

**OPINION 6**  
STOP ROMANTICISING  
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UN TELLS MYANMAR MILITARY

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# Covid resurgence: Cases soar to 8 weeks high

Over 17,000 cases in 24 hours; 6 States account for 88.76% of Covid deaths

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a case of serious concern on the Covid-19 front, the overall daily cases on Thursday surged past 17,000 — the highest in eight weeks — with just six States accounting for 88.76 per cent of the new deaths pushing India's death toll to 1,57,435 and cases to 1,11,56,923.

As many as 89 fatalities were recorded in the last 24 hours with Maharashtra reporting maximum 42, Kerala 15 deaths and Punjab reported 12 deaths.

However, 23 States and UTs have not reported any deaths due to infections in the last 24 hours. The rise in new cases of this magnitude was last reported in the early week of January, pointed out experts.

The rate of active cases has also been rising gradually, pushing it to 1.55 per cent. As per the Ministry's data, there are 1,73,413 active cases at present after 14,031 patients were discharged in a day.

The experts have pointed out that number of possibilities could be due to the stride ranging from the last attitude of people towards following Covid protocols to the likelihood of 'mutations and new strains' causing the surge, as has been studied by the laboratories involved in the Covid detection across the country.

According to State



An elderly woman hands over a document to register for the Covid vaccine at a private hospital in Gurgaon on Thursday. AP

Governments, the recent surge is due to the rise in marriage ceremonies and State and local bodies elections. In mid-February, officials had said the average daily new infections oscillated between 9,000 and 12,000 while the deaths were between 78 and 120 while on February 9, India had reported 9,110 new cases, the lowest this year so far. Last year, the lowest 9,633 cases were recorded on June 3.

The 23 States/UTs which have not reported any Covid-19 deaths in the last 24 hours are: Madhya Pradesh, Haryana,

Rajasthan, J&K (UT), Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Goa, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Puducherry, Assam, Lakshadweep, Nagaland, Sikkim, Ladakh, Tripura, A&N Islands, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Daman & Diu, Dadar & Nagar Haveli and Arunachal Pradesh.

So far, 1,66,16,048 doses of vaccine have been administered in the country since the drive began on January 16.

Meanwhile, the latest round of seroprevalence survey conducted in Hyderabad has showed that about 54 per cent of the population in the city has been exposed to the virus and developed antibodies against it.

The study was jointly conducted by the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), the ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) and the pharmaceutical company Bharat Biotech.

"The data indicate that the population of Hyderabad might be slowly moving towards herd immunity, which will be certainly accelerated by the ongoing vaccination effort," said Doctor Rakesh Mishra, the CCMB director.



## We are giving jabs to foreign nations but not vaccinating our own people: HC to Centre

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court Thursday asked the Centre to explain the rationale behind keeping strict control over distribution of vaccine to people who can be vaccinated against Covid-19 currently as under the present system those above the age of 60 years or with comorbidities can receive vaccination.

The high court said the two institutes which have developed the vaccines COVISHIELD and COVAXIN — Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech — have more capacity to provide the vaccines but it seems that their full capacity is not being exploited.

"We are not utilising it fully."

"We are either donating it to foreign countries or selling it to them and are not vaccinating our own people. So there has to be that sense of responsibility and urgency," a bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli said.

The high court directed the two institutes to file separate affidavits on their capacity to manufacture the vaccines on per day/week/month basis and also the current output of the vaccines and how much unused capacity is lying.

They also have to indicate if they can scale up their production capacities, it said.

## UK strains more contagious: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid cases of new variants of mutated SARS-CoV-2 emerging in India, a new modelling study has found that a variant of the virus that causes Covid-19 in the UK in November 2020 is more transmissible than pre-existing variants and will lead to a large resurgence of Covid-19 cases.

The study should come as a warning to India where number of infections with the mutant UK, South Africa, and Brazil variants of SARS-CoV-2 jumped to 242 on Thursday. The new Covid-19 UK strain is more contagious and spread faster, and vaccines could be less effective on these patients, according to a new modelling study published in the journal Science.

However, the study has its limitation as it was based on a relatively smaller number of intervention and vaccination scenarios.

The research noted that without stringent control measures such as limited closure of educational institutions and a greatly accelerated vaccine roll-out, Covid-19 hospitalisation and deaths across England in 2021 will exceed those in 2020.

Researchers, including those from London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine estimate that the novel variant has a 43-90 per cent higher reproduction number than pre-existing variants of SARS-CoV-2 in England.

Reproduction number indicates the average number of people who will contract a contagious disease from one infected person.

After emerging in November last year, evidence began to emerge in December that VOC 202012/01 was rapidly outcompeting pre-existing variants in south-east England, the researchers said.

They noted that as of February 15, the variant comprises roughly 95 per cent of new SARS-CoV-2 infections in the UK, and has now been identified in at least 82 countries, including India.

India is taking all steps to speed up vaccination pace and hopes to inoculate around 30 crore people by August this year in the second phase.

Estimates of its growth rate, disease severity and impact are crucial for informing policy responses, according to the researchers.

## CAPSULE

### 12 FROM MYANMAR TAKE REFUGE IN MIZORAM

Aizawl: At least 12 people from Myanmar crossed into India and took refuge in Mizoram around a month after neighbouring country's military ousted the elected Government of Aung San Suu Kyi, officials said on Thursday.

### NAXAL BLAST KILLS 3 SECURITY PERSONNEL

Ranchi: Three security personnel were martyred and two injured in a Naxal-triggered ED blast in the forests of Jharkhand's West Singhbhum district on Thursday.

### KEJRIWAL, PARENTS GET COVID VACCINE

New Delhi: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who along with his parents took their first dose of Covid-19 vaccine on Thursday, appealed to all eligible people to come forward and get vaccinated, asserting that there's "nothing to fear".

### 'UNDER GST, PETROL PRICE CAN COME DOWN TO ₹75'

Mumbai: Petrol price can go down to ₹75 a litre across the country if brought under the ambit of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), but there is a lack of political will, which is keeping Indian oil product prices at one of the highest in the world, economists at SBI said on Thursday.

## India pushes for Chabahar port in international transport route

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With India underlining the need for enhancing connectivity for development, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday proposed the inclusion of Chabahar port in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

The port is in Iran and India helped in its construction. The location of the Chabahar port has the strategic advantage and potential to provide connectivity among India, Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and other Commonwealth of Independent States countries, and boost trade.

Located in the Sistan-Balochistan province on the energy-rich Iran's southern coast, the port can be easily accessed from India's western coast, bypassing Pakistan.

Elaborating upon the importance of the Chabahar port, Jaishankar said the shift in the fulcrum of global economic growth towards Asia is creating unprecedented opportunities for connectivity in the



region.

Highlighting these points here on 'Chabahar Day' at the Maritime India Summit 2021, the Minister expressed hope that member states involved with the INSTC will agree on expanding membership of this project.

Jaishankar said India has also proposed the inclusion of Chabahar in the INSTC route. It is an important trade corridor project, wherein India is partnering with 12 countries to establish an economic corridor, he said.

The International North-South Transport Corridor is a 7,200-km-long multi-mode transport project for moving freight among India, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe.

"We also welcome the interest of Uzbekistan and Afghanistan to join the multi-lateral corridor project. Establishing an eastern corridor through Afghanistan would maximise its potential," he said.

"I am hopeful that during the INSTC Coordination Council meeting, member states would agree to the expansion of the INSTC route to include the Chabahar Port and also agree on expanding the membership of this project," Jaishankar said.

He also said as the world goes through a fundamental re-balancing, correcting many distortions of the past, it is only natural that connectivity should be central to that exercise.

The shift in the fulcrum of global economic growth towards Asia is creating

## We hope member states will agree on the proposal, says Jaishankar

unprecedented opportunities for connectivity in the region, the Minister said.

Noting that in the modern age, the correlation between connectivity and economic growth has got even more pronounced, Jaishankar said growth in trade, commerce, industrial development and technological advancement has gone hand in hand with ease of connecting.

Maritime connectivity, in particular, has played a significant role in creating regional corridors for trade and economic linkages, as indeed for cultural and intellectual exchanges over the centuries, he pointed out and added that they too assume a new prominence in contemporary times, for being more competitive and seamless.

The access of land-locked economies to maritime movements has been a focus of recent initiatives, he said. Recognising the importance of regional connectivity, India made a landmark decision to undertake an overseas port investment in Chabahar, Jaishankar said.

## Some OTT platforms show pornographic content: SC

### Apex court wants ways to screen programmes

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday said that a few over-the-top (OTT) platforms show some kind of pornographic content at times, and there should be a mechanism to screen such programmes.

A Bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan asked Solicitor General Tushar Mehta to place before it the recent guidelines of the Government to regulate social media platforms on Friday, when it would hear the plea of Amazon Prime Video's India head Aparna Purohit challenging the Allahabad High Court order rejecting her anticipatory bail in connection with FIRs lodged against her over web series "Tandav".

"A balance has to be struck as some OTT platforms are also showing pornographic materi-



als on their platforms," the bench, also comprising Justice RS Reddy, said.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for Purohit, termed the case against her as "shocking," saying this woman is an employee of Amazon and she is neither a producer nor an actor but still she has been made an accused in around 10 cases relating to the web series across the country.

Tandav, a nine-episode political thriller starring Bollywood A-listers Saif Ali Khan, Deepika Padikone and Mohd Zeeshaan Ayyub, started streaming recently.

## OTT guidelines for self-classification to boost audience experience: Min

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Amid concerns among some OTT (Over-the-Top) players about the new digital media classification, Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar on Thursday said his Ministry will partner with the industry to make the audience experience better and asserted the guidelines focus on self-classification of content instead of any form of censorship.

Javadekar, after a meeting with representatives of OTT platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar and Aha! Balaji, also said that they have welcomed the guidelines. The Centre on February 25 notified rules for OTT platforms and digital news media, requiring them to have a grievance redressal system.

## Bengaluru, Shimla most liveable cities in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Bengaluru has been rated the most liveable city in India in the Government's "Ease of Living Index". The others, in the order of ranking, are Pune, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Surat, Navi Mumbai, Coimbatore, Vadodra, Indore and Greater Mumbai.

The lowest on the list are: Bareilly, Dhanbad and Srinagar. Interestingly, in the 2018 "Ease of Living Index", Pune was ranked the most liveable city in the country. It was followed by Navi Mumbai and Greater Mumbai, which have slipped to the sixth and the 10th rank respectively in the 2020 edition of the East of Living Index.

Besides, Shimla topped the list among 62 cities having

less than one million population followed by Bhubaneswar, while Muzaffarpur in Bihar occupies the bottom place in the rankings.

The city ranking based on the Ease of Living Index 2020, was released by Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Thursday. Chennai, Surat, Navi Mumbai, Coimbatore, Vadodra, Indore and Greater Mumbai are the other seven cities that have found place in the top 10 among the million-plus cities.

Of the 49 cities ranked on livability index in the "million-plus population" category, Delhi ranked at the 13th position, Meerut at 36 and Farabad 40 position and Bareilly, Dhanbad, Srinagar are at the bottom at 47, 48 and 49

position respectively.

Tripurati was at the fourth position and Chandigarh fifth in 2018, but in the 2020 Ease of Living Index, Tripurati and Chandigarh have slipped to the 46th and the 29th position respectively. PM Narendra Modi's constituency Varanasi was ranked 33 position in 2018, which has been ranked at the 27 position in 2020.

Unlike the first ease of living index (EoLI) report of 2018, the latest ranking of cities in 2020 has put 111 cities in two categories, million-plus and cities having population less than a million. "These cities have emerged as models of development who will inspire others to perform better. Further, their peers will also benefit from emulating their best practices," Puri said.

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Not sparing the BJP led Central Government in his attack over the three agriculture legislations, the Congress leader and the former Minister Navjot Singh Sidhu on Thursday once again cornered his own party's Government stressing on the need to bring new legislations to ensure minimum support price (MSP) on oilseeds and lentils to encourage farmers to get out of the wheat-rice cycle that get MSP from the Centre.

The cricketer-turned-politician, days after denying allegations of squandering of public money my mafia, said that the Punjab Government should take all democratic and legal steps to help the farmer — using the "democratic power given to us by three crore Punjabis".

Sidhu, addressing the media at Punjab Bhawan, said that the Centre's three farm laws were an infringement on the State's right to legislate and that the Centre could not scuttle the legislative sphere of the States.

"Thus, we have enough grounds to completely deny the implementation of these black laws in Punjab... Yet why, in this case, are we just amending the Central laws and sending them back, when we know very well that these amendments will not be implemented until either approved by the President of India or if the Central laws are first withdrawn?" he said.

By means of mere amendments, we are going to the Constitutional head, who may not choose to help us, and maybe is not a good position to be in at this decisive critical juncture. Instead, why not use the democratic power given to us by three crore Punjabis by honouring their aspirations?" said Sidhu.

Sidhu said that to help farmers get MSP, there should be an expansion of procurement between wheat and rice in the State.

He added that the farmers cannot diversify until MSP is provided and there is assured procurement.

"To begin with, Punjab can procure pulses and oilseeds through Marked or PunSP on MSP. Punjab imports pulses and edible oils for our own consumption. Keep aside the money we use to import pulses and edible oil from outside and utilize it to procure from Punjab itself."

State Corporations can further process oil seeds and market them outside Punjab... In future, Punjab can expand MSP and assurance of procurement to vegetables and fruits.

For this to become reality, we must take the second necessary step today," he said. Suggesting to create storage

facility to counter the "corporate onslaught" by the Centre, Sidhu contended that once the farmers had storage capacity, they would be in a position to negotiate the price of their crops and they "could be saved from the onslaught of corporate".

Sidhu also asked the Congress Government to provide a scheme for income support to agricultural labourers. "I demand that we give the MNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act)-like income support to all agricultural labour in Punjab which will benefit not only the labour as an increment in their daily wages but also help the farmer as an agricultural labour subsidy and ease their financial burden," he said.

"We should increase the minimum wages of labour, linking it to inflation and the Government should directly pay the difference."

Thirty-six per cent of Punjabis are Dalits, owning only two per cent of land. "Most of them work as labour. Let us support them," he said.

Sidhu avoided replies on his recent statement questioning performance of his own party's government.

He was addressing the media almost two years after he resigned from the Cabinet. At the beginning, he made it clear that he would talk only on the central agriculture laws and the ways to bail out farmers of the farm crisis.

Sidhu said that he would raise the issue in the CLP meeting whenever it was called as he could talk remaining within the party decorum.

"I have been raising the issue on public platform, be it mining or other issues. But the statements should be seen in right perspective," he said.

Continued on Page 2







# J&K delimitation panel's term extended for a year

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a move indicating that the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir's wait for regaining its Statehood would not be over anytime soon, the Centre has given a one-year extension to the Delimitation Commission, headed by retired Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai, mandated for redrawing the boundaries of Assembly and Lok Sabha seats in the UT. It means, the Assembly and Parliamentary polls will only be held after the delimitation exercise, and for conducting the polls, the UT has to be declared a State first.

Interestingly, the north-eastern states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland have been excluded from the mandate of the Commission.

The Union Ministry of Law & Justice has issued a notification extending the term of the Justice (Retd.) Ranjana Desai, delimitation commission by one year. The commission's term was coming to end on March 5, 2021. According to the notification, the Commission's mandate would now only be to carry out the exercise in Jammu & Kashmir Union Territory.

Union home minister Amit Shah had last month told the Lok Sabha that Jammu and Kashmir will get back the status of a state at an appropriate time. The home minister was replying to the discussion on the Jammu



**Jammu & Kashmir**

and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill of 2021 in the Lok Sabha.

Sources said there were some legal issues in notification part relating delimitation in the four north-eastern states. "So possibly a fresh notification may be issued after addressing the legal anomalies", sources added.

The Commission has held its first meeting last month in which the National Conference members skipped the meeting saying that the party has challenged the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act and the matter is pending.

The panel was set up last year to redraw the electoral constituencies of Jammu and Kashmir and four northeastern States — Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. However, the one-year extension is only for Jammu

and Kashmir.

The proceedings of the commission, which has five MPs from the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir as ex-officio members, have been boycotted by the National Conference (NC) that has three representatives in the panel.

Before Parliament passed the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act in August 2019, the effective strength of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly was 107 now with 24 seats to continue to remain vacant as those fall in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

The Government had in August 2019 revoked Article 370, which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir.

# IITs, IIMs, DU et al: 12 Indian institutes in top 100 rankings

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Twelve Indian institutions have made it to the top 100 of the world's IIT Bombay, IIT Delhi, IIT Madras, IIT Kharagpur, IITSC Bangalore, IIT Guwahati, IIM Bangalore, IIM Ahmedabad, JNU, Anna University, University of Delhi, and O P Jindal University have found top billing in the latest QS World University Rankings by Subject 2021.

Amongst these top 100 ranked institutions, IIT Madras has been ranked 30th in the world for Petroleum Engineering, IIT Bombay has been ranked 41st and IIT Kharagpur has been ranked 44th in the world for Minerals and Mining Engineering, and the University of Delhi has been ranked 50th in the world for Design and Studies.

Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' while addressing and unveiling the QS World University Rankings expressed his happiness and congratulated the institutions for securing positions in the top 100 in the QS Subject Rankings for the year 2021.

