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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 lax 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 Guwahati 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 (UT), 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 serosurveyance 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 on Thursday said it would explain the rationale behind keeping strict control over class of persons who can be vaccinated against Covid-19 currently 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 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 opt 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 hospitalisations 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 southeast 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**  
Raichur: Three security personnel were martyred and two injured in a Naxal-triggered IED blast in the forests of Jharkhand's West Singhbhum district on Thursday.

**MARKETS**  
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## 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-Baluchistan 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, being more 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 in Chabahar, Jaishankar said.

## CM makes Gairsain the third Commissionerate of Utkhand

**Would cover districts of Chamoli, Rudrapur, Bageshwar & Chamoli**

PNS ■ BHARADISAIN

In what is being viewed as a political master stroke, the Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat announced that Gairsain would be made the third commissionerate of the state. The new commissionerate would have the districts of Rudrapur, Chamoli, Almora and Bageshwar. The state at present has two commissionerates, Garhwal and Kumaon. In a dramatic announcement which reminded one of the declarations of summer capital status to Gairsain last year, immediately after presenting of the budget for the year 2021-22, the CM amid thumping of tables by treasury benches said that the Congress legislative party, Karan Mahra said



state. He also announced that for the summer capital area around Gairsain appointment of town planner would soon be made.

It is pertinent to mention here that exactly a year ago, on March 4 2020, the chief minister had made an announcement for granting summer capital status to Gairsain in Chamoli district. Though the ruling BJP rejoiced at the decision to make Gairsain as third commissionerate of Uttarakhand, the opposition Congress said that the decision is a political one. The deputy leader of the Congress legislative party, Karan Mahra said

that there is no infrastructure and other facilities in Gairsain. "It would have been proper if Gairsain was accorded the status of commissionerate after development of facilities. This is a purely political decision aimed at pleasing people ahead of elections," he said.

Meanwhile, the CM said that appointment of a commissioner and Deputy Inspector General (DIG) would soon be made in Gairsain. In the budget speech, the CM said that a food processing unit would be set up in Gairsain and twenty thousand fruit trees would be planted in Bharadisaan.

## Bengaluru, Shimla most liveable cities in India



## Pune, Bhubaneswar 2nd in Ease of Living Index 2020

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 occupied 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 have been ranked at the 27 position in the 2020 edition of the East of Living Index.

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 Faridabad 40 position and Bareilly, Dhanbad, Srinagar are at the bottom at 47, 48 and 49 position respectively.

Tirupati was at the fourth position and Chandigarh fifth in 2018, but in the 2020 Ease of Living Index, Tirupati and Chandigarh have slipped to the 46th and the 29th position respectively.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's constituency Varanasi was ranked 33 position in the 2018 which has been ranked at the 27 position in the 2020 edition of the East of Living Index.

## Hurriyat chief Mirwaiz set free, all curbs lifted by admin

PNS ■ JAMMU

Chairman of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference Mirwaiz Umar Farooq has been set free by the local administration in Srinagar.

The administration lifted the restrictions imposed on his free movement days before the Centre scrapped special status of J&K under Article 370 and split the erstwhile State into two Union Territories in the first week of August 2019.

Interestingly, even after the announcement was made public and his well wishers congratulated him on the various social media platforms deployment of security forces remained visible outside his residence.



## SAD, AAI

"The same was done with the sarpanches of Issewal and Sarabha villages. The Issewal village sarpanch has been accused of seizing Shamlat land. If the charge against the sarpanch is proved, I will resign from the post of MLA," he said.

## Union Min Gadkari takes bus ride to inspect work on Dwarka Expressway in Gurgram

of the expressway is 29 km, of which 18.9 km is in Haryana, while the rest is in Delhi. Of the total length of the road, 23 km is elevated. Also a 4-km tunnel will be built. Eight-lane flyovers and six service lanes are also being constructed on this expressway. Four-level interchanges will be built on this expressway near Dwarka in Delhi, with a tunnel or underpass, grade road, elevated flyover and another flyover above that flyover. In addition, an eight-lane tunnel of 3.6 km length will be built near Dwarka for the airport. **PN**

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## ₹57,400.32 cr Budget presented for U'khand

**Focus on agriculture sector, rural development and infrastructure**

PNS ■ BHARADISAIN

With a focus on agriculture and allied activities along with infrastructure, the chief minister Triveni Singh Rawat presented a budget of Rs 57,400.32 crore for the financial year 2021-22 on Thursday in the assembly at Bharadisaan. The budget estimates about eight per cent higher than the budget of last year. Presenting the fifth budget of his government, the CM said that the effect of Covid-19 pandemic was expected on the economy of the state but the state was vigilant on the issue.

The CM said that total receipts for the year 2021-22 are estimated at Rs 57,400.32 crore, out of which Rs 44,151.24 crore are estimated under revenue receipts while Rs 12,872.98 crore are capital receipts. The tax revenue for

the year is estimated at Rs 20,195.43 crore which includes Rs 7,440.98 crore as state's share in central taxes while non tax revenue is expected at Rs 23,955.81 crore in the FY 2021-22.

The CM said that the total expenditure for the FY 2021-22 is expected to be at Rs 57,400.32 crore. It is estimated that an expense of Rs 44,036.31 crore would be made under revenue account head while Rs 13,364.01 crore would be spent on capital account head in the year 2021-22. An estimated Rs 16,422.51 crore would be spent on salaries and allowances of the state government employees. Similarly Rs 6,052.63 crore is estimated to be spent on payment of interest on loans.

One of the highlights of the budget is that it is a statement of profit with an estimated revenue surplus of Rs 114.93 crore. However a fiscal deficit



of Rs 8,984.53 Crore is estimated for the year 2021-22 which is 3.23 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the state.

Focussing on the agriculture and allied activities, a proposal of Rs 87.56 crore is made under Traditional Agriculture Development Scheme. Similarly a provision of Rs 245 Crore is made for payment of sugarcane farmers,

Rs 20 crore for Chief Minister Agriculture Development Scheme and Rs 67.94 crore for the National Agriculture Development Scheme. In the budget a provision of Rs 240 crore is made for Jamrani Dam, Rs 667.76 crore for Jal Jeevan Scheme, Rs 150 crore for Song drinking water scheme and Rs 328 crore for Peri Urban Scheme. A provision of Rs 197.61 crore is made for PM

Awaz Yojana (rural) and Rs 94.43 crore for National Rural Livelihood Mission. For creation of capital assets under Public Works Department (PWD) a provision of Rs 151.29 crore is made in the budget. For Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan a provision of Rs 1154.62 crore is made while Rs 150 crore is kept for Atal Ayushman Uttarakhand Yojana.

