing against a moving ball, Crawley, in an

interaction with British media on Saturday, said, "I think it will play into our hands."

"We have grown up with those conditions, trying to play the ball late in seaming conditions, so you would say we would be more adept at it than the Indians."

"That's probably why they are unbelievable players of spin, because they have grown up with it," Crawley added.

However, the 23-year-old is well aware that the hosts are armed with a potent seam

attack as well as skilful batsmen making them capable of handling all conditions.

"That said, they have an unbelievable seam attack and incredible batsmen so it won't help us too much. They will be more than capable," he said referring to line-up spearheaded by the redoubtable Jasprit Bumrah and comprising seasoned warhorses like Ishant Sharma and new find Mohammed Siraj.

Although the pink ball swings more than the red cherry, Crawley feels spin-

ners will still play a huge role in the outcome of the Test.

"(The pink ball) seems to be swinging more than the red ball, doing a bit more for the seamers. I expect a bit more seam in this game and for the seamers to have more of a chance than perhaps they did in the last couple of Tests.

"It also seems to be a bit harder so the spinners are skidding it on a bit more. The spinners are still going to have to play a big role and I would be surprised if they produce an absolute green

seamer."

The Kent batsman had missed the first two Tests as he had slipped on the marble floor of the Chepauk dressing room, thereby injuring his wrist ahead of the series opener. However, Crawley is fit to play and has also been included in the squad for the day/night Test.

"I have improved quite a bit, doing plenty of batting in the nets, making sure I am as fit as possible for this Test and that there is a chance I can be selected," said Crawley.

The feeling is surreal, says Surya

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Finally rewarded for his consistency, prolific Mumbai batsman Suryakumar Yadav described his feeling as "surreal", a day after he earned a maiden India call-up for the upcoming T20 International series against England.

Suryakumar was overlooked for the limited overs matches in Australia late last year despite a fine IPL, leaving many in the Indian cricket fraternity surprised.

"The feeling is surreal," tweeted Surya along with his picture at the D Y Patil Stadium.

The 30-year-old Mumbai batsman, who has been a constant performer in the Indian Premier League for his franchise Mumbai Indians and



also in the domestic circuit, was rewarded for his performances on Saturday.

Surya, who has captained Mumbai in Ranji Trophy and other domestic tournaments, has played 77 first-class matches and amassed 5,326 runs.

Some former India cricketers also took to Twitter to express their satisfaction at the right-handed batsman's selection in the national team.

"So good to finally @surya_14kumar in Team India. Good Luck," wrote veteran off-spinner Harbhajan Singh.

"Finally the wait is over for @surya_14kumar congratulations buddy. Goodluck @ishankishan51 @rahultewatia02 for your debut guys," said former India seamer Irfan Pathan.

On cusp of 100th Test, Delhi's 'lambu' stands tall

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

On the sidelines of a Ranji Trophy game in 2019, Ishant Sharma had called himself "the last flicker in a lamp" while politely making his reluctance known to three scribes, who had approached the self-effacing beanpole for an interaction.

Ishant was then standing at 96 Tests. Nearly 14 months later, during which he missed five Tests due to an injury, Indian cricket's most adorable 'lambu' is shining bright.

He is on course to become only the second Indian fast bowler, after the great Kapil Dev, to complete 100 Tests for the country.

"Arre yaar mera interview karke kya karogey? Main toh bujhta huya diya hoon (Why do you want to interview me? I am like the last flicker in a lamp)," Ishant had said at the Kotla.

In terms of sheer talent and craft, Ishant wouldn't be in the same league as Zaheer Khan, Mohammed Shami or Javagal Srinath but with his longevity, he has proved that "workhorse" isn't exactly an abused word, which is used to sum up the veteran pacer.

"I think I will say this with certainty..." former India wicketkeeper and Ishant's ex-Delhi teammate and coach Vijay Dahiya said. "Ishant will be the last Indian fast

bowler to play 100 Test matches. I don't see anyone playing 100 Tests. With majority of the fast bowlers preserving themselves for IPL and white ball games, it will be increasingly difficult to play 100 Tests for India," Dahiya made a statement.

Ishant's mate for the last 16 years, Pradeep Sangwan felt that even when Virat Kohli and Ishant attended Delhi's U-17 trials, he looked a class apart.