He said, over the last few years the Government's continuous focus on improvement and reform in Indian higher education has resulted in significant improvement in

the representation of Indian institutions in globally acclaimed and reputed rankings like QS. These rankings and ratings have fostered healthy competition amongst Indian Institutions motivating them towards global excellence, he added.

Nishank said India's higher education system plays a vital role in driving the nation's competitiveness. "Today, India is a leading nation with the highest number of higher education institutions across the globe with significant progress in the last few years in terms of enrolment in higher education which now stands at 37.4 million."

He also highlighted the achievements of the Government in addressing the gender gap in higher education, wherein now women constitute 48.6% of the total enrolment, said Nishank on the occasion.

CEO, NITI Aayog Amitabh Kant, Chairman, UGC, Prof Dhirendra P Singh, Chairman, NAC, Dr Virendra S Chauhan, Chairman, AICTE, Dr Anil D Sahasrabudhe, Vice President, QS Rankings, Ben Sowter, Head of Evaluation, QS Rankings, Leigh Kamolins, Head of Institutions and other dignitaries were also virtually present on the occasion.

# Dwarka e-way to open for public use by Aug 15, 2022



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's First Grade Separated Urban Expressway, called Dwarka Expressway in national Capital region, will be opened open for the public by August 15 in 2022, marking the 75th anniversary of India's Independence. Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari made an announcement in this regard on Thursday.

Gadkari during the review of the progress of the 29-km state-of-the-art Dwarka expressway directed the stakeholders of the project to expedite the construction activities and help further decongest Delhi-NCR and look forward to reduce pollution quickly.

The project is part of the Centre's ambitious Bharatmala Project and with a cost of ₹8,662 crore "it will be the first-ever elevated Urban Expressway in India and will immensely help reducing the

air pollution in Delhi-NCR," Gadkari said while addressing the media after the inspection of project.

Being built in four packages, total length of the Expressway is 29 kilometres out of which 18.9 kilometre length falls in Haryana while remaining 10.1 kilometre length is in Delhi. It starts from Shiv-Murti on National Highway-8 and ends near Kherki Daula Toll Plaza.

The Minister said that the project, once complete, will be an engineering marvel of India as it has several unique features. This will have longest (3.6 kilometre) and widest (8 lane) Urban Road Tunnel in India. The project's road network will also comprise of four levels, i.e., tunnel/underpass, at-grade road, elevated flyover and flyover above flyover.

It will also comprise India's first 9-kilometre long 8-lane flyover (34-metre wide)

on single pier with 6-lane service roads. There will be a fully automated tolling system with 22 lanes toll plaza. The entire project will be equipped with Intelligent Transportation System (ITS). The project has a total estimated consumption of two lakh MT of steel, which is 30 times of that of the Eiffel Tower. The total estimated consumption of 20 lakh Cum of Concrete is six times of the Burj Khalifa building.

Gadkari said that the Dwarka Expressway would also be the first instance of a project where Tree Plantation of approximately 12,000 trees has been undertaken, keeping protection of the environment in view. He further said that "based on this experience, the method will be replicated across the country".

The Minister stated that Delhi-Gurgaon section of National Highway-8, a part of Delhi-Jaipur-Ahmedabad-Mumbai arm of Golden Quadrilateral (GQ), is presently carrying traffic over three lakh Passenger Car Units (PCUs), which is much beyond its designed capacity of this 8-lane highway, leading to severe congestion and with the construction of the present project, 50 to 60 per cent traffic on National Highway-8 will be reduced. The project will also provide around 50,000 direct or indirect employment opportunities.

# Rahul: Centre carries out raids on pro-farmers people

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi on Thursday accused the Centre of carrying out raids against those who are pro-farmers. He used three popular Hindi idioms—"Unglyun pe nachana," "Bheegi billi banana" and "Khisvani billi khamba noch" — which he believed are meaningful in the current perspective amidst the ongoing confrontation between the Government, farmers.

Rahul's scathing comments on the Modi-led Government came as income-tax raids continued at the homes and offices of Bollywood personalities Taapsee Pannu, Anurag Kashyap and others. In his three-pronged attack, Rahul alleged that the Government makes the Income Tax department dance to its tunes, friendly media gets cowed down before the Centre and the Central Government raids those supporting farmers. He used the hashtag "ModiRaidsProFarmers" while his tweet in Hindi to take a dig at the Government.

Pannu and Kashyap, both known to be outspoken in their views on a range of issues, were shown up in Pune and are understood to have been questioned by the tax sleuths as part of the preliminary questioning that takes place during raids. The searches against Pannu and Kashyap as well as his partners who

# Cong blames Modi Govt sans concrete proof, hits back BJP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Thursday hit back at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and his party for criticising the Modi Government on all issues "without any evidence" in that of Coronavirus vaccine. Election Commission's poll data announcement, abrogation of Article 370 or the Income Tax raids on the Bollywood Stars.

Addressing a press conference here, BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia alleged that the Congress and the other opposition parties are attacking a constitutional body like the Election Commission in Mumbai and the eight-phased poll in West Bengal. He said casual criti-

cism against key institutions "weakens democracy".

Pointing to the criticism attracted by the IT raids, this week, against some film stars, Bhatia said "not making law work in the country is in the character of the Congress" and claimed that the Modi-government has given a "free-hand to probe" cases on the basis of merit without discriminating as who is a star or not.

He accused the Congress of discrediting the key institutions saying it was during the UPA regime when the Supreme Court had called CBI a "caged parrot".

The BJP leader accused Congress of playing politics around Covid vaccine, EC and the IT raids on



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Bollywood stars and attacking the government "without any evidence". Bhatia asked Rahul to answer questions which BJP president J P Nadda had asked him like the one as "why he doesn't attend Parliamentary Defence Committee meetings?".

"Rahul asks many questions but runs away when he is posed with some basic questions," Bhatia said. He said Congress leader should at least answer questions asked by the Congress dissident G-23 group leaders as why his party has tied up with a "communal outfit" like Indian Secular Front in West Bengal. "It is Panth Nirpex", he said, "quizzed, hoping Rahul would lead the advice of his party leaders."

zling free press and trying to control the media narrative. Party spokesperson Supriya Sinha said, "A Government communication report has revealed some disturbing facts. There were five Union cabinet ministers and four ministers of State who were part of this."

# India should be ready to face Sino-Pak challenges at border: CDS Rawat

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Flagging the fast-changing war fighting doctrine, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat on Thursday said India faces bigger threats than other military in the world and it should prepare to face the twin challenges of its security from China and Pakistan. The country should also undertake reforms in the defence sector, especially to conduct joint battles in digitized battle space, he stressed.

Underlining these priorities here on Thursday, Rawat said with China's growing military prowess, it will make all efforts to assert its dominance in states around India and the strategically important Indian Ocean region.

"Threats for which our military must be organised primarily comes from China and Pakistan. In future, China will continue to assert itself, seeking to establish domi-

nance in States surrounding India and in the IOR," Rawat said.

Stressing the need to take note of transformational concepts, the CDS said the armed forces and defence establishment has to be prepared for threats for military primary arising from China and Pakistan.

Making these points in his address in a webinar on "Transformation: Imperatives for Indian Armed Forces" organised by the College of Defence Management (CDM), Secunderabad, Rawat said India is facing complex security and a challenging environment.

Calling for reforms in the Indian defence sector, Rawat said organisational structure of the Indian armed forces is outdated and needs to be re-modelled, re-equipped and re-oriented to conduct joint battles in digitised battle space to have necessary flexibility for other types of operations.

# UP Govt has no right to shift don Mukhtar Ansari to Banda jail, Punjab Govt tells SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday was told by Punjab Government and gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari that Yogi Adityanath-led Government has got no fundamental right to seek his transfer from Rupa Nagar jail to a district jail in Banda in Uttar Pradesh.

The Uttar Pradesh government has moved the top court seeking a direction to the Punjab government and Rupa Nagar jail authority to immediately hand over the custody of Ansari, an MLA from Mau constituency, to the district jail Banda.

A bench of justices Ashok Bhushan and R S Reddy said that it will pronounce its verdict on the plea of Uttar Pradesh government and petition of Ansari seeking transfer of the cases against him outside the State.

During the hearing, Solicitor General Tushar Bhatia, appearing for

Uttar Pradesh Government referred to the prison rules and said that though the State does not have fundamental rights, but it can espouse the cause and the fundamental rights of the victims and it may assume the position of the victim.

He said that the submission that the State does not have any fundamental right is wrong as the State can always assume the role of the victim and the society at large. Mehta said that Ansari had flouted the jail manual rules and right of the victim and the State at large cannot be overlooked and the accused cannot be allowed to jettison the fair trial.

He said that this court under Article 142 can order transfer of Ansari from Punjab jail to a jail in Uttar Pradesh as around 14 and 15 cases are at final stages.

# HP farmer takes aromatic way to boost income

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Straying cattle in his farm-land, the monkey menace in his region and the uncertain income from conventional paddy and maize crops pushed Ajay Sharma, a farmer from Himachal Pradesh's Chamba district, to start experimenting with aromatic plants like wild marigold a few years ago. The risk he undertook then has started yielding results now.

Sharma and around 40 farmers who formed a Self Help Group (SHG) in the region have started reaping benefits from Marigold flower cultivation, used in a plethora of industries like perfumery and pharmaceuticals.

However, this could be made possible with the help of interventions made by scientists from Society for Technology and Development (STD), Mandi Core Support group, SEED Division, Department of Science and Technology (DST) under the Union Science and Technology Ministry and the CSIR lab Indian Himalayan



Bioresource Technology (IHBT).

Chamba district is among 112 most backward (tribal) districts of the country identified under the Aspirational Districts' Programme piloted by NITI Aayog in January 2018 where the Central Government has special focus to help farmers become Atmanirbhar (self-sustaining), given that the district has shown relatively lesser progress in key social areas.

Under the Government's Aromatic Mission, the STD initiated cultivation and processing of aromatic plants (wild marigold, improved variety from the stable of IHBT) involving the farming com-

munity in technical collaboration with the Palampur-based CSIR lab in Parvati valley, Bhatiyat Block in Chamba.

The SHG called Green Valley Kissan Sabha Parvati has been formed and linked to Himachal Gramin Bank, Parvathpur, for further financial help, said IHBT scientist Rakesh Kumar.

He said that as a value addition, a distillation unit of 250 kg capacity has been installed at Parvati village while scientists from the IHBT trained the farmers into agro-technology of wild marigold, extraction of oil, packing, and storage of oil started cultivating wild marigold and distill-

ing oil from it.

The extracted oil is being sold at ₹9,500 per kg and used in preparing perfumes and essences by pharmaceutical industries. The income of farmers which was around ₹40,000 to ₹50,000 per hectare from traditional crops has increased to about ₹1,00,000 per hectare by cultivation and extraction of wild marigold oil, said IHBT Director Sanjay Kumar.

Rakesh Kumar added that the initiative was started in 2016-17 as a pilot project and has expanded in Mandi and surrounding villages.

According to him wild animals are not attracted to the wild marigold and the crop is ready to be harvested within five or six months.

"We have set up 50 oil processing units, 35 of them in Himachal Pradesh and the rest in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Manipur and Mizoram. These facilities can also process other aromatic crops such as lemongrass and palmarosa, etc., besides wild marigold," added the scientist.

# Plea seeks Supreme Court order to Govt to appoint CBI Director



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With the post of CBI Director being vacant for over a month now, a plea has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking a direction to the Centre to forthwith appoint a regular chief of the premier anti-corruption investigation agency.

Common Cause has alleged that the Government has failed to appoint a regular CBI Director as per section 4A of the Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, on the expiry of term of Rishi Kumar Shukla on February 2 and instead appointed Praveen Sinha as an interim Director of the agency till appointment of a regular chief or until further orders.

The plea, filed through advocate Prashant Bhushan, has also sought a direction to the Centre to initiate and complete the process of selection of

the CBI Director well in advance, at least one to two months before the date on which the vacancy to the post is about to arise.

"The director of the CBI is the final authority in the organization. He supervises all the work in the CBI and is responsible for the constitution of investigating teams for probing cases. Hence, this court and later on Parliament have made determined efforts to enhance the functional autonomy of the CBI director and limit the extent of executive discretion in the matter of appointment of this key functionary," the plea underscored.

The appointment of CBI director is made on the recommendation of a committee consisting of the Prime Minister, leader of the single largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha and the Chief Justice of India or any judge of the Supreme Court nominated by the CJI.

# SC: Ensure elderly's treatment on priority in pvt, Govt hospitals



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed that elderly people be given priority in admission and treatment at private hospitals besides at government medical institutions amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

A bench of justices Ashok Bhushan and R S Reddy modified its earlier order of August 4, 2020, by which it had directed only government hospitals to give priority in admission and treatment of elderly people looking at their vulnerability to coronavirus.

The bench took note of submission of senior advocate Ashwani Kumar, petitioner in person that except Odisha and Punjab no other state has given details about the steps taken in pursuance of the earlier directions issued by the top court on his plea.

The top court granted three weeks' time to all the

**THE TOP COURT GRANTED THREE WEEKS' TIME TO ALL THE STATES TO RESPOND TO THE FRESH SUGGESTIONS MADE BY KUMAR TO PROVIDE RELIEF TO THE ELDERLY PEOPLE**

states to respond to the fresh suggestions made by Kumar to provide relief to the elderly people.

During the hearing, Kumar said the states need to issue fresh Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in pursuance to the directions issued by the court.

# Didi may fight from Suwendra stronghold

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is almost certain to contest from only one seat — Nandigram. Sources in the Trinamool Congress said that the Chief Minister, a sitting MLA from Bhawanipore where she has been living for decades, would not contest from her present seat and would move to Nandigram in East Midnapore instead.

Considered a 'den of the Adhikari family' led by former Bengal Minister and BJP leader Suwendra Adhikari, a veteran MP, Nandigram has a Muslim vote share of about 23.5 per cent.

In Banerjee's place, party MLA and Minister Sobhan Chatteropadhyay will contest from Bhawanipore, sources said adding the first list of the party's candidates would be on Friday. The TMC had trailed by a few thousand votes from the Bhawanipore

Assembly segment in the 2019 general elections.

Suwendra, a former pointsman of Banerjee, in Nandigram, had earlier challenged the Chief Minister saying if she contested from this seat he would ensure that she was defeated by at least half-a-lakh votes.

This after Banerjee told a huge rally at Nandigram that she would contest from this place which was 'lucky' for her.

Banerjee's calculations are however different. According to TMC sources Nandigram — a former Left bastion — which still has a considerable number of Left supporters who have been at the receiving end of political violence perpetrated by the TMC men then led by the Adhikari's might not vote for him enabling the Chief Minister to scrape through with a solid 62,000 votes of the Ousej Pandit joined TMC during the day at Trinamool Bhavan.

Meanwhile, in a related development after Rashtriya Janata Dal, Samajwadi Party

and NCP, Shiv Sena too has backed Banerjee in the upcoming Bengal Assembly elections.

Calling her the 'real Bengal tigress', senior Sena leader and Rajya Sabha Member, Sanjay Raut, on Thursday said his party would not be contesting what appears to be a "Didi vs AJP" fight this time. Mr Raut further tweeted, "We wish Mamata Didi a 'roaring' success..."

"Sena, SP and RJD support notwithstanding, the 'BJP will win more than 200 seats' in Bengal, saffron leader Tejaswi Surya on Thursday said adding "Mamata Banerjee's days as a Chief Minister are numbered..."

On the 3rd of May, Bengal will have a BJP Chief Minister. Referring to the misrule and violence he said, "This is the legacy of the communists which Mamata Banerjee has carried forward but there will be a change in leadership and political murder" in Bengal "because BJP will have its Chief Minister".

# Remove 'biased' Dy EC Sudip Jain, TMC writes to EC

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress has written to the Election Commission of India seeking the removal of Deputy Election Commissioner Sudip Jain as in charge of Bengal Assembly elections.

The letter has been written by TMC Rajya Sabha Leader Derek O'Brien who has accused Jain of "bias" towards a particular political party. In the letter, the TMC leader has referred to certain actions taken by the Dy EC ahead of the 2019 general elections.

O'Brien has referred to the steps taken by Jain after the violence during the road show of Home Minister Amit Shah in Kolkata when a half-bust of Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidysagar was vandalised by alleged BJP men.

The left Congress, barred election campaigning two days prior to the polling date. "Only one political party, Bharatiya Janata Party, was allowed to complete its election campaigning for that day before such a bar was announced. No explanation was sought, no show-cause was issued, no action was taken by the Election Commission of India against the perpetrators, ie, Amit Shah or his entourage."

loving a skirmish with TMC workers.

The TMC leader has written that Jain's action post violence was "completely biased, partisan, reeked of partiality and tainted."

In the aftermath of the violence "Sudip Jain furnished an erroneous and biased report based on which, the Election Commission of India in an unprecedented manner, barred election campaigning two days prior to the polling date."

"Only one political party, Bharatiya Janata Party, was allowed to complete its election campaigning for that day before such a bar was announced. No explanation was sought, no show-cause was issued, no action was taken by the Election Commission of India against the perpetrators, ie, Amit Shah or his entourage."

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# Jawan's body found hanging inside sentry post in Srinagar

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

An Army jawan was found dead here on Thursday in a suspected case of suicide, officials said.