## Two bills tabled in the House on Thursday

PNS ■ BHARADISAIN

The Urban Development Minister Madan Kaushik tabled the Uttarakhand (Uttar Pradesh Municipal Corporation Act, 1959) (Amendment), Bill 2021 and the Uttarakhand (Uttar Pradesh Municipalities Act, 1916) Amendment Bill 2021 in the assembly on Thursday.

The Uttarakhand (Uttar Pradesh Municipal Corporation Act, 1959) (Amendment), Bill 2021 has provisions related to property tax of Municipal Corporation. The Uttarakhand (Uttar Pradesh Municipalities Act, 1916) Amendment Bill 2021 is related to property tax of Municipal Council and Nagar Panchayats.

## Uttarakhand Assembly to hold business on Saturday & Sunday

PNS ■ BHARADISAIN

In a departure of sorts, the Uttarakhand assembly has decided to conduct business on Saturday (March 6) and Sunday (March 7) this year. The house normally doesn't function on these days. The parliamentary affairs minister Madan Kaushik told the house that the business advisory committee of the house has resolved that the assembly should function for two days on March 6 and 7. The budget would be passed on March 6. The speaker tabled the resolution which was endorsed by the house.

It is expected that the budget session of the assembly which earlier was slated to function till March 10 would be adjourned on March 7.

## Area under organic farming increasing in State: Uniyal

**Bharadisaan:** The area under organic farming in Uttarakhand has witnessed an increase of 23 per cent in the last five years. The agriculture minister Subodh Uniyal informed the house on Thursday that the percentage area under organic farming in the state has increased from eight per cent to 31 per cent. In response to a question of Tehri MLA Dhan Singh Negi, the minister said that a total of 2.62 lakh hectare of land is under organic farming in the state and last year 4.05 lakh farmers had sold organic produce worth Rs 37.11 crore. On organic certification, the minister said that Adoption and certification under organic farming programme under the national agriculture development project is operational in the state. He said that 1.08 lakh farmers have been given organic certification with an area of 78,000 hectares of land. The minister added that many blocks of the state would be made organic blocks and a plan is afoot to make the entire Pithoragarh district as an organic district. **PNS**

## Interest free loan of ₹1,382.53 crore disbursed: Minister

PNS ■ BHARADISAIN

The state government has disbursed a sum of Rs 1,382.53 crore to 24,127 eligible individual beneficiaries and 1,822 self help groups (SHGs) as interest free loan in last one year. This information was provided by the cooperatives minister Dhan Singh Rawat in the house on Thursday. The cooperative banks provide an interest free loan of Rs three lakh to the individuals and Rs five lakh to the SHGs. In response to a question of Jhabreda MLA, Deshraj Karnwal, the minister informed that 39,184 Scheduled Caste (SC) and 10,813 Scheduled Tribes (ST) have received the benefit of interest free loan in the state. He said that the government has targeted to disburse Rs five crore to SC and Rs two crore for ST under the scheme of interest free loan.

## All students upto Class V to be promoted without examinations

PNS ■ BHARADISAIN

The school education department of Uttarakhand has decided to promote all students of government schools of class I to V to higher classes in the state and they would be provided grading on the basis of a work sheet prepared by them during the period when the schools were closed.

This was necessitated as the schools of the state were closed in March last year in view of the pandemic of Covid-19. The education minister Arvind Pandey informed the house that the students of classes VI, VII, VIII, IX and XI would be promoted on the basis of online

or offline examination depending on the situation.

In response to a question by the Jhabreda MLA, Deshraj Karnwal, the education minister said that during the period of pandemic when the schools were closed, the students were provided Food Security Allowance (FSA) in lieu of Mid Day Meal (MDM) scheme.

This allowance was transferred to the bank accounts of the students under Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) scheme. The minister stated that the cooking cost of Rs 4.48 per student in March 2020 and Rs 4.97 from April 2020 was transferred to the accounts of students.

## No shortage of urea in U'khand: Rawat

PNS ■ BHARADISAIN

The state minister cooperatives Dhan Singh Rawat assured the house on Thursday that there is no shortage of the urea in the state. Responding to a question of the Congress MLA from Manglaur, Qazi Nizamuddin in which he had said that rationing of the urea suggests that there is a shortage of urea in the state, the minister said that 1276041 Metric Tonne (MT) of urea was provided by the government to the farmers in the year 2020-21.

He said that the Urea is being provided in all the centres after biometric authentication and the subsidy in the Urea is transferred in the accounts of farmers via Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).

## Pandemic blow on economy of U'khand

### Economic survey shows dip in tax collection, export in year 2021-22

PNS ■ BHARADISAIN

The negative effect of the pandemic of Covid-19 on the economic health of Uttarakhand is visible in the economic survey 2020-21 tabled in Uttarakhand Vidhan Sabha on Thursday. The state is expected to witness a decline in total tax collection as the survey points out a 19 per cent

decrease in tax collection in the year 2020-21 (April to December 20) as compared to the year 2019-20. The industrial output, investment, industrial employment and export have suffered a decline. The report indicates that tax collection in the year 2018-19 was Rs 9,282 crore and it dipped to Rs 7,488 crore (till December 31, 2020). The non GST collection in the year 2018-19 was Rs 1,297.47 crore (till December 31, 2019) saw a six per cent decline as Rs 1,216.13 crore were received in form of non GST (till December 31, 2020).

The revenue generated through petrol and diesel also saw a decline of 6.65 per cent in this year as its consumption decreased by 42 per cent.

The industrial sector also suffered a setback during the pandemic. The survey pointed out that the investment in industry in the 2018-19 which was Rs 1,536 crore increased to

Rs 1,731 crore in the 2019-20. However only Rs 635 crore were invested in the industrial sector in the financial year 2020-21 till January this year in the state. The industrial employment generation which was 20,894 in 2018-19 and 28,700 in 2019-20, decreased to 15,846 this year.

The total export which was Rs 16,971 crore in 2019-20 in the state reduced to Rs 8,624 crore in this year.

On the other hand, the sale of liquor witnessed an increase of 3.07 per cent during the pandemic.

Under the head of stamp and registration the state got Rs 710 crore (from April 1, 2020 till December 2020) which saw a decrease 13.65 per cent as compared to the amount of Rs 1071 crore realized in the corresponding period of last financial year.

The survey clearly shows that the economic growth rate

of the state has declined from 5.77 per cent in the year 2018-19 to 4.30 per cent in the year 2019-20.

On a positive side the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the state witnessed an increase of 4.30 per cent in the year 2019-20 as compared to the previous year. The year 2019-20, the GDP of the state is pegged at Rs 19,9718 crore.

Similarly, the per capita income in 2018-19 was Rs 1.91 lakh and is estimated to be Rs 2.02 lakh for the year 2019-20.

The total revenue receipts estimated for 2020-21 are Rs 42,439 crore, which is 19.53 per cent more than Rs 35,502 crore realized in the year 2019-20.