"He was so tall and that long flowing mane of his, we used to pull his leg and tease him, 'dekh le bhai, lamba Shah Rukh aa gaya brothers, the tall Shah Rukh has come Sangwan said."



Shaw's show set up Mumbai win

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Prithvi Shaw's blistering 105, after an impressive show by the bowlers, set up Mumbai's seven-wicket win over Delhi in an Elite Group D match here on Sunday as the domestic giants began their Vijay Hazare Trophy campaign on a winning note.

Mumbai bowlers, led by experienced pacer Dhawal Kulkarni (3/35), restricted Delhi to 211/7 despite a valiant unbeaten 106 off 145 balls by Himmat Singh and then cantered to the target in 31.5 overs, as Prithvi tore into the Delhi attack.

Shaw took the Delhi attack to the cleaners, hammering 15 boundaries and two sixes in his match-winning innings and was ably supported by Iyer, who is making a comeback after missing the Syed Mushtaq Ali tournament.

Brief Scores: Delhi 211/7 (Himmat

Singh 106 not out, Shivank Vashisth 55; Dhawal Kulkarni 3/35, Shams Mulani 2/33) lost to Mumbai 216/3 (Prithvi Shaw 105 not out; Suryakumar Yadav 50; Lalit Yadav 2/32) by 7 wickets.

BISTA SETS UK WIN

A superb knock of 141 by opener Jay Bista powered Uttarakhand to a six-wicket win over Meghalaya in a Plate Group match of the Vijay Hazare Trophy here on Sunday.

Bista scored his runs in 119 balls, striking 18 fours and three sixes. Chasing 243 for victory, Bista and skipper Kunal Chandela (55 off 80 balls) set up the win with a second-wicket partnership of 126 runs in 142 balls.

Though Bista fell eight runs shy of the target, Uttarakhand got home with 5.5 overs to spare.

Earlier, R Sanjay Yadav's whirlwind 81 off 49 balls (2 fours, seven sixes)

helped Meghalaya recover and post 242 for 6 in 50 overs, having slipped to 123 for 4 in the 34th over.

In other matches, Assam thrashed Manipur by 10 wickets in a game shortened by overnight rain and Nagaland outplayed Sikkim by 98 runs.

CHANDIGARH BEAT HARYANA

Rahul Tewatia celebrated his maiden India call-up with a 39-ball 73 but his effort went in vain as Chandigarh secured a thrilling three-wicket win over Haryana in their Vijay Hazare Trophy Group E opener here on Sunday.

Tewatia, who was named in the India T20I squad for the five-match series against England, clobbered six sixes and four fours.

Chandigarh skipper Manan Vohra led a stiff 300-run chase with a 120-ball 117 (9x4, 2x6) before Ankit Kaushik provided the finishes touches with his

brisk 78 from 66 balls (4x4, 3x6).

Chandigarh completed the chase with three balls to spare.

Earlier, Haryana got off to a solid start with a cracking 102 (125 balls; 11x1, 1x6) by Himanshu Rana and his 115-run opening stand with Arun Chaprana.

Chandigarh bowlers fought back to trigger a middle-order collapse before Haryana rode on Tewatia's strong finish to post a challenging 299/9 from their stipulated 50 overs.

Tewatia, the explosive Rajasthan Royals left-hander, raced to his third List A fifty in 32 balls and then went berserk, scoring his next 22 runs off only six balls before getting dismissed by Jagjit Singh (3/36).

Having made a group stage exit in the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20s, Bengal opened their campaign with a comprehensive 70-run win over Services at

Eden Gardens.

Middle-order batsman Kaif Ahmad hit a stellar 53-ball 75 (11x4, 2x6), while skipper Anustup Majumdar provided him fine support with a 61-ball 58, as Bengal piled 315/6 after putting in by Services.

The top-three, comprising Shreevats Goswami (28), Vivek Singh (39) and Abhimanyu Easwaran (39), too chipped in before the duo of Majumdar and Kaif took charge for a 92-run partnership.

In reply, fifties from skipper Rajat Palival (90) and Pulkit Narang (53) were not enough as Bengal put Services under pressure with consistent wickets before bowling them out for 245 in 49.4 overs.

The pace trio of Ishan Porel, Mukesh Kumar and Akash Deep, along with left-arm spinner Shabaz Ahmed, picked two wickets each.