Rifleman Anup Kumar (28), who was posted on sentry duty at the Badamibagh cantonment in Jammu and Kashmir, was found hanging from the ceiling of the sentry post at the main gate at Batwara here with a light machine gun's loop.

Kumar hailed from Haryana's Bhiwani, the officials said, adding that the reason behind his taking the extreme step was not immediately known.

On Wednesday, a 24-year-old Army jawan shot himself dead in Rajouri district and an Indian Air Force pilot, a lieutenant colonel committed suicide at an Army depot in the Khonmoh area here.

# 12 people from Myanmar take refuge in Mizoram after coup in February

PTI ■ AIZAWL

At least 12 people from Myanmar have crossed the Indian border and took refuge in Mizoram around a month after the neighbouring country's military ousted the elected Government of Aung San Suu Kyi, officials said on Thursday.

Eight people have entered Serchhip district while four others reached Champhai district.

A senior police officer said that the identity of the refugees is yet to be ascertained.

Serchhip Deputy Commissioner Kumar Abhishek told PTI that five people, who included members of a family, crossed the international border and entered the district on Thursday, while three others did so on March 3.

The eight people are currently lodged at a community hall in Lungkawli village, around 8 kilometres from the Indo-Myanmar border, and they were provided with food by the district administration, he said.

He said that details of the refugees are not yet available. Deputy Commissioner of Champhai, Maria CT Zuali, said that four people from Myanmar have crossed over to the district recently.

The entry of people from the neighbouring country has been communicated to the state Home Department and Home Minister Lalchamliana will issue a statement on the matter on the assembly on Monday, the official said.

More than 100 people from Myanmar also attempted to cross the international border to seek refuge in Mizoram recently, the Champhai deputy commissioner told PTI.



However, they were stopped by Assam Rifles personnel guarding the border, she said.

Assam Rifles Deputy Inspector General Digvijay Singh said that the force was directed not to allow any illegal entry from the neighbouring country.

Zuali said that the state government has recently issued a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) in view of the possible influx of refugees from Myanmar following the coup.

Although civil society organisations are willing to harbour refugees from Myanmar, the Mizoram government can't act on its own without the direction of the Centre as it is an international affair, she said.

Besides, the state government will not have sufficient resources to feed the refugees unless assistance is received from the Centre, she added.

Mizoram shares a 404 km long porous border with Myanmar where the military junta took over the government on February 1. A number of pro-democracy protesters were killed in clashes with security forces there.

# EC starts Covid vaccination drive for officers, staff



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission on Thursday started a Covid-19 vaccination drive for its officers and staff working at the Nirvachan Sadan with former Chief Election Commissioner MS Gill taking the first shot.

Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora and Election Commissioners Sushil Chandra and Rajiv Kumar will get vaccinated after all officials and staff of the commission are inoculated, an official statement said.

Arora had recently announced that all staff on poll duty for the upcoming assembly elections have been declared as 'frontline workers' and will be vaccinated before assuming their election duties.

The vaccination would encourage the poll duty officers to perform their duty without fear of Covid-19, Arora had said. The commission had on February 26 announced polls in Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry.

Under the special vaccination drive, lakhs of polling officials in the five states and the union territory will be inoculated before proceeding on election duty, the statement said.

# Celebs join TMC ahead of WB polls

Kolkata: A number of celebrities, a popular singer, an actor and a actor-director joined Trinamool Congress in poll-bound West Bengal on Thursday.

Popular singer Aditi Munshi, actor Subhadra Mukherjee and actor-director Utsav Pradhes, who joined the BJP comes to power (in West Bengal) it will decide what you will eat," she said.

The actor said that she had joined the saffron party in 2019 after hearing Modi's call of 'Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas'. PTI

and allied fields. The singer said that she will be at the party's service in whichever way it deems fit.

Subhadra, a popular mass screen actor, said only Banerjee can save the state from the "fascist BJP turning it into another Uttar Pradesh."

The actor said that she had joined the saffron party in 2019 after hearing Modi's call of 'Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas'. PTI

# BJP meets EC officials demanding action against TMC MLA Hamidul

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A BJP delegation led by Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and Bhupendra Yadav on Thursday met Election Commission (EC) officers and lodged a complaint against TMC MLA Hamidul Rehman over his remark at a public meeting on March 2. The BJP leaders also appealed the EC to remove administrators of local bodies appointed by the state government.

The BJP leaders alleged that TMC MLA Hamidul

Rehman has threatened voters. While addressing a public meeting in Murshidabad, Rehman asked people to "compel" Pradhan and Bhupendra Yadav and reminded them that those who choose to betray Mamata Banerjee even after enjoying her government's benefits will be dealt with post-elections. He said that BJP is a party of liars and the TMC government is of no use. Voting for them would be helping BJP because they are nothing but their stooges. He urged people to not waste their precious votes and go for Trinamool Congress.

"Those who betray Mamata now. Post elections, we will meet them and the game will be played by us," added Rehman. In another complaint, the BJP leader stated that that term of 125 municipal corporations in West Bengal including Kolkata Municipal Corporation ended a year ago but the TMC government had appointed party leaders as administrators of these local bodies. The BJP leaders have demanded removal of these administrators to ensure free and fair polls.

# Manipur militant outfit kills cadre of another extremist group for murdering minor girl

IMPHAL: A terrorist of outlawed Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP), who escaped from jail in Manipur earlier while undergoing trial in the sensational 2003 kidnapping and murder of an 8-year-old girl, was reportedly shot dead by the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), media report said on Thursday quoting a UNLF statement.

The 3-page UNLF statement in Manipuri language said that Thokhom Nando Singh was shot dead on Tuesday in an undisclosed location by the underground outfit, who also released photo of his body. The UNLF said Nando Singh had his police officers in Manipur, in its statement said that it had "tried" Nando Singh and "eliminated" him for his barbaric crime against the minor girl. IANS

# TN parties ready to roll out freebies despite State's huge revenue deficit

IANS ■ CHENNAI

Colour television sets, mixers, grinders, mobile telephones, clothes are some of the freebies rolled out by political parties in Tamil Nadu and has always included these freebies in their election manifestos.

The state of Tamil Nadu is facing a huge deficit with revenue deficit at 65,994 crores despite being a revenue surplus state for the last three years. The state's total debt by March 2022 will be around 5.70 lakh crore, a whopping sum by any measures.

Despite all these hiccups and state fortunes nose diving the political parties are on a freebie culture with one party offering the other in promising them with gifts and other freebies.

DMK commenced the

freebie culture in 1967 with the then Chief minister and the towering leader of Dravidian politics, CN Annadurai promising 3 measures of rice for Rupees 1. This had a huge impact on DMK and helped them for the first time in Tamil Nadu unseating the Congress government led by Bhaktavatsalam. In 2006 DMK supremo, Muthuvel Karunanidhi announced a 'freebie' scheme of free colour televisions, 1 kg of rice at 2 rupees, free gas connection and free gas stoves for all women in Tamil Nadu. The DMK won the election easily.

Spokesman of the DMK, Saravanan Adityan, said in a similar vein the fixed deposit schemes for the girl child by the TN governments had increased the social indicators for the State.

a revolutionary decision to provide women solace from spending long hours in kitchen and now the Prime minister Narendra Modi has replicated the same move after so many years.

There are divided opinions on the Governments doling out such schemes to the people.

Senior Journalist PK Sreenivasan while speaking to IANS said that freebie schemes and not freebies are made out. Studies had revealed that in remote areas of Tamil Nadu after the Colour TV sets were provided by the DMK government, the crime rates had decreased in Gujarat because of the "wrong policies" of the BJP government.

Countering them, the minister said the number of such farmers has in fact increased. "The number of (small and marginal) farmers has increased as land gets divided between each family member and each one of them becomes a farmer."

# Kerala CM urges people to shed hesitation on taking Covaxin jab

Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday urged people to take the indigenous Covaxin vaccine without any hesitation

the base of the Great Borehole of the Indian Council of Medical Research, the country's apex research body, about its third phase clinical trials.

People had some doubts about the Covaxin, manufactured by Bharat Biotech with the support of the ICMR, he said at a press meet here.

There was some reluctance among the public to take the vaccine as part of the delay in getting the results of its third phase clinical trials, he said.

"ICMR has now released the interim results of the third phase clinical trials. According to it, the vaccine has shown an interim efficacy of 81 per cent

in preventing COVID-19," Vijayan said.

It has also been reported that it can prevent the viral infection with very severe symptoms and effective against all COVID-related deaths, he said.

As per ICMR, Covaxin also has the ability to neutralize the UK variant strain of SARS-CoV-2.

Thereafter, based on this evidence, people should be ready to accept Covaxin along with Covishield vaccine," the Chief Minister added.

Stating that the total number of people under treatment for COVID-19 in Kerala till Wednesday was 45,995, he said it was the lowest figure since September 25 last year.

"It shows that the disease tends to subside very rapidly in

the state. In the last one week alone, the number of patients has dropped by 13 per cent. It dropped by 30 per cent in a month," Vijayan said, quoting figures of the health department.

He said vaccines were generally well-received in the state and 3,47,801 health workers have received the shot till Wednesday.

Kerala now has adequate stock of COVID-19 vaccine and the union health minister has informed that 21 lakh doses would reach the state on March 9, he said.

The state government has also requested the Centre to take steps for the smooth registration in the designated platform, the Chief Minister said, adding that the number of vaccination centres would be increased in a phased manner. PTI

# Army launches community radio stn in north Kashmir



MOHTI KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

After winning the hearts and minds of the Kashmiri people on ground zero, the Indian Army has now set its eyes on ruling the 'Air Waves' too.

To begin with, the Indian Army had initially launched a community radio service in the South Kashmir district of Anantnag more than four months ago. After receiving a huge response from the common masses in the region, senior Army officers then decided to replicate the model and expand its reach among the local masses in the North Kashmir districts as well.

On Thursday, Lt. Gen BS Raju, Corps commander of the Srinagar-based Chinari Corps formally inaugurated Radio

Chinar — a Community Radio station dedicated to the peace and development of Kashmir. He said, two more community radio stations are in the pipeline and would be inaugurated soon.

The tagline of the community radio service has been scripted carefully "Har Dil ki Dhadkan". "The idea is to connect with the masses through this platform and provide an opportunity to the younger generation to find a foothold by showcasing their talent. Lt. Gen BS Raju said, explaining the idea behind launching the radio services.

He said the radio service people across Sopore, Baramulla and Baramulla districts can listen and contribute on a daily basis.

# Man strangles 19-year-old daughter living with lover: Cops

PTI ■ JAIPUR

A 19-year-old girl living with her lover after eloping with him, was strangled by her father on Thursday after her marriage with another person was allegedly strangled to death by her father in Dausa district, police said on Thursday.

Accused Shankar Lal said 50 days eloped with her to the police soon after killing his daughter Pinki and confessed to his crime, said Assistant Police Commissioner Deepak Kumar.

He said Singh was taken into custody and a case of murder was registered against him at Kotwali police station.

He said Pinki was married to a man against her wishes on February 16 but she returned to her parental home three days later and eloped with her lover Roshan on February 21.

Following her elopement, her father had also lodged a police complaint, alleging abduction of his daughter, the ACP said.

He said Pinki's family members eventually traced her and brought her back home where his father strangled her to death.

# Agriculture census to be conducted in Gujarat this year

PTI ■ GANDHINAGAR

An agriculture census will be conducted in Gujarat this year, Union Agriculture Minister K. J. Somaiya said on Thursday to collect various data related to the key sector, Agriculture Minister RC Faldut informed the legislative Assembly here on Thursday.

Faldut said data regarding farmers' land holdings, collected from the periodic exercise, is crucial for formulating policies for the agriculture sector.

"An agriculture census is conducted (across the country) every five years. It was first conducted in Gujarat in the census in 1970-71 and the last one was conducted in 2015-16, which was the tenth edition of the census."

"Results of the last census were released in 2020," Faldut informed the House during Question Hour.

He said results are usually published four to five years after the census is conducted.

"The next agriculture census would take place this year (in India and Gujarat). The main aim of the exercise is to fetch data regarding operational land holding, which means the land which is actu-

ally used for cultivation by a farmer."

"The data helps us in formulating agr policies and strategies to boost the sector," Faldut said.

Citing the past data, some opposition Congress MLAs claimed that the number of small and marginal farmers, who own less than 2 hectares of land, has decreased in Gujarat because of the "wrong policies" of the BJP government.

Countering them, the minister said the number of such farmers has in fact increased.

"The number of (small and marginal) farmers has increased as land gets divided between each family member and each one of them becomes a farmer."

"Similarly, land under cultivation has also increased as land has decreased in Gujarat because of the "wrong policies" of the BJP government.

Periodic agriculture census are the main source of information on basic characteristics of operational holdings such as land-use, cropping pattern, irrigation status, tenancy and dispersal of holdings, among others. PTI

# AP Govt orders return of 2,180 acres of land to farmers

Amaravati (AP): The Andhra Pradesh Government on Thursday issued an order for returning 2,180 acres of land, which was originally sought to be acquired for the Kakani Special Economic Zone (KSEZ) way back in 2007, to the farmers following a protracted struggle.

The farmers who owned the land refused to part with their property for or receive compensation and carried out an agitation for many years.

Based on the recommendations made by a six-member committee headed by Agriculture Minister Kanna Babu, the government ordered that the 2,180 acres of land be returned to the farmers so that the KSEZ could go ahead and industries established.

The Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry notified the KSEZ in the year 2007 for establishing a port-based Multiproduct SEZ spread over several villages under Uthapalli and Thondangi mandals in East Godavari district.

The KSEZ could not take off as intended because of many unresolved issues, mainly that related to land. PTI

# K'taka Cong MLA does a Salman Khan with shirtless protest, suspended

Bengaluru: Karnataka Assembly speaker, Vishweshwara Hegde Kaageri on Thursday suspended Congress MLA B K Sangamesh for one week for displaying indecent and disrespectful behaviour in the Assembly by taking off his shirt.

Sangamesh, who won the Assembly seat from Bhadravathi constituency in Shivamogga district, will not be allowed to enter the Legislature till March 12.

This incident took place when the Congress party was in front of the speaker to Oppose the ruling party's decision to take up debate on - one nation one election - for two days starting from Thursday.

However, Sangamesh had his own reasons to oppose in this manner alleging that ruling party BJP leaders were harassing his family members and filing false complaints against them.

Sangamesh protesting by removing his shirt was similar to a 2010 protest in which Goolihatti Shekhar a minister in Yeddyurappa's cabinet ripped off his shirt in the Assembly and was disqualified.

Furious over the Sangamesh's way to protest, the speaker Kaageri adjourned the

house soon after and suspended the MLA from Bhadravathi, for a week.

Karnataka leader of the opposition, Siddaramaiah, described the "One Nation, One Election" push as being part of the agenda of the Rashtriya Swamysavak Sangh (RSS), the ideological mentor of the ruling BJP, as his party MLAs raised slogans against the issue.

The idea mooted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi after taking office in 2014, many BJP leaders have backed the proposal to hold all elections together, from Lok Sabha to state assemblies and local bodies, arguing that this will orient various elected bodies fully towards development as the current cycle of frequent polls across the country hampers work.

But Congress members decided to protest against the ruling party decision to hold two-day special session on - one nation one elections and trooped into the well in front of the speaker.

The moment, Sangamesh removed his shirt, KPC president and Congress MLA JN Ganesh who rushed towards him made him wear his shirt besides covering him. IANS



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Burmese Spring

The Army, unmoved by global appeals, is back to repressive tactics to quell pro-democracy protests

**A**ll hell has broken loose on the streets of Myanmar as the security forces resorted to unbridled violence to crush peaceful anti-coup protests, reminding one of the Chinese crackdown in Tiananmen Square in the spring of 1989 and the bloodshed in Libya and Yemen in the Arab Spring of 2010. Though the official number of people killed in the "Burmese Spring" is being put at 38, the United Nations (UN) says the number is close to 50. However, the activists put the toll even higher as the armed forces continue to use lethal weapons on the protesters, resulting in unarmed teenagers, women and youth being killed for demanding what is rightfully theirs. No one is surprised at the recent show of brutality by the Tatmadaw, which had been in power in Myanmar since 1962 and had just about tolerated the quasi-democracy that began in 2011, even though the parliamentary elections and other reforms had been initiated by the military itself under global pressure.



The February 1 coup, which returned the military to full power, had seen a major pushback from the repressed citizenry that obviously did not want to be living once more under the shadow of the ruthless Tatmadaw, which had gained notoriety for having crushed pro-democracy movements in 1988 and 2007 by shooting protesters. Though the forces had initially shown some restraint when the protests began, the Army became increasingly repressive each

passing day as the demonstrations showed no signs of abating.