The state has a fiscal deficit of 2.63 per cent of GDP in the year 2019-20 while it was 3.09 per cent of GDP in the year 2018-19.

## Cabinet approves formation of sub-committee

PNS ■ BHARADISAIN

The Uttarakhand cabinet in its meeting on Thursday has endorsed creation of a sub-committee for pension to the employees recruited before October 1, 2005. The two member committee would be headed by cabinet minister Subodh Uniyal with minister Madan Kaushik as member.

The cabinet approved the creation of a post of member (legal) in Uttarakhand Revenue Board on grade pay of Rs 8,700. This post would be of ex cadre category.

## Case lodged against officials in 400 bigha land irregularities

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The police have registered a case against the then secretary of Doon Valley Special Area Development Authority (SADA), officials of the forest and horticulture department along with land mafia elements in the Vikasnagar Kotwali for illegal cutting of fruit trees and unauthorized plotting on about 400 bigha land in areas including Herbertpur, Jivangarh and Dhakrani.

According to the Dehradun police, in a public interest litigation filed by Anuj Kansal the Uttarakhand high court had ordered probe by a special investigation team (SIT) and registering of a case into use of

agricultural land/orchards for residential purposes and approval allegedly granted to axing of fruit trees in Herbertpur, Vikasnagar and Dhakrani areas under the purview of SADA. Earlier the probe was being conducted by the SIT headed by the Garhwal inspector general. Later, the police headquarters directed the Kumaon inspector general Ajay Rautela and Dehradun senior superintendent of police Yogendra Singh Rawat to conduct the probe. Detailed investigation by the SIT revealed that land owners/colonisers had neither sought permission from the government nor mutated the land use before illegally chopping trees and plotting on

about 400 bigha land in Herbertpur, Jivangarh and Dhakrani areas. Plots were also sold to various persons and in many cases, trees were not shown in the sale deeds for plots with trees. Further, between 2007 and 2014 the then SADA secretary, Kalsi divisional forest officer, district horticulture officer and other subordinate departmental officers concerned did not take any action against the land owners and colonisers. The officials did not fulfil their responsibility as public servants, stated the police. Based on the report of the SIT, the police have lodged a case against various persons involved under various sections.



Artists perform a folk dance outside the Assembly building in Bharadisaan during celebration of one year marking the announcement of Garisain as the State's summer capital on Thursday

## Challenges galore for those susceptible to substance abuse

POOJA NEGI ■ DEHRADUN

At a time when the problem of substance abuse has assumed alarming proportions in Uttarakhand, the youths and other people susceptible to this problem continue to face various challenges. Those who are involved with the rehabilitation of the substance abusers state that environmental factors, easy availability and peer pressure are the major factors fueling this problem.

A 22-year old MBA student who wants to remain anonymous said that youths face pressure to be adventurous and do something thrilling when they enter college life. "In college if the group you are in consumes drugs, you might end up at least trying it and if you like it, you might end up becoming addicted to it without realising it. Dehradun is an education hub and students from different cities come here to have quality education. Drugs are easily available which makes it easier to have drugs. I have seen my teenagers get-



ting addicted, which ultimately affects their mental and physical health," he said. A 20-year-old from Kotdwar who has been clean for over a year now states that the popularity of drugs lured her to consume drugs when in high school. She said, "During school life, at least you are supervised by your parents which prevents most young-

sters from becoming regular addicts. However, once you get out of your home you experience the freedom to do different things and those who were just occasional consumers of alcohol and drugs tend to become addicts. When I realised that the drugs are damaging my body severely I stopped consuming."

Nijaat Rehabilitation month rehabilitation process in which we try to involve them in music, games, prayers and other activities to divert them from drugs. We go to health camps and schools to spread awareness. It is vital to inform the people that if someday they are tempted to abuse drugs they should know the consequences they'll face later," he said.

## District administration to resume Padho Doon Badho Doon campaign

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Dehradun district administration will soon resume the Padho Doon Badho Doon campaign after resuming the final report of the third-party audit of the campaign in which over 30,000 illiterate persons were educated by the administration within about five months. The chief development officer (CDO), Nitika Khandelwal stated that the audit started over a month ago to determine the literacy level of citizens of the district who were educated under the campaign. She said that the primary teachers had taught the illiterate persons under the campaign for five months while secondary school teachers are currently conducting the audit under District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) of Dehradun and a non-profit organisation Room to Read. According to the CDO, this

audit will help the administration to understand the effect of the campaign and help strategise further for it. "The teachers were selected randomly by us for fair conduct of the audit. We are expecting the audit report by next week. We want to know the level of basic education of locals, how many can properly read, write and recite their answers considering which, the teachers took oral as well as written tests of the students," stated Khandelwal. She further added that once the administration gets the audit report, the Padho Doon Badho Doon campaign will be resumed in the district. It is pertinent to mention here that the district administration announced Dehradun as the first district in Uttarakhand that educated all the illiterate people of the district except 5,054 locals who could not receive an education due to certain reasons.

## Uttarakhand Virtual Bazaar to organise Women Motor Rally

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Uttarakhand Virtual Bazaar will organise a motor rally for women on the occasion of International Women's Day this Sunday. This rally is being organised by the admins of this virtual group Richa Karnwal and Jyoti Dvok. The group was founded last year during the lockdown and has over 16,000 active members. According to Karnwal, it would be a 22 kilometres motor rally that would start from Mahindra Ground in Garhi cantonment and end at a resort in Sahasradhara. All the participants will have to go through five points where they will be given some tokens which they will have to submit at the finishing point. It is being done to ensure that participants do not take any short cuts to

reach the finishing point, said Karnwal. She said that this rally is being done to break the stereotype that women cannot drive and provide them a day filled with fun activities. Moreover, Pooja Dwivedi who is involved in the Indira Amma Canteen and is also a member of this virtual group, stated that the participants will also get Pahadi dishes made by women of the Indira Amma Canteen after the rally.



## 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 tenure of Justice (Retd.) Ranjana Desai, delimitation commission for 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 the status of a state at an appropriate time. The home minister was replying to the discussion on the Jammu



Jammu & 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 in the Supreme Court and the matter could not be decided.

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 87, including four seats from Ladakh, which is now a separate Union Territory without a legislature. The strength of the re-aligned Jammu and Kashmir Assembly is 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. IIT Bombay, IIT Delhi, IIT Madras, IIT Kharagpur, IIS 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 50th in the world. Petroleum Engineering, IIT Bombay has been ranked 41st and IIT Kharagpur has been ranked 44th in the world for Minerals and Mining Engineering, and University of Delhi has been ranked 50th in the world for Development 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 innovation, development and reform in 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 achievement 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, NAAC, Dr Virendra K Chaudhary, Chairman, AICTE, Dr Anil D Sahasrabudhe; Vice President, QS Rankings, Ben Sower, Head of Evaluation, QS Rankings, and Leigh Marston, 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 thrown 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 long (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 / elevated pass, at-grade road, elevated flyover and flyover above flyover.

It will also comprise 8-lane 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 of over three lakh Passenger Car Units (PCUs), which is much beyond design capacity of the road. 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—'Ungliyon pe nachana', 'Bhogeji billi banana' and 'Khisaiyan billi khamba noche'—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 Central 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' with 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 shooting in Pune and are understood to have been questioned by the 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" be it that of Coronavirus vaccine.

Election Commission's poll date 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 for announcing the eight-phased poll in West Bengal. He said casual criticism

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 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

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".

He said Congress leader should at least answer question 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. "Is it Panth Nirpex?", he quizzed, hoping Rahul would heed the advice of his party leaders.

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Flagging the fast-changing border fighting doctrines all over the world, 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 challenge to 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 invest in 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 must 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 for conventional wars or limited conflicts already exists, but they need 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 Rupnagar 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 Rupnagar 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 Mehta, 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 14 and 15 cases are at final stages.

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



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With the post of CBI Director lying 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.

In its petition, the NGO 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 Singh 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 late CBI director and limit the extent of executive discretion in the functional autonomy of the CBI director and the CBI director has to exercise the power of executive discretion in the matter of appointment of this key functionary," the plea underscored.

The appointment of CBI Director was 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 Ashwini 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.

## 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 State Institute 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 (aspirational) 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 of the stable of IHBT) involving the farming com-

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

The SHG called Green Valley Kissan Sabha Parvati has been formed and linked to Himachal Gramin Bank, Parvathod, 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 crop 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 crop as it is not a food crop and 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.



# Didi may fight from Suwendu stronghold

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is almost certain to contest from only one seat—Nandigram. Sources 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 BJP Minister and BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari and his father Sisir Adhikari, a veteran MP, Nandigram has a Muslim vote share of about 23.5 per cent.

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

Assembly segment in the 2019 general elections.

Suwendu, a former pointsman of the "real Bengal tigeress", senior Sena leader and Rajya Sabha Member, Sanjay Raut, on Thursday said his party 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 Muslims.

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 tigeress", senior Sena leader and Rajya Sabha Member, Sanjay Raut, on Thursday said his party would ensure that she was defeated by at least half-a-lakh votes.

"We wish Mamata Didi a 'roaring' success," he said. 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 Adhikari family. Mamata Banerjee has carried forward but there will be no more bloodshed 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 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 statue of Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyaasagar was vandalised by alleged BJP men. The saffron workers from Shah's rally had allegedly raided the Vida Sagar College and destroyed the statue following 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 in the aftermath of the violence during the road show of Home Minister Amit Shah in Kolkata when a half-bust statue of Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyaasagar was vandalised by alleged BJP men. The saffron workers from Shah's rally had allegedly raided the Vida Sagar College and destroyed the statue following a skirmish with TMC workers."

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

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

An Army jawan was found in a suspected case of suicide, officials said.

Rifleman Anup Kumar (28), who was posted on sentry duty at the Badami bagh 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 Harayana Bhuvan, 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 Army officer of the rank of a lieutenant colonel committed suicide at an Army depot in the Khonoh 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.

Deputy Commissioner Kumar Abhishek told PTI that five people, who include 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 Lungkawh 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 Lachhmalia will issue a statement on the matter in the assembly on Monday, an 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 food 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 its member.

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 Dheeraj Pandit joined TMC during the day at Trinamool Bhavan.

Aditi said only TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee thinks or works so much for people in the performing arts

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

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

"If BJP comes to power (in West Bengal) it will decide what you will eat," she said. The actor said that she had joined 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) officials and lodged a complaint against TMC MLA Hamidul Rehman over his remark at a public meeting made on March 2. The BJP leaders also appealed the EC to remove administrators of local bodies appointed by the TMC BJP leaders alleged that TMC MLA Hamidul

Rehman has threatened voters. While addressing a public meeting in Murshidabad, Rehman asked people to vote for TMC 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 left-Congress alliance 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 Banerjee, we will meet them and the game will be played by us," added Rahman. He said that BJP is a party of liars and the left-Congress alliance 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.

# 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 Nations 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, one of the oldest militant groups 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 the revenue deficit at 65,994 crores despite being a revenue surplus state a few years ago. 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 states fortunes nose diving, the political parties are on a freebie culture with one party overtaking the other in promising the people with gifts and other freebies. DMK commenced the

freebie culture in 1967 with the then Chief Minister and the towering leader of Dravidian Movement, C.N. Annadurai promising 3 measures of rice for Rupees 1. This had a huge impact and DMK romped home for the first time in Tamil Nadu unseating the Congress government led by Bhakthavatsalam. In 2006 DMK supremo, Muthuvelu Karunanidhi announced a highly populist 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. The spokesman of the DMK, Saravanan Annadurai while speaking to IANS said: "These are not freebies but populist schemes and in 2006 when we provided the gas stoves and subsidised gas cylinders it was

a revolutionary decision to provide women solace from spending long hours in kitchen cooking. The then Union Minister Narendra Modi has replicated the same move after so many years." There are divided opinions on the Government's doling out such schemes to the people. Senior Journalist PK Sreenivasan while speaking to IANS said: "These are populist schemes and not freebies as 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 come down. In a similar vein the fixed deposit schemes for the girl child by the TN governments had increased the literacy indicators for the State."

# 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 on the basis of the latest report 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 the 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 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.

He has been reported that it can prevent the viral infection with very severe symptoms and effectively check Coronavirus related deaths. As per ICMR, Covaxin also has the ability to neutralize the UK variant strain of SARS-CoV-2.

Therefore, based on these 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 after 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, dropped by 30 per cent in a month," Vijayan said, quoting figures.

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 stocks 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



MOHIT 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 Raut, Corps commander of the Srinagar based Chinar 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 rich talent. Lt-Gen BS Raut said, explaining the idea behind launching the radio services.

# 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 within days after her marriage with another person was allegedly strangled to death by her father in Dausa district, police said on Thursday.

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

He said Saini 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.

# Agriculture census to be conducted in Gujarat this year

PTI ■ GANDHINAGAR

An agriculture census will be conducted in Gujarat this year as part of a pan-India exercise to collect various data related to the key sector, Agriculture Minister K C 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 1950-51 and in the country 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 actually 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 members 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."

# 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 Kakinada 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 nor receive compensation and carried out an agitation for many years. Based on the recommendations made by a six-member committee headed by Agriculture Minister K. 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 industrialise.

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 Uthukottapalli 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, Vishveshwara 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 Bhadravati 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 him by filing false complaints against them.