In fact, the movement swelled as more people rallied together to protect their democracy and seek the release of their democratically-elected leaders. The military regime had to face global embarrassment and resort to firing the country's ambassador in New York, pleading for international help in restoring democracy in his nation. Rattled by the unwanted global attention, the Tatmadaw became increasingly aggressive, thus inviting global sanctions. Now, the military, which has long been documented to be engaged in human rights abuses in conflict zones, seems to be past caring if the revelations by the UN's Special Envoy Christine Schraner Burgener are to be believed. When Burgener warned the military that the UN Security Council and member States were likely to take strong measures against it, she was told: "We are used to sanctions, and we have survived those sanctions in the past." Warned of global isolation, the Tatmadaw's answer was: "We have to learn to walk with only few friends." This is a worrying line of thought because when a regime that has a history of brutality and repression becomes indifferent to the consequences of its actions, there is not much the global community can do. For the people of the beleaguered country it means double trouble: The wrath of the authoritarian regime on the one hand, and the economic hardship that the sanctions bring, on the other. Whatever the global community has to do for the beleaguered citizens of Myanmar it must do fast, because the people there are running out of time.

### PICTALK



People build barricades to block police in Mandalay, Myanmar

AP

## Political gambit?

Sasikala's retirement comes as a boost for the AIADMK. But how long will she keep still?

**I**n a stratagem that has left Tamil Nadu's political circles stunned, VK Sasikala — considered by many the closest aide of the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa — has declared that she will "stay away from politics and public life" while also "praying" for the AIADMK to retain power in the April 6 election. She unequivocally spelt out the reasons for her decision, too: That the AIADMK cadres need to stay united rather than fighting among themselves, so that the party can continue to rule even after Jayalalithaa and keep the "evil DMK" out of power, "as was Amma's wish". Chinnamma, as Sasikala is fondly called by her followers, had aired the same sentiment even on the day she came out of Bengaluru jail after serving a four-year sentence in a corruption case and undertook the road journey from Karnataka to Tamil Nadu. The latest surprise was delivered even as the central leadership of the BJP, which is allied with the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, had been mounting pressure on the regional outfit to work with Sasikala and her nephew's party, the Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK). The move clearly translates into an unexpected advantage for the beleaguered party — already facing anti-incumbency and with the odds stacked against it as the State alternates between the AIADMK and DMK Governments — and a major setback to AMMK leader TTV Dinakaran.



With one deft stone, she has killed two birds: Sasikala has taken the moral high road, projecting the image of a leader whom the masses want to see in an office of authority but who doesn't hanker after power; and, at the same time, she has shielded herself from any blame that might have come her way, should the AIADMK perform poorly in the elections. This possibility, however, is bleak as the Congress is already considering an exit from the DMK-led front since it's not being offered a "respectable number of seats". Of course, Sasikala's current assertion keeps her safely away from the party's inner turmoil and political heat and dust in the State without compromising her chances of springing back on to the centre stage at an opportune moment later. There's nothing that could stop Sasikala from re-entering politics after assessing the poll results. For Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami, it would be tough to keep his hold on the party when he is no longer in the top seat. That is when Sasikala would probably time her comeback.

# Stop romanticising interfaith marriages

If a Muslim man and Hindu woman marry, it is recommended they do it under the Special Marriage Act, which doesn't have unequal rights



PRAFULL GORADIA

**A**t my niece's wedding in a church, the officiating priest began by declaring: "Marriage is a union; divine and indivisible." This is a succinct way of expressing that marriage is a sacrament; no breaking until death does the union part.

Thomas Patrick Hughes (published by Rupa & Co) calls marriage a *nikah*, a word that in its literal sense means a conjunction. It is a contract till the husband wants it. He can divorce his wife at pleasure by giving a notice of three months. The wife does not have this privilege. If she wants to separate, she has to follow the procedure of *khul*, which entails finding a *qazi* and convincing him under the rules of *fiqh* or dogmatic theology of Muslims.

If a Muslim man and Hindu woman fall in love, it is recommended that they marry under the Special Marriage Act, which does not have unequal rights nor requires the woman to change her religion or name, whereas a *nikah* insists that both partners be of the same religion, i.e. Muslim. If the man does not wish to divorce, he can take another wife.

It is rare to find an interfaith marriage where the bride is a Muslim and the groom a Hindu. Perhaps the reason is that it is impermissible for a non-Muslim to marry a Muslim woman as he would have legal authority over her. The tenets of Islam say that God doesn't allow non-Muslims to have authority over Muslims. A Muslim man can marry a non-Muslim woman, but not vice versa.

This seems unfair, but the Islamic rationale is that a non-Muslim man will not respect his Muslim wife's faith. These tenets also hold that while Muslims believe in all previous religions and Prophets of God and respect them, a non-Muslim does not return the favour. A non-Muslim husband might not explicitly express this, but a Muslim wife cannot expect her husband to respect her faith. Muslims believe in only the



revealed religions of the Book, not other religions. A Muslim woman marrying a non-Muslim would eschew respect of the wife's religion.

Some time ago, celebrated IAS couple Tina Dahi and Athar Aamir Khan filed for divorce in Jaipur, two years after they had tied the nuptial knot. Their love story and marriage in 2018 had made national headlines. A video made by Tina, in which she alleged that her Muslim husband tortured her for wearing a *burqa*, converting to Islam, reading *namaz* and adopting 'Khan' in her name, went viral.

Even without divorce, a Muslim male can marry up to four wives at a time; with divorce, there is no limit on the number of wives he can have. Hinduism and Christianity insist on only one wife. For marrying a Muslim boy, girls must know the possibilities they face. If the boy is Muslim, his faith enjoins upon him to produce as many children as possible so that they achieve demographic preponderance. This is borne out by the *Hadith* (The Traditions, the second holy book after the *Quran*; The Dictionary of Islam by Hughes). Concerned Hindus

understandably use the word 'jihad' in this context.

It is time to stop romanticising interfaith marriages blindly. Marrying Muslim men does entail legal outcomes for non-Muslim women. Today's political discourse is less than open in that it tends to ignore arguments of those who have issues with such marriages. Selective quoting and presentation of only particular views as acceptable does not help the cause of any informed debate. The current secular outrage over interfaith marriages souring is focused on romanticising interfaith marriages as a virtue by itself and treating all such alliances as the same, which they regrettably are not.

The rights of women under the Hindu Marriage Act or Special Marriage Act vary greatly from the rights of those who wed as per the *Sharia*. This has particular outcomes, as under *Sharia*, non-Muslim women have to first convert to Islam because this is a condition for marriage. Thus, any non-Muslim woman marrying a Muslim man instantly forfeits all her rights as she transmits from a legal regime with more rights to one with fewer rights. This

is not reversible, as Islam does not permit apostasy. Many women who convert for the sake of getting married, believing they can continue to practice their faith, are quickly belied of this notion; the faith they marry into doesn't permit this either.

Moreover, Hindus hold marriage to be a sacrament where even divorce is considered an anathema (though allowed legally). Under *Sharia*, it is only as a contract where a man can divorce his wife orally and instantly by simply saying *talaq* thrice (till it was banned). This is the chasm between the two worlds.

Non-Muslim women must be made aware of these consequences. The blind eulogy and advocacy of interfaith marriages and pretending that all such alliances are of the same nature is dishonesty. Rossy and romanticised pictures of interfaith marriages carry the serious propensity of harming non-Muslim women, who might make hasty and misinformed decisions only to repent and suffer later.

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

ANY NON-MUSLIM WOMAN MARRYING A MUSLIM MAN INSTANTLY FORFEITS ALL HER RIGHTS AS SHE TRANSITS FROM A LEGAL REGIME WITH MORE RIGHTS TO ONE WITH FEWER RIGHTS. THIS IS NOT REVERSIBLE, AS ISLAM DOES NOT PERMIT APOSTASY

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### BE SENSITIVE TOWARDS HEARING LOSS

Sir — The World Hearing Day was on March 3 and, sadly, it went past like the problems of the hearing impaired go unheeded! It is really shocking to know that according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), one in four people will suffer from hearing problems by 2050. The world body has raised the alarm, stating that currently one in five people have hearing problems but most often it is just ignored. The same amount of care and attention that we give to other ailments is not given to problems related to hearing except when we have severe pain in the ear or similar such problems.

The WHO has called for global action and asked the nations to take immediate measures to check this 'silent danger'. According to medical reports, almost 60 per cent of hearing loss in children is due to factors such as ear infections and birth complications that can be prevented through public health measures. According to the WHO, over one billion young adults are at risk of permanent, avoidable hearing loss due to unsafe listening practices, stressing the need to make people aware of this danger. Early identification of hearing loss and ear diseases are the key to the effective management.

Modern medicine with modern technology and implementation of certain safety norms can end such difficulties provided that the Governments, health organisations, NGOs and other agencies come forward to mitigate the problem.

M Pradyu | Kanpur

### RAHUL IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PAST

Sir — This refers to the editorial 'Maa Chulpa' (March 4). Verily speaking, the Nehru-Gandhi family's contribution to the country is unmatched and cannot be questioned. The 'Grand Old Party' has a chequered performance sheet having caused memories of the Emergency, communal riots and Bofors scandal. But Congress' former president Rahul Gandhi should not be held responsible for them, as he was just a child or minor when these incidents took place. Personally, Rahul is an man of stern rectitude and a honest political leader who possesses the grit

## Congress must correct its course



It refers to the editorial 'Split house' (March 4). The state of affairs within the Congress is gloomy, to say the least. The 'Grand Old Party' seems to be totally bereft of a centralised command which can control its affairs. Due to the lack of a powerful leadership, the Congress rank and file are working at their whims, fulfilling their vested interests and making whatever statements they feel like, without caring about the party. These

to contest even his party's decisions if he doesn't agree with these.

Moreover, he put in his papers as the party chief, taking moral responsibility for the Congress' drubbing in the last general elections. On the other hand, it was his personal charisma appealing to the masses that helped the 'Grand Old Party' make a comeback by wresting the States of Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh from the formidable BJP. The realisation of the past mistakes of the Congress comes across as a welcome gesture from this young and charismatic political leader. As the saying goes, "The sins of the parents are visited on the children!"

Azhar A Khan | Rampur

### MERGE CHANNELS TO INCREASE VIEWERSHIP

Sir — It is welcome that the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha TV channels have been officially merged into one single entity, Sansad TV. It will help curtail the expenditure that is incurred in running the two TV channels.

unfortunate things are happening at a time when the party faces elections in four States and a Union Territory. There has always been friction in the party but it seems to have blown out of proportion and is hurting the poll prospects of the Congress.

While cadres of other political parties in the poll fray are investing all their energy in campaigning, big leaders of the Congress are indulging in fights among themselves. It's high time Rahul Gandhi took note of it and took steps to ensure that the party stays united. It is also the duty of the old guard to show more responsibility and talk with other leaders in order to resolve their differences. Merely making allegations and counter-allegations would serve no good. If this state of affairs continues, it will further shrink the party's vote bank as people would choose not to vote for the party which is divided because of internal feuds and has a weak leadership. The Congress must mull over this issue immediately or must ready itself for another poll drubbing.

Bai Govind | Noida

The direct telecast of the proceedings of the two Houses can be aired according to their importance. However, excerpts of proceedings of the two Houses can be shown not only on Sansad TV but also on various Doordarshan channels.

A somewhat similar merger can be considered for the Doordarshan channels according to the viewership statistics. There are several Doordarshan channels which do not have significant viewership, continuing with such channels is a waste of public money. They all must be merged with this will not only help increase the viewership but also save lot of public money that goes in running these channels.

Further, the Government must exercise real control over private news channels and ask them to compulsorily telecast proceedings of both the Houses.

Subhash Agarwal | Delhi

Send your feedback to: [letterstopioneer@gmail.com](mailto:letterstopioneer@gmail.com)

## SOUNDBITE

My request for 27 per cent reservation for socially and economically backward in Government jobs in Odisha has remained unaddressed till date.

Union Minister — Dharmendra Pradhan

China is the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system.

US President — Joe Biden

The issues of drug abuse and crime against women are somewhere interconnected, and the youth of the nation suffers the most owing to these transgressions.

Actor — Ravi Kishan

It was important to be positive and play your shots on that pitch, back yourselves to clear the boundary — just happy that I managed to contribute to the team's cause at that point of time

West Indies captain — Kieron Pollard

The Modi Government is using the economy's collapse since the pandemic to rush headlong into its mission of handing over large portions of India's wealth to its favourite crony capitalists.

Interim Congress President — Sonia Gandhi



## FIRST COLUMN

## VACCINE FIRST, POLITICS LATER

Netas getting into poll campaigning must get the job, both for safety and for sending a message for public good



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

India began one of the largest vaccination drives attempted globally on January 16 and opened it up for frontline workers in February. The second phase of the inoculation drive began on March 1, with the doors thrown open to citizens above a certain age and fulfilling specific criteria. At the launch of the second phase, the nation woke up to a visual of Prime Minister Narendra Modi getting vaccinated at a Government facility. It was a wise message, ranging from taking the India-developed vaccine, being conscious of the home State of healthcare staff administering the shot and the sartorial choice of a *gamucha* from Assam. However, there was another story unfolding mid-day onwards in many of the vaccination centres around the country as many senior citizens failed to get vaccinated on days one and two despite managing to register successfully on the CoWin website.

Despite the glitches, this is a remarkable feat for our country which, till the same time last year, was not aware of the horror waiting to unfold and, therefore, didn't even have basic toolkits of personal protective equipment handy. The reason it is vital to mention this is so that we keep learning every moment and improvising on the deliverable processes, like we did in 2020.



It is a welcome step that a sizeable chunk of private hospitals has been roped in for the second phase of the vaccination drive. However, it seems like they are being treated like lesser institutions when it comes to supply and execution logistics. Many private hospitals reported one queue for walk-in registrations and those registered with confirmed time slots through the CoWin website. This led to crowding, which is an in-your-face blunder to be avoided during these times. The private sector is equipped enough with stipulated processes for vaccination and with some guided information, could manage the drive with proper social distancing. Ideally, the authorities should have done a workshop with key hospitals and taught the staff to manage a demand-driven hybrid model vaccination exercise. At some stage the Government has to think about opening up the vaccination drive for corporates and the money spent should be treated as part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Most of the corporates are willing to either take up a vaccination drive for their staff under the CSR head or allow staff to pay, provided the exercise like Aadhaar registrations moves to their premises. RS Sharma, the current chair of the National Health Authority, is aware of the private-public cooperative plumbing required to make India's vaccination pipeline a model worth emulating. He is also aware of the role technology is going to play in the exercise and the digital divide in the country over access and use of factual information. The confusion between the use of the CoWin app vs the CoWin website needs to be addressed. Also, vaccine hesitancy among certain sections of society is triggered by opinionated fake information on social media. It is time for all technocrats involved in the process to start tackling the barrage of misinformation and talk about the facts on all platforms available.

Another aspect of the inoculation programme is driven by politics. Already there have been some remarks regarding the Prime Minister's picture on the vaccine completion certificate, specially from States bound for elections. Universal vaccination against the dreaded virus is a shared project of all leaders at the Central and State level. Any attempt to subvert the process by creating barriers may not go down well with the electorate or be good for the leader's image. Of course, the optics need to be high for any candidate facing the electorate in a few days, however it would be good if they start showing their commitment. Most of the leaders getting into campaigning ahead of polls would do well to get vaccinated, both for safety and for sending a loud message for public good.

(The writer is a policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.)

## Economy riddled with corruption

Graft is a huge, insidious problem in our country that has eaten into every aspect of our lives, be it in rural or urban India



MOIN QAZI

A survey conducted by Transparency International (TI) last year found that India has the highest rate of bribery in the Asian region. The survey titled, 'Global Corruption Barometer (GCB), Asia' revealed that the nation also had the highest rate of people using personal connections to access public services. The country has a bribery rate of 39 per cent while 46 per cent people use 'familiarity' to get access to services. The report noted that 'slow and complicated bureaucratic process, unnecessary red tape and unclear regulatory frameworks force citizens to seek out other solutions to access basic services through networks of familiarity and petty corruption (in India).'

The nation's quest for economic dynamism has been severely stifled by chronic corruption. The country needs to urgently modernise its institutions and end the culture of rent-seeking and cutting corners if it wants the wheel of its economy to roll seamlessly. Corruption is both anti-national and anti-poor because the resources meant for poverty alleviation schemes get siphoned off by dishonest politicians and bureaucrats. It is among the most debilitating economic illnesses that afflict large parts of the world. India is now caught in a situation where many sectors are steeped in endemic corruption, including those charged with controlling it — from the legislators who write the laws, to the judiciary which makes them roadworthy and the police which is charged with enforcing them.

In the last four decades, despite several Government programmes for the welfare of the rural poor, poverty remains endemic. Either the nets were not cast wide or there were too many holes blown into them. The cruel reality is that much of the public spending does not reach the poor. It is either siphoned off by the delivery mechanism consisting of consultants, advisors, their equipment and studies — or it gets pocketed. This has become a touchstone for all public-funded programmes and is now parroted in all Indian development literature. Low-level graft remains pervasive. Much of the Western world aid is running down the bureaucratic ratholes. Corruption is a huge, insidious problem in our country that has eaten into every aspect of life. It can lead to distrust in the Government, generating civil strife, violence, and conflict.

While the poor do not have the money to bribe public servant to avail services that are their right, they have a vote that the politician wants. The politician does a little bit to make life a little more tolerable for the poor — a seat in a good school for the lucky few, a Government job for the even luckier, on occasion the unexpected munificence of a loan waiver or, more commonly, a phone call that helps them get a police case registered. For all this, the politician gets the gratitude of his voters. However, he then also has little reason to improve the system by reforming it.