Sangamesh protesting by removing his shirt was similar to the 2019 protest in which Goolhati Shekhar a minister in Yediyurappa'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 Bhadravati, for a week.

Karnataka leader of the opposition Siddaramiah, described the 'One Nation, One Election' push as being part of the agenda of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak 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 - one nation one election - in front of the speaker.

The moment, Sangamesh removed his shirt, KPCCC president and Congress MLA IN Ganu, 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

All 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 to the UN a day after he gave an impassioned speech to the UN General Assembly 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

## Political gambit?

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

In 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 Anna 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 TV Thirukaran.



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

At 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.

The *Dictionary of Islam* by 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 *khol*, 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 Dabi 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

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

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 is focusing 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 transits 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 *iddah* 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 dishonest. Rosy 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.)

## 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 has 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 'Mau culpa' (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 casted 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



I 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

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.

Bal Govind | Noida

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.

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 as 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)

## SOUND BITE

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.

Indian 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 wide 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 *gancha* 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 tools 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, as 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 public 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 SPONGED 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 multi-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 shuffling 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 spans of time as 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  
UDDHAV 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 adapted by music educators in line with music industry practices.

The year 2020 presented many 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, Vishakhapatnam 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 training

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 standalone 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 the Myanmar crisis, 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 Sun Kyi's rise to power after 2015 elections, the international community responded by lifting most sanctions and pouring investing into the country.

AP

## 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 threatened 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 Htaik Htaik Aung, who noted that there's "hundreds" of videos of uniformed soldiers and police on the app. A spokesman for the army 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."

AFP

## 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.

Bachelet 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."

The UN rights office said it

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 the UN figures the office has been able to verify," it stressed.

The killings have escalated sharply in recent days.

The rights office 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, Sagay, Magway and Mon.

Another 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 during protests."

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

AFP

## 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 4chan, 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 commemoration 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 the man ahead of his first scheduled court appearance on Friday.

"Any threat made to 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.

AP

## House passes sweeping voting rights bill over GOP Opposition

AP ■ WASHINGTON

House Democrats passed a sweeping voting rights bill 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 causes.

The bill is a powerful counterweight to voting rights restrictions advancing in the Republican-controlled statehouses 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 in the House floor Tuesday.

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

## 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 1.15 am. He was undergoing treatment at the Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka, Awami League Office Secretary Biplab 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.

PTI

## 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, 39, 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.

PTI

## 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 reunited 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 reports.

Anxious and angry parents who 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 area'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.

AP

**Office of the Superintending Engineer**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Circle, P.W.D., Tallital Nainital -263002**  
Phone/ Fax:- 05942-235728/ 232030 E-mail: sepdwnit@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 Governor of Uttarakhand, Superintending Engineer, 2<sup>nd</sup> Circle, P.W.D., Nainital (Uttarakhand) invites Expression of Interest (EOI) for the preparation of Feasibility study 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, etc. The consultants shall acquire Land and building and Preliminary Project report including estimated cost and general arrangement drawing of traffic (NH-87) and Pilihothi — Mukhani Chauraha — Kallu Sidi Mandir (SH-41).

The EOI shall include adequate information including their organization details, Relevant Experience of consultancy work executed under M.D.Bike 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/firm(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/firm(s) without assigning any reasons whatsoever.

GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA TENDER NOTICE					
SR. NO.	NAME OF DEPARTMENT	NAME OF WORK NOTICE TENDER	OPENING DATE CLOSING DATE	AMOUNT / ESTD (APPROX.) IN RUPEES	WEBSITE OF THE DEPARTMENT
1	PWD BAR, FATEHABAD	CONSTRUCTION OF ADDITIONAL ALTERNATION OF ICHUJHIN IN EXISTING CIVIL HOSPITAL AT FATEHABAD	03.03.2021 24.03.2021	24.71 LACS	https://tenders.hry.nic.in
2	PWD BAR, PANICHERA	TENDER FOR THE WORK OF CONSTRUCTION OF PROPOSED MATERIAL AND CHILD HOSPITAL, AND SERVICE BLOCK IN THE CAMPUS OF CIVIL HOSPITAL IN SECTION-6, PANICHERA	04.03.2021 24.03.2021	3680.49 LACS	https://tenders.hry.nic.in
3	PWD BAR, BEHARI	1. DINT FOR ICHUJHIN OF ADDITIONAL BLOCK IN CIVIL HOSPITAL AT BEHARI 2. BEHARI DISTT. 3. OTHER WORKS	04.03.2021 25.03.2021	56.09 LACS	https://tenders.hry.nic.in
4	BRIGADATION & WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT HARYANA, CHANDNI CAGRE	SUPPLY ERECTION & COMMISSIONING OF 3 NO. 100 CV. & 4 NO. 5 CV. FLOOD U.P. PUMPS WITH 15 FEET LIFT ALONG WITH THE 50HP & 30HP MOTORS & 50HP & 30HP AT 575/575/575	CLOSING DATE 24.03.2021	69.74 LACS	https://tenders.hry.nic.in
5	RESOURCES DEPARTMENT HARYANA, CHANDNI CAGRE	PROVIDING HELPER CHOWDHAR SWEETEN CUM OIL ELECT. TURNER WELDER DATA ENTRY OFF. CUM CLERK.	CLOSING DATE 18.03.2021	8PD 5 LACS	https://tenders.hry.nic.in
6	BRIGADATION & WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT HARYANA, CHANDNI CAGRE	CONSTRUCTION OF PUMP HOUSE ALONGWITH GEO SYNTHETIC MAT AT RD 10574 OF PNHAN DRAIN X-RING KANHAUR DISTT. AT RD 141025-2	CLOSING DATE 17.03.2021	12.36 LACS	https://tenders.hry.nic.in
7	DIRECTOR GENERAL, SUPPLIES & DISPOSALS, HARYANA	HIRING OF SUITABLE OFFICE ACCOMMODATION MEASURING AROUND (COMMERCIAL) 00000G, FT 2020 CARPET AREA REQUIRED BY THIS OFFICE	04.03.2021 19.03.2021	—	https://tenders.hry.nic.in, dhyanaryana.gov.in
8	DISTRICT FOOD & SUPPLIES CONTROLLER, SERAVAL	TRANSPORTATION AND LABOUR & CARTAGE WORK	09.03.2021 14.03.2021	—	https://tenders.hry.nic.in
9	CEO, ZILA PANCHSATH KURUSHETRA	WALL PAINTINGS IN 419 VILLAGES (5 NO. WALL PAINTING IN EACH VILLAGE) OF DISTRICT KURUSHETRA HAVING SIZE OF EACH 10' X 10' METER	04.03.2021 10.03.2021	84 LACS	https://tenders.hry.nic.in
10	FOOD CIVIL SUPPLIES AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS CONTROLLER, SOHAL, PRINCIPAL GOVT.	LABOUR AND CARTAGE TRANSPORTATION	09.03.2021 14.03.2021	15 ORORE	https://tenders.hry.nic.in
11	LT J. MEHRAUL, GURUGRAM	SUPPLY OF TOOLS, EQUIPMENTS & MACHINERY AT GOVT. LT. GURUGRAM	03.03.2021 15.03.2021	15.97 LACS	https://tenders.hry.nic.in

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

**GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR**

**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER MECHANICAL HOSPITAL AND CENTRAL HEATING DIVISION SRINAGAR**  
Telefax :- 0194-2496089, Email Id: xennmhchdk@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, Hazratnab, Srinagar.