The state of affairs is grim. In every village official must be paid not just to expedite the application form for development schemes but specifically for not obstructing it. There is no easy solution to the problem. The corrupt police officials have a rollicking time at the expense of helpless citizens. In fact, there is no link between corruption and poverty. It is easier to convert a corrupt



IN THE LAST FOUR DECADES, DESPITE SEVERAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAMMES FOR THE WELFARE OF THE RURAL POOR, POVERTY REMAINS ENDEMIC. EITHER THE NETS WERE NOT CAST WIDE OR THERE WERE TOO MANY HOLES BLOWN INTO THEM. THE CRUEL REALITY IS THAT MUCH OF THE PUBLIC SPENDING DOES NOT REACH THE POOR. IT IS EITHER SIPHONED OFF BY THE DELIVERY MECHANISM CONSISTING OF CONSULTANTS, ADVISORS, THEIR EQUIPMENT AND STUDIES — OR IT GETS POCKETED

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



constable rather than an officer into an honest person. Higher officials get so carried away by the glamour and competition evident among their peers, and the aspirations of their families, that malpractices and bribes become a part of their lives. Surely education is a failure here. Voters favour a familiar family pedigree, partly because of a cultural reverence for the family and because of feudal habits that go back centuries. These traditions are more important in politics than individual qualities or merits in India and they strike at the very core of democracy. Grassroots activists and student leaders with no patronage matter little, and given the huge money and muscle power involved in elections, outsiders can only dream of power. In fact, the impact of nepotism goes beyond politics, with the reign of dynasties extending to most businesses too.

Like the mythological hydra, corruption is a many-headed foe that insinuates itself into every part of the social fabric — weakening the body politic and jeopardising prospects for economic growth. It can wither only after the heads are lopped off.

It has been a long-standing problem that successive Governments have battled and mostly failed to quell. In his magnum opus 'Arthashastra', written nearly three centuries before the Christian era, Kautilya, the classical master of statecraft, observed:

"Just as it is impossible to know when a fish moving in water is drinking it, so it is impossible to find out when Government servants in charge of undertakings misappropriate money"

The phrase, "probity in public life" has become an oxymoron. The time to start popping the corks would be when corrupt officials are actually convicted and penalised. Unfortunately, our criminal justice system has a truly pathetic record on this front. As long as that remains true, much publicised arrests serve little or no purpose. They certainly do not act as effective deterrents to potential bribe-takers or bribe-givers. Corruption is too often seen as merely a moral issue. Not enough people realise just how crippling an economic factor it can be. The cost of the bribes clearly must be factored into the business model and hence into the costs.

The country's economic system is fused with many strands of corruption and organised systems of tax evasion. Cases of people greasing palms to get a college scholarship, tax refund or mortgage from a State-owned bank are now commonplace. Petty corruption includes slipping banknotes to the police and to officials to get paperwork done. Businessmen have to offer "seed money" to avoid red tape.

Writer and former diplomat Pavan Varma suggests that the persistence of corruption in India also

reflects a strain of amorality in our character. A willingness to tolerate corner-cutting and rule-breaking in the successful pursuit of wealth and power. "Corruption, of course, is not unique to India," he writes in 'Being Indian'. "What is unique is the level of its acceptance, and the creative ways in which it is sustained. Indians do not subscribe to antiseptic definitions of rectitude... Their understanding of right and wrong is related far more to efficacy than absolute notions of morality."

Most Indian businesses cannot survive or remain competitive without stashing away undeclared earnings. Almost everybody who has sold a house has taken one part of the payment in cash and evaded tax on it. Huge quantities of secret wealth are still a part of our system.

The solution lies in ensuring that the Central Bureau of Investigation remains free of Government interference and that whistle-blowers, witnesses and journalists working on corruption cases are protected. The Government must realise that increasing corruption can act as a speed breaker in the Indian growth story. There is a need for a strong political will to untangle it. Without a strong civil society or an independent judiciary to check Government power, the political class can become complacent. We have a long distance to cover to get rid of corruption and it may require longer sprints as time is running out.

## POINTCOUNTERPOINT

YOU PUT NAILS ON ROADS AND PREVENTED FARMERS FROM ENTERING THE CAPITAL OF THE SOVEREIGN COUNTRY, BUT YOU BEAT A RETREAT AGAINST CHINA.

—MAHARASHTRA CHIEF MINISTER

UDHAV THACKERAY



YOU ARE MAKING INSULTING STATEMENTS AGAINST OUR SOLDIERS WHO DEFENDED (THE COUNTRY FROM) CHINESE AGGRESSION.

—MAHARASHTRA FORMER CHIEF MINISTER

DEVENDRA FADNIS

## Technology for pedagogy in music strikes the right note

It helps to build highly effective differentiated learning experiences, which are rather challenging otherwise in a group setting with traditional teaching approaches

Technology has been one of the mainstays of music education, particularly contemporary music and its production and sound engineering since the late 2000s. However, the adoption rate was probably slower than anticipated due to the general resistance to change and the reluctance to shift to newer methods of learning and teaching. Interestingly, music technology, which we should clearly differentiate from the technology for pedagogical purposes, has been adopted widely and is frequently adopted by music educators in line with music industry practices.

The year 2020 presented many with a make-or-break situation due to the pandemic and music education providers, both institutions and teachers, were swift to drop all inhibitions and embrace technology to aid pedagogy.



NILESH THOMAS

The writer is Dean, The True School of Music, Vijaybhoomi University. The views expressed are personal.

Most interestingly, private tutors — who probably argued the most against technology-driven learning and teaching in place of the tried and tested traditional approach of in-person instruction — were the first to jump on the bandwagon. Consequently, they taught music using every possible technological means, from Skype to Zoom to Google Hangouts. In most of such cases, the technology integration started and ended with these video calling apps that allowed remote teaching and learning and did not extend to more immersive and interactive learning systems.

Increasingly, we are now seeing larger music schools tapping into comprehensive learning management systems (LMS), customised mobile apps and subscription-based music learning services such as music notation applications, ear train-

ing applications with content libraries, backing music tracks and practice tools for instruments, voice instruction and so on, that integrate into LMS or remote teaching using video calling apps.

LMS are excellent cloud-based tools to extend learning beyond face-to-face time, and more importantly to build a social learning ecosystem around the class. There are a number of such solutions available now, mostly on a per-user subscription model that is increasingly becoming affordable in markets like India and South Asia.

LMS allow teachers to administer independent learning content to a class or individual learners, provide feedback to students using text, audio or video, conduct online assessments that could be auto-graded and so on. More importantly, LMS allow students to inter-



act with each other, share and discuss topics of interest online, and learn from each other's works. This provides invaluable benefits over just focusing on instrumental or voice mastery.

Newer learning technologies that either work as stand-alone mobile or web-based apps or integrate into LMS help further enhance the music learning experience. Many schools employ music notation and ear training applications with preloaded content libraries for independent learning and practice.

For example, music teachers are able to assign an exercise with a predetermined difficulty level and a target practice score to student groups or individuals. The students can then practice the material on their own with the app giving highly specific feedback on how well they are doing, and the areas that need improvement. Once the student attains the target score, the teacher assigns a new difficulty level, much like a game.

Similar gamified learning technologies also exist for instrument and voice learning. Many of these systems provide comprehensive content libraries organised in terms of progressive difficulty levels. Teachers are able to assign target goals for practice, and once a student achieves the desired proficiency, conduct an assessment within the app using similar content to validate the learning and

progress to the next level. Some of these systems give detailed visual heatmaps of a student's performance, with granular feedback on areas that have met expectations and those needing improvement.

Technology-enabled pedagogy also helps to build highly effective differentiated learning experiences, which are rather challenging otherwise in a group setting with traditional teaching approaches. One of the biggest benefits of technology-enabled pedagogy is its focus on student-centred learning, taking the attention away from the teacher as the sole enabler of learning. With technology-enabled learning, the teacher has the flexibility to adopt a more efficient role of a learning facilitator, provide necessary personalised interventions and allow each learner to grow at their own pace while focusing on the core areas to be developed.

Teachers can drop the one-size-fits-all approach that works rather poorly in creative arts education.

While this recent and swift adoption of technologies for pedagogical purposes is mainly driven by the pressure to enhance remote learning in light of the social distancing and lockdown conditions necessitated by the Coronavirus pandemic, they are more than likely to find a permanent place in music education since both students and teachers will find obvious enhancements to their learning and teaching experiences.

Institutions are likely to adopt and scale such technologies aggressively since they introduce efficiencies and help collect extremely valuable data that will help design newer and more effective curriculum, learning programmes and delivery methods.



**MYANMAR COUP**

# Protesters, undaunted by killings, march again

**Nay Pyi Taw:** Demonstrators in Myanmar protesting last month's military coup returned to the streets Thursday, undaunted by the killing of at least 38 people the previous day by security forces.

New protests were held in at least three areas of Yangon, the country's largest city, that have been scenes of violence for the past few days. Police again used force to try to disperse the crowds, according to social media accounts.

Protests also continued in Mandalay, the second-biggest city. A formation of five fighter planes flew over the city on Thursday morning in what appeared to be a threatening show of force.

The UN special envoy for Myanmar, Christine Schraner Burgener, said 38 people were killed Wednesday, a figure consistent with other reports.

The death toll was the highest since the Feb. 1 takeover, when the military ousted the elected government of leader Aung San Suu Kyi. More than 50 civilians, mostly peaceful protesters, are confirmed to have been killed by police and soldiers since then.



People build barricades to block police in Mandalay, Myanmar on Thursday

The UN Security Council has scheduled closed-door consultations on Friday on calls to reverse the coup — including from UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres — and stop the escalating military crackdown.

Any kind of coordinated action at the United Nations will be difficult since two permanent members of the Security Council, China and Russia, are likely to veto it. Some countries have already imposed or are considering

their own sanctions.

UN Envoy Schraner Burgener said she warned Myanmar's army that the world's nations and the Security Council "might take huge strong measures."

"And the answer was, We

are used to sanctions and we survived those sanctions in the past," she said. When she also warned the army that Myanmar would become isolated, she said, "the answer was, We have to learn to walk with only a few friends."

The coup reversed years of slow progress toward democracy in Myanmar, which for

five decades had languished under strict military rule that led to international isolation and sanctions. As the generals loosened their grip, culminating in Suu Kyi's rise to power after 2015 elections, the international community responded by lifting most sanctions and pouring investing into the country.

## I'll shoot whoever I see: Myanmar military threatens protesters on TikTok

**Singapore:** Armed Myanmar soldiers and police are using TikTok to deliver death threats to protesters against last month's coup, researchers said, prompting the Chinese video-sharing app to announce it was removing content that incites violence.

Digital rights group Myanmar ICT for Development (MIDO) said it had found over 800 pro-military videos that menaced protesters at a time of increasing bloodshed — with 38 protesters killed on Wednesday alone according to the United Nations.

"It's just the tip of the iceberg," said MIDO executive director Hlaing Hlaing, who noted that there's "hundreds" of videos of uniformed soldiers and police on the app. A spokesman for the army and junta did not respond to a request for comment.

One video from late February reviewed by Reuters shows a man in army fatigues aiming an assault rifle at the camera and addressing protesters: "I will shoot in your fucking faces... and I'm using real bullets."

## Stop murdering protesters: UN tells Myanmar military

**Geneva, Switzerland:** At least 54 people have been killed and over 1,700 detained since Myanmar's February 1 coup, the UN rights chief said Thursday, demanding that the military "stop murdering" protesters.

The comments come after the deadliest day of protests in Myanmar, with at least 38 dead Wednesday in rallies where security forces were seen firing into crowds.

UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet urged security forces to "halt their vicious crackdown on peaceful protesters."

"Myanmar's military must stop murdering and jailing protesters," she said in a statement. "It is utterly abhorrent that security forces are firing live ammunition against peaceful protesters across the country," she added.

The rights officer added that she was "also appalled at the documented attacks against emergency medical staff and ambulances attempting to provide care to those who have been injured."

had corroborated information that at least 54 people had been killed by police and military officers since February 1.

The actual death toll, however, could be much higher as these are the figures the office has been able to verify," it stressed.

The killings have escalated sharply in recent days.

The rights officer had verified 30 of the 38 deaths reported by other UN entities on Wednesday, saying the killings by security forces had taken place in Yangon, Mandalay, Sagan, Magway and Mon.

At least one person was documented killed on Tuesday and 18 people on Sunday, with five prior to that.

It said it was difficult to document injuries, but that "at a minimum, hundreds have been wounded on court hearings."

Since the coup, more than 1,700 people have also been "arbitrarily arrested and detained in relation to their participation in protests or engagement in political activity," the statement said.

## New Zealand man charged over threats to Christchurch mosques

**Wellington:** A New Zealand man is facing criminal charges after allegedly posting online threats against two Christchurch mosques that were the sites of a terrorist attack that left 51 people dead.

Police on Thursday arrested the 27-year-old man and charged him with threatening to kill.

If found guilty, he faces a maximum prison sentence of seven years.

Police Superintendent John Price told reporters the threats were made earlier this week on the website iChon, which has been used as a forum in the past by white supremacists.

The arrest comes as Muslims prepare to mark the second anniversary of a white supremacist gunman's attack at the mosques.

Price said there would be an enhanced police presence at the mosques during the com-

memoration of the March 15, 2019, attacks.

He said that had been planned before the threats came to light.

Price declined to give details of the alleged threats or name the man ahead of his first scheduled court appearance on Friday.

"Any threat made on our community and our people is a threat on our society, and will not be tolerated," Price said.

"Any messages of hate or people wanting to cause harm in our community, they will be held to account."

Police initially arrested two men and executed search warrants at two Christchurch addresses. One of the men was later released without being charged.

In the 2019 attack, gunman Brenton Tarrant slaughtered worshippers at the mosques during Friday prayers.

## House passes sweeping voting rights bill over GOP Opposition

AP ■ WASHINGTON

House Democrats passed a sweeping voting and ethics legislation Wednesday over unanimous Republican opposition, advancing to the Senate what would be the largest overhaul of the US election law in at least a generation.

House Resolution 1, which touches on virtually every aspect of the electoral process, was approved on a near party-line 220-210 vote. It would restrict partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts, strike down hurdles to voting and bring transparency to a murky campaign finance system that allows wealthy donors to anonymously bankroll political

houses across the country in the wake of Donald Trump's repeated false claims of a stolen 2020 election. Yet it faces an uncertain fate in the Democratic-controlled Senate, where it has little chance of passing without changes to procedural rules that currently allow Republicans to block it.

The stakes in the outcome are monumental, cutting to the foundational idea that one person equals one vote, and carrying with it the potential to shape election outcomes for years to come. It also offers a test of how hard President Joe Biden and his party are willing to fight for their priorities, as well as those of their voters.

This bill "will put a stop at the voter suppression that we're seeing debated right now," said Rep. Nikema Williams, a new congresswoman who represents the Georgia district that deceased

voting rights champion John Lewis held for years.

"This bill is the Good Trouble" he fought for his entire life.

To Republicans, however, it would give license to unwanted federal interference in states' authority to conduct their own elections — ultimately benefiting Democrats through higher turnout, most notably among minorities.

"Democrats want to use their razor-thin majority not to pass bills to earn voters' trust, but to ensure they don't lose more seats in the next election," House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy said from the House floor Tuesday.

The measure has been a priority for Democrats since they won their House majority in 2018. But it has taken on Trump's false claims, which incited the deadly storming of the US Capitol in January.

## Nepal Govt signs peace agreement with communist rebel group

AP ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal's government signed a peace agreement Thursday with a small communist rebel group widely feared because they were known for violent attacks, extortion and bombings.

The government agreed to lift a ban on the group, release all their party members and supporters in jail and drop all legal cases against them, while the group agreed to give up all violence and resolve any issues through peaceful dialogue, the government said in a statement after peace talks.

Details of the agreement would be made public at a ceremony Friday with Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli and the leader of the rebel group Netra Bikram Chand, who is better known by his

guerrilla name, Biplav. The rebels also claim they have the Nepal Communist Party.

This group is known for violence, threats and enforcing general strikes.

It had split from the Maoist Communist party, which fought government troops between 1996 and 2006 when it gave up its armed revolt, agreed to UN-monitored peace talks and joined mainstream politics.

The Maoist fighting had left 17,000 people killed, hundreds missing and many more maimed.

The peace agreement with the rebel group comes at a time when the prime minister and his government are facing a political crisis since a split developed in his own ruling party and the Supreme Court reinstated the Parliament he had dissolved.

## Hong Kong court denies bail to 32 democracy activists

**Hong Kong:** A Hong Kong court on Thursday denied bail to 32 out of 47 pro-democracy activists charged under a Beijing-imposed national security law, ending a four-day court hearing.

The group of activists was charged with conspiracy to commit subversion under the law and detained on Sunday over their involvement in an unofficial primary election last year that authorities said was a plot to paralyze Hong Kong's government.

The mass charges against the activists were the most sweeping action taken against the city's pro-democracy camp since the national security law was implemented last June. With the 32 activists remanded in custody until the next court hearing on May 31, it means that a majority of Hong Kong's pro-democracy figures will now be in jail or in self-exile abroad amid an ongoing crackdown on dissent in the semi-autonomous Chinese city.

## Sheikh Hasina's political adviser HT Imam passes away

**Dhaka:** HT Imam, the political adviser to Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, died on Thursday at a military hospital here.