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

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

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

**Position: AA&A funds :-** AA-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.jktenders.gov.in](http://www.jktenders.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 form 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-14404/20 Dated:- 04.03.2021







# 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 Indian 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 handicrafts sector to the tune of ₹8,000-10,000 crore post pandemic.

According to 'The Unlock

Editor's 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 their ability to avail financing and credit from the formal financial sector. 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 amply 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 to 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 to 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 of 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.

Sunil 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."

Laspreet 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, Ases Kaur, Bhoomi Trivedi, Akkuri Kakar, Payal Dev, Neha Bhasin, Shilpa Rao are the 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 they should all invest in, rather than just celebrate one day in the entire year as 'Women's Day'.

Addressing fellow team captains like Akkuri, Neha,



Bhumi and Payal, Mumbai Warriors captain Shilpa Rao said, "I feel yeh female singer ka tag hat 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 gender."

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

Disney's most-awarded 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 (Frodo 2), Mulan, etc. Along with her, the Crazy Rich Asian-fame Awkwafina does 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 'Tail 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 Talon 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*



and Indonesia, as well as weapons modelled from Kali and Arnis martial arts found in the Philippines. Her distinctive sword was inspired by the keris, a blade 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 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



fiber 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 Oatoo 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 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:



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 flavour 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.

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 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 Kamusutra, 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

## 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: 1/2 tsp
  - 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 vechu 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





Windsor skipper Kieron Pollard reacts after he hits Akila Dananjaya for six sixes in an over

## Pollard hits 6 sixes in an over

AFP ■ COOLIDGE

West Indies captain Kieron Pollard on Wednesday became only the third man to hit six sixes in an International over in his team's four-wicket T20 victory over Sri Lanka. The feat came in the sixth over of a bizarre West Indies innings, bowled by off-spinner Akila Dananjaya, who moments earlier in his previous over had been celebrating taking a hat-trick.

Pollard followed in the footsteps of South Africa's Herschelle Gibbs against the Netherlands in the 2007 World

Cup and India's Yuvraj Singh, who also achieved the feat in the 2007 T20 World Cup against England.

Pollard was eventually out for 38 off 11 balls as the West Indies chased 132 to win at the Coolidge Cricket Ground, reaching their target in the 14th over when Jason Holder clobbered his side's 13th six. "I felt I could hit six sixes after the third one," said 35-year-old Pollard.

"Once I had five sixes I knew I had the bowler on the back foot. He was going around the wicket and it was difficult for him. I just told myself 'Go for it'."

Sri Lanka skipper Angelo Mathews hailed his opposite number. "Pollard as we know is very destructive," Mathews told the post-match presentation.

"What I told Akila was to go for his wicket even if he gets hit for six sixes. If he misused one we could have got him out. Unfortunately it didn't happen."

Only eight men have hit six sixes in an over in all forms of cricket with fellow West Indian Garfield Sobers the first to do so in an English county game in 1968.

# Axar, Ashwin undo Poms batting graft

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

England's batsmen lost the battle of both mind and skills in yet another shoddy performance to surrender the momentum to India with Axar Patel and Ravichandran Ashwin calling the shots on the opening day of the fourth and final Test here on Thursday.

After five innings, England crossed the 300-run mark but a total of 205 in 75.5 overs was certainly not what Joe Root had expected when he called it right at the toss on a day which would have ideally been best for batting.

There was turn and bounce but the pitch was far from being a minefield that some of the England batsmen save Ben Stokes (55, 121 balls) made it out to be.

For India, spinners Axar Patel (26-7-68-4), Ravichandran Ashwin (19-5-47-3) and Washington Sundar (7-1-14-1) toyed with the already muddled up minds, clueless on how to deal with the conditions.

Mohammed Siraj (14-2-45-2) played his part to perfection with the semi-new and old ball, hurrying the batsmen with sheer pace as he did with Jonny Bairstow.

India ended the day at 24 for 1 with wily old James Anderson (5-5-0-1) accounting for an out-of-form Shubman Gill (0). Rohit Sharma (8 batting, 34 balls) and Cheteshwar Pujara (15 batting, 36 balls) were holding fort for the home side.

A cursory look at the England line-up, loaded with an extra batsman, will reveal that four — Stokes, Bairstow (28, 67 balls), Dan Lawrence (46 off 74 balls) and Ollie Pope (29 off 87 balls) got starts but failed miserably on the conversion part.

The others came in and went without breaking a bead of sweat. It was as if already in their minds, they were playing on a track they thought would turn square.

Stokes was a cut above the rest both in defence and offence before a moment's indecision cost him his wicket.

Washington angled one in



Axar Patel celebrates with his Indian teammates after he takes wicket of England batsman on Day 1 of 4th Test

4th Test, Day 2  
Live from 3:30pm IST  
STAR SPORTS 1 NETWORK

and Stokes was on backfoot after initially trying to come forward preempting an off-break. The ball didn't turn and hit the back leg with clear indication of crashing into the leg stump.

Stokes' dismissal, after a good show, upset the team's rhythm just when it was looking to redeem itself after a poor first session.

Similarly for Lawrence, who was ready to play the attacking game, and Pope, intent on using his footwork to defend while negating the turn. There was always going to be a delivery with their name written all over it.

In case of Lawrence, he was beaten by the away turn when he danced down the track only to be stumped.

In case of Pope, the strategy that kept him on course brought about his downfall. And then I thought during the day when Ashwin changed the line of his delivery, dropping it a bit short and the attempted flick went between his legs and Gill had a reflex catch at forward short leg.

Patel, whose straight deliv-

eries have scarred the English batsmen, was again menacing in the first session with Siraj giving him good support.

Stokes and Bairstow, during their 48-run stand, showed that if one can trust their defences, batting wasn't impos-

sible. Both played the spinners close to their body on most occasions and especially on the front-foot.

But on a track like this, no batsman would feel completely set and that's what happened with both Bairstow and Stokes.

## Siraj enjoyed Root's dismissal

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Perfect execution brings with it an inherent satisfaction which India speedster Mohammed Siraj felt after dismissing England captain Joe Root on the opening day of the fourth Test on Thursday.