Imam, 81, breathed his last at 11.15 am. He was undergoing treatment at the Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka, Awami League Office Secretary Biplob Barua said in a social media post.

Imam, who was the cabinet secretary to the 1971 wartime government, was hospitalised with various age-related problems, Dhaka Tribune reported.

## Buckingham Palace to probe if Markle bullied staff during her time as frontline royal

**London:** Buckingham Palace has launched an investigation into allegations that Meghan Markle, the Duchess of Sussex, bullied staff during her time as a frontline royal with Prince Harry in Britain.

Markle lived at Kensington Palace for nearly a year after her marriage to Prince Harry, 36, the Duke of Sussex, in May 2018.

The probe comes as The Times published a leaked email on Wednesday from a staff member alleging that the former American actress drove two personal assistants out of the household and undermined

the confidence of a third member of staff.

"We are clearly very concerned about allegations in the 'Times' following claims made by former staff of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex," Buckingham Palace, which is responsible for all Royal Household staff, said in a statement.

"Accordingly, our HR team will look into the circumstances outlined in the article. Members of staff involved at the time, including those who have left the Household, will be invited to participate to see if lessons can be learned," it said.

## Chaos as freed Nigerian girls reunited with families

**Jangebe (Nigeria):** Hundreds of Nigerian girls abducted last week from a boarding school in the country's northwest have been returned to their families amid chaos as security forces opened fire on a gathering outside the school where the reunions were held Wednesday.

One person died and two were injured in the mayhem, according to local media reports. The forces opened fire after stones were thrown at Government officials, apparently in frustration at the drawn-out procedure, said the report.

Anxious and angry parents with the girls were reunited with the girls after six days of waiting

grabbed their daughters and left after shots rang out. Many were worried about traveling on the road's dangerous roads at night.

The girls, aged 10 and up, had been abducted from the Government Girls Secondary School in Jangebe in Nigeria's northwest Zamfara state and were released Tuesday after negotiations. Zamfara Gov. Bello Matawalle said that 279 girls had been freed.

Upon their release, the girls were brought to the government's provincial offices, Government House, in Gusau for presentation, before being medically examined and reunited with their families.

## Office of the Superintending Engineer 2nd Circle, P.W.D., Tallital Nainital -263002

Phone/ Fax: 05942-235728/ 232030 E-mail: sepwntl@rediffmail.com

Letter No: 1167/41M-2/2021 Date: 04/03/2021

### INVITATION FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI) FOR FEASIBILITY STUDY AND CONCEPT PLANNING OF PROPOSED FLY OVER BRIDGE FOR PLANNED TRAFFIC IN HALDWANI CITY

On behalf of Government of Uttarakhand, Superintending Engineer, 2nd Circle, P.W.D., Nainital (Uttarakhand) invites Expression of Interest (EOI) for the preparation of Feasibility study and concept planning of proposed fly over in traffic congested area of Haldwani City by the eligible, qualified and experienced consultants/firms(s).

**Scope of work:** The scope of work shall include Traffic Survey, Topographical Survey, Concept Plan, Utility Shifting proposal including acquisition of Land and building and Preliminary Project report including estimated cost and general arrangement drawing of traffic congested area of Haldwani City as Teenpani Mandi — Mangal Padao — Kallu Sidh Mandir — Tikonyia (NH-87) and Pukhthi — Mukhani Chauraha — Kallu Sidh Mandir (SH-14).

The EOI shall include adequate information including their organization details, Relevant Experience of consultancy work executed under M.D.B like A.D.B/World Bank funded project etc. Professional Staff and Annual Turnover and other relevant document in Letter of interest to demonstrate their qualification in the best manner. The short listed consultants/firms(s) will be invited to submit their Technical and Financial Proposal as per Request for Proposal (RFP) for the mentioned works at a later stage.

The EOI shall be submitted in the sealed envelope and must reach the mentioned address not later than 3.30 P.M. on dated 25-03-2021. In case the last day of submission of EOI falls on a public holiday, it shall be submitted on the following working day. The department reserves the right to shortlist or not to shortlist any or all of the consultants/firms(s) without assigning any reasons whatsoever.

## GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER MECHANICAL HOSPITAL AND CENTRAL HEATING DIVISION SRINAGAR

Telefax :- 0194-2496089, Email Id: xennhchd@yahoo.in

### Gist of e-tender

NIT No: MHCHD/TS/2020-21/309/e-tendering Dated: -02-03-2021.

For and on behalf of Lt. Governor of UT of Jammu & Kashmir, e-tenders are invited on item rate basis from Original Equipment Manufacturers or their Authorized dealers/ Registered/ Reputed firms having requisite experience for the below mentioned work.

**Name of Work:** Supply, Installation, Testing and Commissioning of 50 KVA of D.G set along with, Cement Concrete Foundation at Govt. Sub District Hospital, Hazratbal, Srinagar.

**Est. Cost (Rs. in Lacs) :- 5.65**

**Cost of T/Doc. (In rupees) :- 500**

**Time of completion (in Days) :- 10**

**Position of AAA/funds :- AAA Vide No: 118-MCS of 2021, Dated: 01-03-2021**

**TS, NO :- 110 of 03/2021**

**1. Downloading of Bids:-** The NIT Consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, Bill of quantities (B.O.Q), Set of terms and conditions of contract and other details can be seen from the departmental website [www.itenders.gov.in](http://www.itenders.gov.in) from 03.03.2021(15.00 hrs) and can be downloaded from 03.03.2021(15.00 hrs).

**2. Uploading:** The bidders shall deposit their bids in electronic format on the above web site from 03.03.2021(15.00 hrs) to 12.03.2021(14:00 hrs) in two (02) covers.

**3. Opening of Bids:** The bids received upto due date and time shall be opened on 12.03.2021 at 16.00 hrs or any date convenient to the Department.

Sd/- Executive Engineer, MHCHD, Srinagar

No. DIPK-1440/20 Dated:- 04.03.2021

| GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA |  | TENDER NOTICE  |                            |
|-----------------------|--|--|----------------------------|
| Sr. No.               | NAME OF DEPARTMENT   | NAME OF WORK NOTICE TENDER   | OPENING DATE CLOSING DATE  |
| 1                     | PWD B&R, FATIHAABAD  | CONSTRUCTION OF ADDITIONAL ALTERATION OF ICU/HOU IN EXISTING CIVIL HOSPITAL AT FATIHAABAD.   | 03.03.2021<br>24.03.2021   |
| 2                     | PWD B&R, PANOKHOLA   | TENDER FOR THE WORK OF CONSTRUCTION OF PROPOSED MATERIAL AND CHILD HOSPITAL AND SERVICE BLOCK IN THE CAMPUS OF CIVIL HOSPITAL IN SECTOR-4, PANOKHOLA.          | 04.03.2021<br>24.03.2021   |
| 3                     | PWD B&R, REWARI  | 1. ONIT FOR ICU/HOU IN ADDITIONAL BLOCK IN CIVIL HOSPITAL AT REWARI IN REWARI DISTT. -1 OTHER WORK.  | 04.03.2021<br>24.03.2021   |
| 4                     | IRIGATION & WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT HARYANA, CHANDIGARH | SUPPLY ERECTION & COMMISSIONING OF 3 NO. 10 CS. & 4 NO. 5 CS. FLOOD V.T. PUMPS WITH 15 FEET LIFT ALONG WITH THE 50HP & 30HP MOTORS & 50HP & 30HP ATS STARTERS. | CLOSING DATE<br>24.03.2021 |
| 5                     | IRIGATION & WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT HARYANA, CHANDIGARH | PROVIDING HELPER CHOWDAR SWEEPER CUM CLERK, TURNER WELDER DATA ENTRY OPT. CLM ELEC.  | CLOSING DATE<br>18.03.2021 |
| 6                     | IRIGATION & WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT HARYANA, CHANDIGARH | CONSTRUCTION OF PUMP HOUSE ALONGWITH GROUND SYNTHETIC MAT AT RD 10574 OF MEHAR DRAIN X GHAHNAH DISTT. AT RD 141025+2   | CLOSING DATE<br>17.03.2021 |
| 7                     | IRIGATION & WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT HARYANA, CHANDIGARH | HIRING OF SUITABLE OFFICE ACCOMMODATION MEASURING AROUND (COMMERCIAL) 6000SQ. FT. 2000. CARPET AREA REQUIRED BY THIS OFFICE.                                   | 04.03.2021<br>19.03.2021   |
| 8                     | DISTRICT FOOD & SUPPLIES CONTROLLER SONBET                 | TRANSPORTATION AND LABOUR & CARTAGE WORK.  | 05.03.2021<br>14.03.2021   |
| 9                     | CEO, ZILA PARSHAD KURUKSHETRA                              | WALL PAINTINGS IN 419 VILLAGES (5 NO. WALL PAINTING IN EACH VILLAGE) OF DISTRICT KURUKSHETRA HAVING SIZE OF EACH 10' X 10' MAXIMUM.                            | 04.03.2021<br>10.03.2021   |
| 10                    | FOOD CIVIL SUPPLIES AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS CONTROLLER SONBET | LABOUR AND CARTAGE TRANSPORTATION  | 05.03.2021<br>14.03.2021   |
| 11                    | PRINCIPAL GOVT. LT.1 MEHARABAD, GURUGRAM                   | SUPPLY OF TOOLS, EQUIPMENTS & MACHINERY AT GOVT. ITL, GURUGRAM   | 04.03.2021<br>15.03.2021   |

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION KINDLY VISIT : [www.haryanaeprocurement.gov.in](http://www.haryanaeprocurement.gov.in) or [www.etenders.hry.nic.in](http://www.etenders.hry.nic.in)

RO NO. 2048



# FDI rises 40% to USD 51.47 bn: Govt data

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign direct investment (FDI) in India grew 40 per cent to USD 51.47 billion during April-December 2020, according to government data released on Thursday.

India has attracted 22 per cent higher FDI inflow (including re-invested earnings) of USD 67.54 billion during the first nine months of the current fiscal as against USD 55.14 billion in the same period of 2019-20.

"FDI equity inflow grew by 40 per cent in the first nine months of 2020-21 (USD 51.47 billion) compared to the same period (USD 36.77 billion)," the commerce and



doing business have resulted in increased FDI inflows into the country, according to the ministry.

The foreign inflows are a major driver of economic growth and an important source of non-debt finance for the economic development of India.

"The steps taken in this direction during the last six and a half years have borne fruit, as is evident from the ever-increasing volumes of FDI inflows being received into the country. Continuing on the path of FDI liberalisation and simplification, government has

continued FDI reforms across various sectors," the ministry said.

The measures taken by the government, such as the FDI policy reforms, investment facilitation and ease of

# ICICI, HDFC, SBI will have to offload ₹1.2 lakh cr if RBI caps stake in insurance arms: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Just State Bank of India, HDFC and ICICI Bank will have to offload equity worth Rs 1.21 lakh crore if the central bank goes ahead with its reported plan to make banks cap their stake in insurance arms at 20 per cent, says a report.

Quoting unnamed RBI officials, a media report earlier this week said the monetary authority is not comfortable with banks owning controlling stake in non-core businesses like insurance ventures which are capital guzzlers and want banks to cap ownership in insurance arms/ companies at a maximum of 20 per cent.

While in case of ICICI the RBI recently approved Axis Bank's plan to buy Max Life

only after it agreed to directly hold only 10 per cent and also capped the overall holding at 20 per cent.

Current regulations allow banks to own over 50 per cent stake in insurance arms.

The RBI forces promotion of banks/BFPIs to lower their stakes to 20 per cent, this can significantly increase free float in the four listed insurance arms of HDFC, ICICI Bank and SBI worth Rs 1.2 lakh crore alone, Kotak Securities said in a report on Thursday.

HDFC owns 55 per cent in HDFC Life and bringing it down to 20 per cent would mean offloading equity worth Rs 44,100 crore at today's market value.

Prudential Life which is 51 per cent owned by the bank, it will

be Rs 22,100 crore worth of shares flowing into the market, and Rs 21,700 crore worth of shares from ICICI Lombard in which the bank owns 52 per cent.

SBI which owns 55 per cent in SBI Life will have to sell share worth Rs 32,200 crore.

The total value their excess holding is worth Rs 1,20,000 crore, says the report.

Almost all state-run banks and large private sector banks also have unlisted life and non-life insurance ventures.

Calling for maintaining the status quo, the report said banks owning insurance companies has been a win-win for all and that there are many positive values in that structure such as integrated service to their customers and better risk provisioning in challenging times.

# WhatsApp expands voice, video calling to desktop PCs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

WhatsApp on Thursday said it has rolled out one-to-one voice and video calls on its desktop app, a move that will now allow users to make calls through their laptops or desktop PCs.

The Facebook-owned company said voice and video calls on the platform are end-to-end encrypted, and WhatsApp can't hear or see them whether the call is made from phones or computers.

"We're starting with one-to-one calls on the WhatsApp desktop app so we make sure it can give you the same high-quality experience. We will be expanding this feature

to include group voice and video calls in the future," it added.

WhatsApp said there has been a significant increase in video calling and one another on WhatsApp over the last year and often for long conversations.

"Last New Year's Eve, we broke the record for the most calls ever made in a single day with 1.4 billion voice and video calls. With so many people still apart from their loved ones, and adjusting to new ways of working, we want conversations on WhatsApp to feel as

close to in-person as possible. Regardless of where you are in the world or the tech you're using," WhatsApp said.

# Minister releases APEN vision document 2021

PTI ■ KOHIMA

Despite being endowed with Promising hydropower and topography, Nagaland's power potentials are yet to be sufficiently exploited and harnessed due to lack of resources leading to an acute shortage between demand and availability of electricity in the state, according to a vision document by APEN.

The Vision Document 2021 was presented by the Association of Power Engineers Nagaland (APEN) on the occasion of World Engineering Day organized by the Federation of Nagaland State Engineering Service Association (FONESA) here on Thursday.

The Vision Document

2021 (VD-2021) was officially released by Minister for PWD (Housing and Mechanical) Tongpang Ozokum during the WED celebration held on the theme "Engineering for a Healthy Planet-Celebrating the UNESCO Engineering Report".

On infrastructure development, the vision document said that the number of consumers in the state as of 2020 is 2,99,825 with the peak and off-peak demand being 179 MW and 120 MW respectively while the energy consumption is 854 MU.

It said the state's energy demand is predominantly met from the central sector allocations (90%), and own generation contributing approximately 10 per cent only.

# Sensex, Nifty drop amid global equity retreat

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Snapping its three-session winning run, benchmark BSE Sensex plunged by around 599 points to crack below the key 51,000-level on Thursday due to heavy selling in financial, energy and IT stocks amid a meltdown in global shares.

Asian and European markets tumbled as another rise in US bond yields fanned fears of higher inflation that may prompt central banks to raise interest rates.

Intra-day, the 30-share BSE barometer fell as much as 95 points before ending the session at 50,846.08, showing a decline of 598.57 points or 1.16 per cent. Of 30 Sensex shares, 25 closed with losses.

The broader NSE Nifty closed down by 164.85 points or 1.08 per cent at 15,080.75

with 38 of its constituents ending in the red zone.

On the Sensex chart, HDFC, L&T, SBI, Axis Bank, Bajaj Finserv and HDFC Bank were major losers.

Mortgage major HDFC fell the most by 2.62 per cent. Bajaj Finserv dropped 2.49 per cent, while Reliance 1.17 per cent. IT stocks Infosys, Tech Mahindra, HCL Tech, and TCS also saw losses of up to 1 per cent. Dell tower today mainly on weak global cues.

Financials and Metals indices were also under pressure, while FMCG, Pharma and IT indices were resilient.

# Rupee retreats by 11 paise to 72.83, ends 2-day winning run

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee on Thursday declined by 11 paise to close at 72.83 against the US dollar due to a rebound in the greenback in overseas markets and muted domestic cues.

At the interbank forex market, the local unit opened at 72.99 against the greenback and witnessed an intra-day high of 72.62 and a low of 72.99.

It finally ended at 72.83 against the American currency, registering a fall of 11 paise over its previous closing.

# Startup Harvesting starts e-commerce platform to help farmers sell produce to wholesalers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Agri-tech startup Harvesting on Thursday said it has started an e-commerce portal to help farmers sell their produce to wholesale buyers.

The HFN.Mandi.Com is a portal online service for farmers to connect and transact with buyers, a company statement said.

HFN Mandi leverages technology to provide nationwide farmers and buyers on a single transparent online platform. It aims to provide farmers with larger market access and better price realisation.

"Farmers as far as from Meghalaya are now able to export their crops to countries like South Africa because they can produce on our platform," Ruchit Gang, Founder and CEO, Harvesting, said.

# Prices are decided by the farmers and orders are fulfilled by farmers themselves

Prices are decided by the farmers and orders are fulfilled by farmers themselves.

"For buyers, it provides not only access to the largest selection of crops under a single roof at attractive prices, but also provides a seamless experience of purchasing agricultural produce in wholesale including the booking of transportation, quality check on the ground, legal contract, escrow of funds etc," the company said.

Harvesting India Pvt Ltd was founded in 2018 to drive financial inclusion for small-holder farmers.