Root was trapped before the wicket by Siraj, who bowled a beautiful inswinger which would have hit the middle and leg stump.

"I wanted to set Root up bowling away going deliveries. And then I thought during the start of a new over, I should bring one back in. I could execute it as I had planned and it gave me great satisfaction. *Mazaa* a gaya (It was fun)," Siraj said about dismissal.



Both played the spinners close to their body on most occasions and especially on the front-foot.

Similarly, he had done his homework on Jonny Bairstow's apparent weakness against in-coming deliveries. The in-cutter that got Bairstow was bowled at more than 146 kmph.

"Bairstow, I wasn't bowling him at a lot of pace at the start... But whatever footages

## Archer out due to elbow injury

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

England pacer Jofra Archer was not considered for the fourth Test due to a persisting elbow injury of the some of the squad members including Ben Stokes also have an upset stomach, the ECB said on Thursday.

Archer had missed the second Test in Chennai due to the same issue.

"Jofra Archer is not playing in this Test match due to his ongoing right elbow issue. The ECB medical team will provide an update in due course," read an update from the England cricket board.

"Ben Stokes has had an upset stomach, the same issue that has affected other members the touring party. It is not expected to keep him off the field," it said.

Archer returned to play the third Test in which he picked up a wicket.

I have seen of him, he gets out in in-swinging deliveries. So I wanted to bowl in one area and bring it back consistently and it worked," he said.

His skipper Virat Kohli on the day mostly used him in short bursts and the plan was to hit one area consistently in order to create pressure.

"Since the time of Ranji Trophy, we learnt one thing that we should have to bowl good areas and especially one area without trying too many things. It's all about being patient."

"Virat Kohli just told me to bowl one area and try build the pressure. Ishant Bhai also said that don't try too many things because when you build pressure, then automatically you get wickets."

## CANCELLATION / PARTIAL CANCELLATION / DIVERSION / RESCHEDULING & REGULATION OF TRAINS DUE TO NON-INTERLOCKING WORK

In order to upgrade the infrastructure, Railways will undertake the Pre-Non-interlocking and Non-interlocking work in Ajmer yard in connection with patch doubling work between Ajmer - Bondamunda stations on Madar Jn. - Marwar Jn. section of Ajmer Division. To execute this work suitable traffic blocks of different durations will be taken from 19.03.2021 to 23.03.2021. During this period following trains will temporarily be affected as under :-

CANCELLATION OF TRAINS		
Train No. & Train Name		Date(s) of Cancellation (from originating station)
02065/02066 Ajmer Jn. - Delhi Sarai Rohilla - Ajmer Jn. Jan Shatabdi Special Train		19 & 20.03.2021
09611 Ajmer Jn. - Amritsar Jn. Festival Special Train		18.03.2021
09614 Amritsar Jn. - Ajmer Jn. Festival Special Train		19.03.2021

PARTIAL CANCELLATION OF TRAINS		
Train No. & Train Name	Partially Cancelled Between Stations	Date (s) (from originating station)
02421 Ajmer Jn. - Jammu Tawi Superfast Special Train	Ajmer Jn. - Jaipur	15.03.2021 to 20.03.2021
02422 Jammu Tawi - Ajmer Jn. Superfast Special Train	Jaipur - Ajmer Jn.	14.03.2021 to 19.03.2021

DIVERSION OF TRAINS		
Train No. & Train Name	Diverted via	Date (s) (from originating station)
04312 Bhuj - Bareilly Jn. Special Train	Marwar Jn.-Jodhpur-Merta Road Jn.-Phulera Jn.	19.03.2021
04321 Bareilly Jn. - Bhuj Special Train	Phulera Jn.-Merta Road Jn.-Jodhpur-Marwar Jn.	19.03.2021
05013 Jaisalmer - Kathgodam Ranikhet Express Special Train	Jodhpur-Merta Road Jn.-Phulera Jn.	19.03.2021 & 20.03.21
05014 Kathgodam - Jaisalmer Ranikhet Express Special Train	Phulera Jn.-Merta Road Jn.-Jodhpur	18.03.2021 & 19.03.21
09264 Delhi Sarai Rohilla - Porbandar Special Train	Phulera Jn.-Merta Road Jn.-Jodhpur-Marwar Jn.	18.03.2021
09269 Porbandar - Muzaffarpur Jn. Special Train	Marwar Jn.-Jodhpur-Merta Road Jn.-Phulera Jn.	18.03.2021 & 19.03.2021
09565 Okha - Dehradun Uttaranchal Express Train	Marwar Jn.-Jodhpur-Merta Road Jn.-Phulera Jn.	19.03.2021
09566 Dehradun - Okha Uttaranchal Express Train	Phulera Jn.-Merta Road Jn.-Jodhpur-Marwar Jn.	21.03.2021
09601 Udaipur City - New Jalpaiguri Special Train	Adarsh Nagar-Madar Jn. By pass	20.03.2021
09602 New Jalpaiguri - Udaipur City Special Train	Madar Jn.-Adarsh Nagar By pass	22.03.2021
02993 Delhi Sarai Rohilla - Udaipur City Special Train	Madar Jn.-Adarsh Nagar By pass	18.03.2021 & 19.03.2021
02994 Udaipur City - Delhi Sarai Rohilla Special Train	Adarsh Nagar-Madar Jn. By pass	19.03.2021 & 20.03.2021

## REGULATION/RESCHEDULING OF TRAINS

Train No. 09610 Yog Nagan Rishikesh - Udaipur City Special will be regulated from 2 Hours 38 minutes on 09.03.2021 at Madar Jn.

Train No. 09612 Amritsar Jn. - Ajmer Jn. Special will be regulated from 2 Hours 13 minutes on 09.03.2021 & 1 Hour 13 minutes on 11.03.2021 at Madar Jn.

Train No. 02315 Ajmer Jn. - Amritsar Jn. Special will be regulated from 40 minutes on 18.03.2021 at Madar Jn.

Note: All notices of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., may be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

For any kind of Information such as detailed Time-Table and Stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website <http://www.enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

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## Sumit Nagal stuns world No 22 Garin

PTI ■ BUENOS AIRES

India's Sumit Nagal registered the biggest win of his career by stunning second seed Cristian Garin of Chile in straight sets to enter the quarterfinals of the Argentina ATP 250 tournament here.

Nagal, ranked 150, produced high-class tennis on Wednesday night to register an impressive 6-4, 6-3 second round win over his Chilean rival, who is ranked way above at the 22nd spot in the ATP chart.

Nagal will play Spain's Albert Ramos-Vinolas, in what will be the Indian's maiden quarterfinal appearance at the ATP Tour level.

Ramos-Vinolas had defeated

Domnik Koepfer of Germany 7-5, 6-4.

SANIA OUSTED

Sania Mirza's first tournament in more than a year ended with a semifinal defeat as she was ousted from the Qatar Total Open along with her partner Andreja Klepac, here on Thursday.

Sania and her Slovenian partner lost 5-7, 6-2, 5-10 to

America's Nicole Melichar and Dutch player Demi Schuurs in one hour and 28 minutes.

Playing against players, who are ranked 11 and 12 in the world was tough but it was a decent outing for Sania, who recovered from Covid-19 recently, and her partner.

Sania and Klepac split \$100,000 and earned 185 ranking points each. Since Sania was not defending much points, it will help her improve her ranking.

Sania will break back into top-200 and is expected to climb to the 177th spot from the current 254.

## SA appoint new Captains

Bavuma gets limited-overs charge, Elgar to lead in Tests

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

Cricket South Africa on Thursday appointed Temba Bavuma, who is rather inexperienced for the role, and Dean Elgar as the national team captains for limited-overs and Tests respectively, who are on a record-breaking 21-game winning streak.

In a statement, CSA Director of Cricket Graeme Smith thanked Quinton de Kock for leading the side in what are tumultuous times in South African cricket. Both Bavuma and Elgar take over from de Kock, who led the team temporarily.

"We are grateful to Quinton for the work he has put in as captain of the team in the limited overs formats and are indebted to him for stepping up while the National Selection Panel continued its search for the 'Test captain'."

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Director of Cricket Graeme Smith thanked Quinton de Kock for leading the side in what are tumultuous times in South African cricket. Both Bavuma and Elgar take over from de Kock, who led the team temporarily.

## Man Utd, Leicester drop more points

AFP ■ LONDON

Manchester United were left a huge 14 points behind Premier League leaders Manchester City as Crystal Palace held them to yet another goalless draw on Wednesday.

The stalemate at a foggy Selhurst Park was United's third successive goalless draw in all competitions ahead of Sunday's Manchester derby against City, who are on a record-breaking 21-game winning streak.

Elsewhere, third-placed Leicester had captain Kasper Schmeichel to thank for a point in a 1-1 draw at Burnley. Aston Villa missed the chance to move to within two points of the top four as they suffered a shock 1-0 loss to bottom-of-the-table Sheffield United, who held on for the final half with 10 men.

A point in south London left second-placed Man United just one ahead of Leicester, with the main aim now for Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side to cling on to a top-four place that will secure Champions League football next season.

"We have to do much better, we have to risk more in attack to create more chances," United midfielder Nemanja Matic, who almost broke the deadlock with a deflected shot, told Sky Sports.

"We are Manchester United, we have to win this kind of game. On Sunday we have a big game against Manchester City. We have to refocus for that."

have not won in their last three games — when they are in action on Thursday.

MILAN SALVAGE POINT

Franck Kessie scored a 97th-minute penalty to rescue a 1-1 draw for AC Milan at home to Udinese on Wednesday, giving Serie A leaders Inter Milan the chance to pull six points clear at the top.

Rodrigo Becao's converting the goal at the San Siro completely deceived Milan goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma and Stefano Pioli's faltering side looked destined for a third defeat in four games.

But a needless handball from Udinese substitute Jens Stryger Larsen offered Milan a lifeline, with Ivorian international Kessie converting the penalty with the final kick of the match.

Elsewhere, Robin Gosens, Jose Luis Palomino, Luis Muriel, Josip Ilicic and Aleksei Miranchuk all scored for Atalanta in a 5-1 rout of bottom club Crotona.

## SINGLES

PSL POSTPONED AFTER 3 MORE TEST +VE

KARACHI: The Pakistan Super League was on Thursday postponed with immediate effect after three more cricketers tested positive for Covid-19, taking the total number of cases in the T20 event to seven and prompting the cricket board to announce an inquiry into the fiasco. Out of the seven cases, six are players while one is a support staff member. PCB CEO Wasim Khan said an inquiry will be conducted to understand what went wrong.

PANGHAL LOSSES IN BOXXAM QUARTERS

NEW DELHI: World championship silver-medallist Amit Panghal (52kg) on Thursday bowed out of the 35th Boxam International Boxing tournament after being upstaged by European Games champion Gabriel Escobar in the quarterfinals. The Olympic-bound Panghal, went down in a split verdict to make a surprisingly early exit from the tournament.

SHARATH KAMAL LOSSES IN PRE-QUARTERS

DOHA: Indian challenge at the World Table Tennis Continental series ended after veteran Sharath Kamal suffered a loss to world No 7 Lin Yun-Ju of Chinese Taipei in the men's singles pre-quarterfinals here on Thursday. The 38-year-old Indian suffered a 6-11, 4-11, 8-11 defeat against Lin. Earlier, Manika Batra and Sreya Akula also lost their respective first qualifying round matches in the women's singles category.

LIVERPOOL TO PLAY LEIPZIG IN EUROPEST

NORW: Liverpool and Borussia Dortmund are going to Budapest for a second time in the Champions League round of 16 next week. UEFA confirmed on Thursday that Liverpool's home second-leg game will also be at Puskas Arena next Wednesday.

NEERAJ IN LINE FOR BRONZE

ROME: India's Greco Roman wrestler Neeraj kept himself in contention of a Bronze medal in the 65kg but four of his competitors faded on the opening day of the UWW Ranking Series event on Thursday. Neeraj began by losing his quarterfinal 1-4 to Sultan Aseulty but since the Kazakhstani's wrestler suffered the final, he got a reprieve. In the consolation match, Neeraj defeated Russia's Aleksei Tadykin 7-3 to book himself a slot in the Bronze-play off.

LEIPZIG REACH GERMAN CUP SEMIS

LEIPZIG: Yussuf Poulsen and Hwang Hee-chan netted second-half goals as RB Leipzig beat Wolfsburg 2-0 in Wednesday's German Cup quarter-final in a tense battle between the in-form Bundesliga sides. After Poulsen opened the scoring, South Korea striker Hwang came off the bench to hit a late second goal and seal a semi-final berth alongside Borussia Dortmund and second-tier Holstein Kiel.

LILLE WIN TO STAY AHEAD OF PSG

PARIS: Canada forward Jonathan David scored two late goals as Lille beat Marseille 2-0 to stay top of the French league. David netted the 90th minute and again two minutes into injury time on Wednesday. The northern side remains two points ahead of defending champion Paris Saint-Germain, which won 1-0 away to Bordeaux.

24 HOURS OF LE MANS POSTPONED

PARIS: The 24 Hours of Le Mans has been postponed from its original dates in June until August in the hope fans will be able to attend. The 90th minute and again two minutes into injury time on Wednesday. The northern side remains two points ahead of defending champion Paris Saint-Germain, which won 1-0 away to Bordeaux.

Agencies