# India wearables market grows 144.3% in 2020: IDC

IANIS ■ NEW DELHI

Driven by record shipments of wearables and watches, the Indian wearables market posted 144.3 per cent year-over-year (YoY) growth in 2020, exiting the year with 36.4 million unit shipments, industry tracker International Data Corporation (IDC) said on Thursday.

India was the only country in the top 20 to see triple-digit growth in wearables in 2020 and continues to be the third-largest wearables market globally, showed IDC Worldwide Quarterly Wearable Device Tracker, 2020 was a year of transition in the audio segment from wired to wireless devices," said Jaipal Singh, Associate Research Manager, Client Devices, IDC India.

"In 2021, this category will further migrate to more sophisticated devices with enhanced audio experience being the central theme for all vendors," he added. Earwear device shipments grew more than three-fold in 2020 compared to the previous year, mainly driven by the affordable launches, and expanding use cases beyond entertainment like virtual meetings and e-learning requirements.

## SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED

General public is hereby informed that a girl (depicted in the photo), Name: Himanshi D/o Mr. Mukesh Meena R/o 128/1, DCM Railway Colony, Khasan Gari, Karol Bagh, Delhi has been missing/kidnapped since 27.02.2021 from the area of P.S. Dush Bandu Gupta Road, Delhi. In this regard a case vide FIR No. 52/21 U/S 363 IPC dated 27.02.2021 has been registered at Police Station Dush Bandu Gupta Road, Delhi. Her physical description is as under:-

**HIMANSHI**  
Age: 13 Years, Height: 4', Complexion: Fair, Face: Round, Build: Thin, Wearing: White colour jacket and dark brown colour top & black colour half pant.

Any person having any information/Clue about this missing/kidnapped girl, may inform SHO, Dush Bandu Gupta Road, Delhi at E-mail id - [cic@cbl.gov.in](mailto:cic@cbl.gov.in) or Website: <http://cbl.nic.in>

Phone: SHO  
011-24368638, 24368641 P.S. Dush Bandu Gupta Road, Delhi  
Fax No: 011-24368639 Central Distt., Delhi  
DP/18/1/CD/2021 Ph. No. 011-23613252, 23537374

## APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION

General public is hereby informed that an unidentified dead body of a unknown male Age: 40 years, Complexion: Shallow, Height: 5'7", Built: Thin, Face: Round, was wearing Grey colour Shirt and Dark colour Lower, was found at Hari Nagar Clock Tower, Hari Nagar, Delhi dated 22.02.2021 and admitted in DDU Hospital vide MLC No. 1868/2021. During the treatment he was declared dead by doctor on 24.02.2021. In this regard a DD No. 76A, dated 24.02.2021, has been lodged at P.S. Hari Nagar, Delhi.

Any person having any information or clue about the deceased may kindly inform to the undersigned on the following address or telephone nos.

SHO  
P.S. Hari Nagar, Delhi  
DP/355/WD/2021 Ph: 011-28125719, 8750871128

## PUBLIC NOTICE

My client HFCF Ltd. who had disbursed a Loan to Mr. Taj Mohammed, against the mortgage of Property being Unit No. Plot No. 382, Khanna number 134/79, Khanna Nagar, Loni, Ghazipur, U.P. has come to the notice that the original property documents i.e. Sale deed dated 18.01.85 registered at Doc. No. 1487, executed by Mrs. Khanna & Sons Pvt. Ltd. through its authorised representative, Shri. Anandh Khanna in favour of Mrs. Durga Baidya, Pvt. Ltd. through its authorised representative, Shri. Ramendra Kumar Narain. Sale deed dated 10.06.86 registered at Doc. No. 318/82, executed by Mrs. Durga Baidya, Pvt. Ltd. through its authorised representative, Shri. Ramendra Kumar Narain in favour of Mr. Kuldeep Kumar Narain. Sale deed dated 12.1.97 registered at Doc. No. 2339, executed by Mr. Kuldeep Kumar Narain in favour of Mr. Ravindra Kaur in favour of Mr. Ravindra Kaur in favour of Mr. Ravindra Kaur. It is hereby requested to the general public that whoever finds any of the documents mentioned herein in above may kindly return the same to the HFCF Ltd., The Capital Court, Murkio, Outer Ring Road, Old Palms Marg, New Delhi - 110087.

Kamraj Singh, Advocate  
Ct. No. 153, Sunset Court Complex, New Delhi-110014.  
P.S. Ghazipur, Delhi  
DP/409/ED/2021 Ph. No. 011-22610068, 22610094

# OPEC cartel, allies face decision on increasing oil output

AP ■ FRANKFURT

Members of oil producer cartel OPEC and allied countries are weighing an increase in production now that prices have recovered to near their pre-pandemic levels.

Their online meeting on Thursday takes place against the background of more confidence that prices have steadied, offset by concern that that the spread of new variants of the coronavirus could easily hurt demand.

The so-called OPEC Plus - which includes countries like Russia that are not part of the cartel but have been coordinating production - recently made deep cuts in output in 2020 to stave off a complete collapse in prices.

It decided to add back 500,000 barrels per day in December, and analysts say it's possible the gathered ministers could have reduction by another 500,000 barrels per day.

A big question ahead of the meeting is whether Saudi Arabia, the kingdom among member countries, will withdraw any of the voluntary 1 million barrels per day in cuts that it announced at the January meeting, a move that startled oil markets and sent prices higher.

The group still has a self-

imposed cap of not raising the target production by more than 500,000 barrels per day on a monthly basis, which does not include the return of the extra 1 million barrels per day of production cuts, which would come on top, said Bjornar Tonhaugen, head of oil markets at Rystad Energy.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
Be it known to all that our client, M. Kamal Kumar Son of Late Sh. Dhanraj D/o R/o 52/21, DCM Railway Colony, Khasan Gari, Karol Bagh, Delhi has been missing/kidnapped since 27.02.2021 from the area of P.S. Dush Bandu Gupta Road, Delhi. In this regard a case vide FIR No. 52/21 U/S 363 IPC dated 27.02.2021 has been registered at Police Station Dush Bandu Gupta Road, Delhi. Her physical description is as under:-

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P.S. Hari Nagar, Delhi  
DP/355/WD/2021 Ph: 011-28125719, 8750871128

## PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform to all that we are going to close the company Naya Bazar Chit Fund Pvt. Ltd. having registered office at 26/36, East Patel Nagar, New Delhi. If anybody have any objection please inform within 15 days.

## WESTERN RAILWAY CORRIGENDUM

Tender Notice No: (1) Tender Notice No. VP-2021-01-01-02555 dated 18.02.2021 (2) Tender Notice No. VP-2021-01-01-02551 dated 18.02.2021. Wrong Date published earlier for closing of tender online. Closing of tender online at [www.rps.gov.in](http://www.rps.gov.in) on 06-03-2021 at 15:00 Hrs. Correct Date to be read for closing of tender online (Corrigendum): Closing of Tender online at [www.rps.gov.in](http://www.rps.gov.in) on 16-03-2021 at 15:00 Hrs.

# Wipro to buy UK firm Capco for \$1.45 billion

IANIS ■ BENGALURU

Global software major Wipro said on Thursday that it has signed an agreement to acquire the UK-based management and technology Capco for \$1.45 billion (Rs 10,551 crore) to provide digital, Cloud and IT services to financial institutions in the US, Europe and Asia-Pacific.

"The acquisition will make us one of the largest consulting, technology and service providers to the banking and financial services industry," said the city-based IT behemoth in a statement here. The acquisition is expected to close in the quarter ending June 30, 2021.

London-headquartered Capco's clients include the marquee in the global financial services industry.

"Capco has 5,000 consultants based in 30 global locations to support clients with their expert insights, entrepreneurial approach and focus on delivery excellence," said the statement.

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"Capco has 5,000 consultants based in 30 global locations to support clients with their expert insights, entrepreneurial approach and focus on delivery excellence," said the statement.

# Wipro to buy UK firm Capco for \$1.45 billion

IANIS ■ BENGALURU

Global software major Wipro said on Thursday that it has signed an agreement to acquire the UK-based management and technology Capco for \$1.45 billion (Rs 10,551 crore) to provide digital, Cloud and IT services to financial institutions in the US, Europe and Asia-Pacific.

"The acquisition will make us one of the largest consulting, technology and service providers to the banking and financial services industry," said the city-based IT behemoth in a statement here. The acquisition is expected to close in the quarter ending June 30, 2021.

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## SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED

General public is hereby informed that a girl (depicted in the photo), Name: Simran D/o Titu R/o H.No. E-1287, Jyoti, Bawana, Delhi has been missing/kidnapped from her house since 05.02.2021 at 4:30 PM. In this regard FIR No. 49/2021 Dated 05.02.2021 U/s 363 IPC has been registered at P.S. Narela Industrial Area, Outer North District, Delhi. Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the girl but no clue has come to light so far.

Her physical description is as under:-  
Sex: Female, Age: 17 years, Height: 4'6", Complexion: Fair, Built: Normal, Wearing: Blue Colour Suit Salwar and Yellow Dupatta and White Shoes in feet.  
Any person is having information or clue about this missing/kidnapped girl may kindly inform to the following:-  
SHO  
Website: <http://cbl.nic.in> P.S. Narela Industrial Area, Delhi  
E-mail: [cic@cbl.gov.in](mailto:cic@cbl.gov.in) Ph. No: 011-27787592  
Tel. No: 011-24368638/24368641 Mob. No: 7065036324  
Fax No: 011-24368639 DP/802/ON/2021

## APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION

General public is hereby informed that one person Name: Unknown, S/o: Unknown, R/o: Unknown, Age: 60 Yrs., Height: 5'8", Sex: Male, Complexion: Wheatish, Hair: Small Grey, Face: Oval, Built: Thin, Wearing: Red line and White Colour T-Shirt and Blue Colour Lower, Place of Recovery: Found dead near Baba Khark Singh Marg in the jurisdiction of P.S. Connaught Place, New Delhi.

In this regard DD No. 18A, Dated 28.02.2021 has been lodged at Police Station, Connaught Place, New Delhi. Any clue come to notice please inform undersign.

SHO  
P.S. Connaught Place, New Delhi  
DP/237/ND/2021 Ph: 011-23364139 & 8750870525

## BATTLE FOR SURVIVAL

The crafts industry needs a fresh set of structural reforms to move ahead, shares SREYA MOZUMDAR

India's handicraft market, the true epitome of India's vibrant culture and heritage, has a glorious history of several centuries. However, the once-prosperous Indian craft sector of the country has been in deep trouble since the beginning of the pandemic. A source of sustenance of a conservative estimate of staggering 9-10 million artisans, craft is one of the worst-affected sectors that is trying to find ways to revive itself. The current situation signals the need for a fresh set of structural reforms for the crafts industry to move ahead.

The striking appeal of premium handicraft goods produced by Indian artisans has fascinated not just the domestic market but also the global one. To put it in context, Indian handicrafts and handlooms are a ₹24,300-crore industry and contribute ₹10,000 crores to India's export earnings annually, according to the Twelfth Five Year Plan. Additionally, the India Trade Portal asserts that India is the second-largest exporter of handloom products globally. The exports of Indian handloom products were valued at USD 353.9 million in the period 2017-2018.

The reality on the ground, however, seems different. Despite a show of promise and potential, the Indian craft sector doesn't get the serious attention it should. The Fourth All India Handloom Census (2019-2020) says that the total number of households engaged in weaving and allied activities amounts to 3.14 million; two-thirds (66.3 per cent). Already facing this uncertain livelihood situation, the crafts sector is now fighting for survival amid the pandemic. Low pay, lack of exposure, financial constraints, and inadequate client coverage are some of the most common challenges faced by India's craft sector in the post-lockdown era. It is no surprise then, that the ongoing pandemic has only made the struggles harder. Speaking statistically, an initial estimate by EPCH pegs the possible losses of the craft sector to the tune of ₹8,000-10,000 crore post pandemic.

According to 'The Unlock

Edition' survey conducted by the All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association (AIACA), wage losses, cashflow crunches, cancellation/withholding of orders, and supply disruptions in the raw material value chain make for some major challenges faced by India's craft enterprises.

The sector has been suffering from a lack of access to credit and working capital. According to the Sixth Economic Census, India has an overwhelming presence of micro-businesses and small proprietary businesses. Though craft businesses in the country fall within the spectrum of such businesses, their operations are unorganised, which hinders access to credit and working capital. Over 80 per cent of small proprietary businesses in India are self-financed. Barely two per cent borrowed from financial institutions.

Artisanal trade is the second largest employer among the developing countries behind agriculture, articulating unique expressions of arts, culture and heritage. In a report 'Policy Gaps Study on the Crafts Sector in India' presented by AIACA, the challenges being faced by artisans/entrepreneurs in the crafts sector are well analysed. First, there are large-scale gaps in fulfilling the mandates of the government schemes themselves, in terms of infrastructure provision, access to credit, skills training, marketing etc. The lack of penetration by scheduled banks into rural areas, lack of financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills among the artisans and lack of institutionalisation of craft persons are significant inhibitors. An enabling fiscal and tax environment is required in order to drive entrepreneurial activities by artisans.

Women artisans have struggled to be recognised as potential earners and entrepreneurs in their own right because of various reasons — working double hard to be taken seriously as an entrepreneur/earner; lack of female mentors and role models; restrictive gender roles, revealed by the funding patterns of investors and the 14 per cent statistic (i.e. of



women running only 14 per cent of Indian businesses and most self-financed). Women in our country rarely own property that could serve as collateral for start-up loans. They have less education than men, on an average. When they do work, they receive lower wages than their male counterparts and generally occupy low-skill jobs in agriculture and services, often in the informal economy.

Moving ahead, it is simply clear that the need of the hour necessitates a revisiting of traditional approaches towards income generation and livelihoods. There is a need to redefine the mechanics of work with women artisans and entrepreneurs and look at promoting well-grounded, economically and environmentally sustainable models of social business and enterprise as a way ahead. Here are a few revival measures that will help alleviate the financial as well as marketing difficulties of the sector:

- Individuals and NGOs must come together to take the initiative of raising funds for relief distribution to promote craft businesses and keep the tradition of handicrafts alive.

- Since the crafts sector is slowly losing its grip, steps should be

taken to conduct branding and marketing campaigns, promote the distinctiveness of Indian art and craft. We must reposition the sector as crafts and creative enterprises (CCEs) and engage it deeper with e-commerce.

- Reskilling and rebuilding capabilities in the sector will help quicken the recovery and make the sector resilient, especially for smaller artisans.

- Broad financial recommendations include expectations of a stimulus from the government for craft based enterprises, including measures like reduction/deferral in GST across categories, soft loans and interest free working capital loans to aid production and the easing of access to raw material supplies.

Globally, many countries have announced large bailout packages in the form of soft loans or government-backed collateral-free loans, tax holidays, a moratorium on liabilities to protect their small businesses. In India, the Government has announced a special economic package viz., *Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan* with relief and credit support measures for various sectors including MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises). This is in line

with the GOI envisioning a contribution of \$2 trillion from micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) as India eyes becoming a \$5 trillion economy by 2024, along with a target of generating fifty million additional jobs from the sector. The definition of Small and Micro enterprises have been changed (as per the Finance Minister's announcement on May 13, 2020), with a revision of upwards limits, a focus on annual turnover and a removal of the differences between service and manufacturing MSMEs. This would clearly have an implication for craft enterprises in the country.

The road ahead. This sector currently needs a helping hand to prevent widespread job losses and deal with bank loan defaults. Considering the gravity of the current situation, multiple stakeholders across the crafts value chain — entrepreneurs, merchandisers, NGOs and craft cooperatives and coalitions — have come together to revive the sector. Their support would be critical to ensure the sustainability of India's craft enterprises at this critical time.

(The writer is the Executive Director of AIACA — All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association.)



## LFW, FDCI to present joint fashion week

Seems like the good old days of Indian fashion are back. After more than a decade-and-a-half, Lakme Fashion Week (LFW) and the Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI) will present a joint fashion week.

The Physical Fashion Week ushers in an era of positivity and drive growth in the industry in the post-pandemic world. Leaders of the industry — FDCI, Lakme and RISE Worldwide make history with this event, kickstarting an era of effective co-operation and meaningful initiatives.

Combining forces Lakme Fashion Week jointly organised by Lakme & RISE Worldwide (formerly IMG Reliance) and FDCI will present a joint schedule this season at LFW. The event will have a special 'unity logo' designed to mark this occasion.

It will feature the best of curation and designers from Delhi, Mumbai and across India. FDCI & LFW will jointly present the Opening Show on March 16 and will culminate with the Lakme Absolute Grand Finale on March 21. The event will also feature talent discovery programme GenNext for designers as well as promote modelling talent through FDCI's #GetNoticed Model Hunt besides other innovations. Both FDCI and LFW will continue their buyer programmes launched last season as well.

Sanil Sethi, Chairman FDCI commented, "The Fashion Design Council of India for decades has tirelessly

worked to make the design industry lead from the front and leave a global footprint. The pandemic has darkened the clouds, this will add a silver lining to the business of fashion and help sharpen the needs of the fast-changing world. Lakme, RISE Worldwide and FDCI will now have a shared purpose and belonging as we both reinvent the wheel in uncertain times. We are delighted to present this fashion week together."

Ashwath Swaminathan, Head of Innovations at Lakme said, "Our association with the Indian fashion industry runs deep as Lakme has been a key driver of its growth for the past 20 years. We look forward to this partnership opening up new avenues of growth for all stakeholders. We continue to remain true to the pillars of the Lakme Fashion week which are discoverability, sustainability and talkability as we present the best in Indian fashion and beauty this season to a global audience."

Jaspreet Chandok, Head - Lifestyle Businesses at RISE Worldwide said, "Our ultimate goal is the development of ecosystems that we operate in and we feel this partnership will help elevate the fashion industry to new heights. We are glad to partner with the FDCI and look forward to jointly present Lakme Fashion Week this season as we RISE as one."

(The show is going to take place from March 16 to 21 and the schedule will be released shortly.)

## Don't put a tag

Singer SHILPA RAO says it is time we started addressing everyone equally and giving accolades irrespective of gender

With Indian Pro Music League (IPML), Zee TV is gradually changing the face of music reality shows. While the world of sports has seen several league competitions, this unique music league has six teams representing different regions of India, battling it out against each other in a musical championship. Each of these six teams supported by leading Bollywood and sports celebrities has top playback singers as their captains, one reality show star, and one fresh voice. Celebrated singers - Mika Singh, Kailash Kher, Sajid Khan, Shaan, Ankit Tiwari, Javed Ali, Asees Kaur, Bhoomi Tripathi, Akriti Kakkar, Payal Dev, Neha Bhasin, Shilpa Rao are captains of these six zonal teams.

At the shoot of an forthcoming episode, the women singers made a very pertinent observation about the industry and spoke up about the change they believe we should all invest in, rather than just celebrate one day in the entire year as 'Women's Day'.

Addressing fellow team captains like Akriti, Neha,



Bhumi and Payal, Mumbai Warriors captain Shilpa Rao said, "I feel yeh female singer ka tag hai jana chahiye for all of us. We are all singers, be it male or female. It shouldn't make any difference. It's

about time that we start addressing everyone equally and give deserved accolades regardless of their gender."

(The show airs every Saturday and Sunday at 8 pm on Zee TV.)

## TREND TOOL

Disney's most-awaited animated classic of the year, *Raya and The Last Dragon* has won several hearts globally with critics and ardent fans already raving about the masterpiece. Here are five things you must know before you dive headfirst into the land of Kumandra with Raya on a quest to find the last dragon.

- ◆ Kelly Marie Tran and Awkwafina to voice the titular roles

Set in a mystical world called Kumandra, the story of *Raya and The Last Dragon* is inspired largely by Southeast Asian cultures. Adding to that authenticity, Kelly Marie Tran will voice the lead character Raya, making her an addition to the long list of Disney's warrior princesses after Elsa (*Frozen 2*), Mulan, etc. Along with her, the Crazy Rich Asian-fame Awkwafina also voices the voice of Sisu, a dragon from the fantasy lands of Kumandra.

- ◆ The mystical land of Kumandra

The story of Raya is set in Kumandra, a kingdom divided into five different lands that she has to venture through to find the last dragon. The lands of heart are covered with rock formations to secure the sacred dragon Gem, while Tala lands are isolated desert islands. The snowy mountains sheltering fierce warriors are the Spine lands and at the head of the Dragon river lie the opulent Fang lands with manmade canals for security. At the centre of these four lands, lie the Ialan lands, vibrant and bustling market area, a crossroad for merchants of all five lands, connected by the Dragon river. A cinematic journey through these unique and different regions will be a sight you cannot miss.

- ◆ Southeast Asian influence

Vastly influenced by the Southeast Asian heritage, *Raya and The Last Dragon*



Watch out for...  
...when you head to the theatres to see *Raya and The Last Dragon*



ensured that the influences were kept authentic. The two groups of filmmakers made research trips throughout Southeast Asia, including Laos, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia and Singapore. In fact, Raya's fighting style was inspired by Pencak Silat from Malaysia

and Indonesia, as well as weapons modelled from Kali and Arnis martial arts found in the Philippines. Her distinctive sword is inspired by the keris, a bladed sword that is revered in countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia. It is the very first Disney animated film that features a Southeast Asian warrior Raya.

- ◆ Women power breaking barriers on and off-screen

The character sketch of Raya breaks the conservative cookie-cutter cutter approach to the creation of a princess. The titular characters Raya and Sisu are female characters who are mighty, intelligent and brave enough to face their troubles. Breaking the patriarchal boundaries off-screen, the film presents an all-female

technical leadership team led by Technical Supervisor Kelsey Hurley, and Associate Technical Supervisors Gabriela Hernandez and Shweta Viswanathan.

- ◆ Work from home

The pandemic has caused several glitches to film production houses all over the world in the past year, but did you know that this film was made from the homes of its crew members? Yes, almost 450 artists and crew members managed to create all shot production for *Raya and The Last Dragon* while working from their homes. It is also known that more than 900 employees have worked remotely to contribute to this film and other forthcoming projects of Walt Disney Animated Studios.

(The film releases today.)

## TRENDBLAZER

fairtalk  
RAVI KISHAN



"I strongly believe that drugs and sexual abuse are interconnected. We have to fight against drug consumption that leads youngsters towards sexual crime against women. We have to understand that we do not have that many number of policemen as compared to the population we have. So, at times we normalise a lot of crime and do not report them."

dailytalk  
VAANI KAPOOR



"Holistic lifestyle has been a part and parcel of my life even before I made my debut in Bollywood. I have always wanted to lead a healthy lifestyle and working out and eating right was always a priority for me. I want to build something of my own in the health and nutrition space in the coming years and I have been researching the same for years now."

CHEYENNE NO LONGER CRAVES ALCOHOL

Actor CHEYENNE JACKSON has revealed that staying off alcohol during lockdown required effort but his life is better off without it. "The craving for alcohol has been lifted. Our lives are better (without alcohol) and we find something else to do. And it usually involves being with the kids, doing something to get your mind out of that," says he.



SHREYA GHOSHAL ANNOUNCES PREGNANCY

Singer SHREYA GHOSHAL took to Instagram to share the news of her pregnancy with fans. The singer posted a picture of herself flaunting a baby bump.

Dressed in a blue and green ensemble, the mom-to-be poses with her bump in the picture and is visibly glowing. "Baby #Shreyaditya is on its way! We are thrilled to share this news with you all. Need all your love and blessings as we prepare ourselves for this new chapter in our lives," she posted.



# FOR THE LOVE OF OATS

RAGHAV GUPTA shares why oats have emerged as the go-to breakfast cereal

The breakfast cereal market has been projected to hit \$75 billions the next five years, and oats as a category is stacked up against hundreds if not thousands of processed competitors. Yet, unlike most of its sugar-coated, colour-coded, attractively shaped counterparts, oats have maintained a clean image, especially in the health-food section. Apart from being a great source of complex carbs, it also has several other nutritional benefits which makes it a hit among health experts and fitness enthusiasts alike.

Scientifically known as Avena Sativa, oats are one of the world's most ancient whole-grains. Whole oat grains are called oat groats, and look a lot like wheat. The best part about the grain is that the texture and mouth-feel of oats can change as the treatment and processing changes.

There are many variations in the way oats are processed to make steel cut oats, rolled oats, instant oats, oat flour and oat bran. On a scale of 1 to 10 of processing, you could say that whole-grain oat groats and steel cut oats are a '1' because they are least processed, while rolled oats, instant oats would be a '5' and oat flour would be a '10'.

Yet surprisingly, the nutritional value of the cereal remains pretty much unchanged throughout the spectrum right from whole oats to oat flour, compared to other grains like corn or maize.

Even the byproduct which is called oat bran is a nutrient dense food with as much as 12-15 grams of protein per 100 grams of bran. This also makes it a lucrative option for manufacturers since the grain offers infinite ways to experiment with it.

Susan Downey divulged in a tête-à-tête with an American magazine on how her husband and *Avengers* star Robert Downey Jr bought his own packs of oats to the sets. Which gets you thinking if Iron Man's eating it, there's definitely more to this grain than what meets the eye. Isn't it?

The most known benefit of oats is its high protein content, which makes it a great post or even pre-workout snack. Around 100 grams can contain upto 12-13 grams of protein, which is equivalent to protein from two whole eggs. They are also a good source of iron since 100 grams can contain upto 4.5 mg of iron.

However, what makes them truly special is its fibre component i.e Beta Glucan. Oats are one among the only two grains that have abundant beta glucan. It is one form of soluble dietary



fibre that's strongly linked to improving cholesterol levels and boosting heart health.

Oats also contain antioxidants that are beneficial for good health. In fact, they are the only grains to contain avenanthramides, a unique antioxidant.

One study has reported that the antioxidants in oats work together with Vitamin C to prevent LDL oxidation, thus, lowering the risk of heart diseases. Apart from these, oats also have numerous trace elements like Magnesium, Zinc, Phosphorus

and Vitamin B1 and B5.

Interestingly, over a hundred years ago, Dr Bercher Benner, the original inventor of oat-based muesli intended it to be the cure for tuberculosis! There's also tons of evidence and studies showing the multiple

benefits of including oats in the diet.

Urmi Kothari, a wellness and fitness expert based out of Mumbai, explained how the cereal can be a great way to beat cravings and include whole grains in one's diet. Kothari, who also specialises in creating nutrition and fitness plans for women suffering from PCOS uses social media to advocate for oats as an effective ingredient to combat the disease. There are also others like Dr Rini Selvagiftson, an Onco physiotherapist and rehabilitation specialist from Tata Memorial who suggests oats as nutritious meal options for building strength to patients and clients alike.

From aiding better digestion, improving skin health to reducing LDL, there are plenty of known and proven benefits of oats for everyone.

You must be wondering which type is right for you? Well, here comes the part where personal tastes and preferences come into play. If you're putting a salad together, par-boiled steel cut oats would be a great addition in place of quinoa. For baking, oat flour or oat bran is a great option to fortify or use as an alternative to regular refined flour. If you're pressed for time, instant oats or Muesli is your best bet.

There are also many healthy flavoured versions available in the market. Whatever the mood, chances are there's a oat-based alternative out there for everyone. (The writer is the founder of Oatco Oats.)



## Mix it up

Want to throw a last-minute party without the hassle of arranging drinks? Here is a list of mixers that come in handy

Who doesn't like to party with friends and family but hosting one can be dreadful, let alone an impromptu party. Serving old school cola, beer and hard liquor drinks straight out of the refrigerator is 'pas de passe' now. It's time to get out of the rocks and get mixing. Nowadays, mixers are in trend and there are a plethora of options in the market to choose from. While mixing carbonated/fizzy soda is the go-to choice for many, newer options like organic mixers with natural flavours and tonic water are also gaining popularity and successfully creating a niche in the market. Be it a summertime pool party, a house warming party or an impromptu get-together of close friends and family, these mixers have been saviours of multiple parties and saved a lot of hassle for the hosts. Here is a list of mixers that come in handy:

**COOLBERG:** It's the first non-alcoholic beer that has successfully created a buzz in the market with its taste and flavourful fizz. The company offers seven different flavours of fizzy drinks that have not just created a niche as a non-alcoholic beer brand but also as a mixer for multiple delicious cocktails and mocktails entailing that will make you forget the old school drinks on the rocks. It tastes refreshing and leaves a lasting aftertaste.

**SVAMI MIXERS:** Find the perfect match for your gin with deliciously balanced tonic water from Svami. A staple mixer for all the gin lovers. From infused tonic water, zesty ginger to spiced ginger tonic water, these mixers can up your classic G&T game. They are gradually gaining popularity among industry experts and party lovers. Like the Kamasutra, Chess & Zero, Tonic Water is a proud invention from India and building on this provenance, Svami claims to use the finest botanicals and handpicked quinine to craft their tonics. So, for your next cocktail party, it can be a great choice.

**JADE FOREST:** From zero artificial ingredients in their drinks to the way they make people feel, Jade offers a bespoke range of natural mixers. The brand wants to inspire people to rethink what



they drink. Their beverages are designed to be naturally delicious with fewer calories and less sugar, which means the products have zero artificial sweeteners, flavours or colouring. They aim to offer a great tasting drink, which is loaded with the goodness of nature. The products range from flavoured tonic water to ginger ale.

**SEPOY & CO:** It is one of the only Indian mixer brands. They have successfully created a premium mixer that offers various low-sugar botanical mixes of the finest oils and flavours. They take pride in their vast range of flavours crafted with discipline and the intention, uncompromisingly to delight. Their rich in taste flavours can make any cocktail or mocktail flavour-some.

**MONIN:** It is an Internationally-acclaimed, premium French brand delivering innovative, gourmet flavour solutions built on a bedrock of more than a century of traditional artisanal beverage know-how. Having remained a family-owned company since 1912, it is now a trusted partner and a brand of choice for hospitality professionals in more than 150 countries. A dynamic market leader and a major player on the international stage of the drinks industry, they offer an unrivalled product portfolio. Their range includes syrups, fruit mixes, sauces, frappes, liqueurs and smoothies. They are available in more than 150 flavours and in 19 different formats.

## R E C I P E S

### DUCK UPPU KARI

#### WHAT YOU NEED

##### For marination:

- Duck meat cut into small cubes: 1000 gm
- Ginger and garlic paste: 1.1/2 tsp
- Turmeric powder: 1/2tsp
- Red chilli powder: 1 tsp
- Salt to taste
- Gingelly oil: 100 ml
- Dry red chilli: 2
- Garlic chopped: 20 gm
- Green chilli slit: 4
- Shallots onion slice: 250 gm
- Coriander powder: 3 tsp
- Fennel powder: 1 1/2 tsp
- Garam masala: 1/2 tsp
- Black pepper powder: 1 tsp
- Curry leaves: 10

#### METHOD

- Wash and pat dry duck cubes.
- Add salt, ginger and garlic



paste, turmeric powder, red chilli powder and mix well. Keep aside for two hours.

● Heat oil in a heavy bottomed pan, add mustard seeds and red chillies. When mustard starts spluttering, add chopped garlic and sauté until golden colour.

● Add green chilli slit and onions and sauté until onions get translucent.

● Now add marinated duck till the meat is seared and moisture evaporates.

● Stir in the dry spice powders including coriander, fennel, garam masala and red chilli.

● Add enough water and simmer covered with a lid on moderate to low heat occasionally stirring.

● When the duck is cooked

and the sauce thickens, remove the lid and add curry leaves, black pepper powder and further cook stirring to ensure it does not burn at the bottom and the reduced sauce coats the meat well. ● Adjust seasoning if need be and serve hot with veechu parata.

Courtesy: Executive chef Mir Zafar Ali at The Leela Palace, Bangalore.

### VANILLA BEAN BUNDT CAKE

#### WHAT YOU NEED

- Unsalted butter: 250 gm
- Plain flour: 250 gm
- Baking powder: 1 1/2 tsp
- Salt: 1/4 tsp
- Caster sugar: 225 gm
- Vanilla pod (split lengthways, seeds scraped out with the edge of a knife): 1
- Eggs: 4 eggs
- Edible flowers
- Whipped cream
- Fresh strawberries
- Bundt tin

#### METHOD

● Heat the oven to 180°C. Generously butter the inside of the bundt tin using a brush to get into the corners. You need to be very generous with the butter, otherwise the cake won't turn out perfectly.

● Sift the flour, baking powder and salt into a large bowl.

● In another large bowl, using an electric whisk or in the bowl of your stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream together the butter,



sugar and vanilla seeds until very pale and fluffy. Add the eggs one at a time, whisking well after each addition.

● Make sure to scrape down the sides in between. Using a metal spoon, fold in the flour mixture carefully, so as to not knock out the air that's been whisked in.

● Spoon the mixture into the greased bundt tin and then smooth the top. Then bake for 35 to 40 minutes or until

a skewer/toothpick inserted into the centre comes out clean.

● Leave the cake to cool in the tin for 15 minutes, then turn out on to a wire rack to cool completely.

● Add on edible flowers to decorate, if you'd like. Cut into slices and serve with whipped cream and fresh strawberries or any other berries you'd like.

Courtesy: Chef Tanaya Sharma.

### YAM FISH CURRY IN GOA

#### ORGANIC MASALA

##### WHAT YOU NEED

- Yam: 3 cup
- Red pepper
- Coconut milk: 5 cup
- Onion (medium): 1
- Salt to taste
- ORCO hand-ground organic fish masala
- Organic ginger powder
- Organic cinnamon powder: 1/4

#### tbsp

- Garlic: 4
- Organic Kashmiri chilli powder: 3 tbsp
- Organic paprika powder:
- Balsamic or apple cider vinegar: 1/4 cup

#### METHOD

- In a steamer or pressure cooker, cook the yam pieces for 10 to 15 minutes until tender.



Pierce the yams with a fork on all sides to allow the organic masala to be absorbed. Keep aside.

● While the yams are steaming, grind together all the organic masala ingredients into a fine paste.

● This paste can stay for three months so if you like, you can make a large batch and store in the fridge.

● In a pan on medium flame, add one cup of water, the organic

masala and the onion and stir. Cook until the water is almost gone and you are left with a thick paste.

● Add the cooked yam pieces, coconut milk and salt. Stir thoroughly to mix and boil it.

● Once boiling, lower the heat, add the red pepper slices and turn off the heat.

● Serve hot with rice or millets.

Courtesy: ORCO



