

**OPINION 6**  
CAA DOUBTS IN ASSAM  
NOT REALLY UNFOUNDED

**WORLD 8**  
SUICIDE BOMB HITS PALM SUNDAY  
MASS IN INDONESIA, 14 WOUNDED

**SPORT 12**  
BARTY SETS UP  
AZARENKA CLASH

NEW DELHI, MONDAY MARCH 29, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3

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## BJP, TMC go all guns blazing

Mamata accuses Adhikaris of Nandigram firing deaths; BJP plans Shah, Mithun rallies to blunt TMC attack

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The BJP and the TMC have gone all out in the high stakes April 1 phase 2 polls involving Nandigram where Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is pitted against her former lieutenant BJP's Suwendu Adhikari. Roadshows and rallies by Mithun and Amit Shah are lined up by the BJP, while Mamata extended her stay in Nandigram. She alleged that Suwendu family was behind the Nandigram firing which led to the fall of the Left Government.

Mamata on Sunday added more charge to an already high-voltage battle for Nandigram where the Chief Minister is taking on her BJP challenger Suwendu, a former spearhead-turned saffron turncoat.



CRPF jawans patrol a street in Nandigram on Sunday PTI

So much so that in a sharp and strategic shift from a long held out official narrative — blaming the Marxists for the Nandigram mayhem — Mamata on Sunday accused Suwendu and his father Sisir Adhikari for the loss of 14 lives in the 2007 Nandigram police firing — that finally brought the downfall of the Buddhadeb

Bhattacharjee Government. Sisir a veteran leader, a former Union Minister and a sitting TMC MP, recently joined the BJP.

"On that fateful day on 2007 hundreds of policemen, and many private mercenaries dressed in police uniforms had entered Nandigram and fired at the villagers killing many of them... but the truth to be told those mercenaries in police uniform wearing sandals could not have entered the village without the tacit support of this father and son duo," Mamata said at a public rally on Sunday at Birulia Bazar in Nandigram where she hurt her knees on March 10 while campaigning.

## Didi mocks Shah for claim: 'BJP will win 26 seats in phase-1'

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Attacking Home Minister Amit Shah for claiming that the BJP would win 26 out of 30 seats that went to polls in the first phase of Assembly elections on March 27, Bengal Chief Minister said a person had the freedom to say whatever one liked but things were finally in the hands of the voters and "I have left it on the 'maanush' (people)... they will decide the things."

Wondering as to why the Home Minister claimed only 26 seats and why not the entire 30 of them she said, "a leader today said that the BJP will win all 26 seats... I wonder why not the entire 30," adding "have they kept the remaining 4 for the CPI(M) and the Congress who are their partners." Banerjee who was addressed two rallies at Chandipur and Nandigram said "I will not predict anything... how can I predict can I go inside the voting machines... I can only put faith on the



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during election campaign in Nandigram on Sunday PTI

people and I have full faith in them... things will be known only the result day," adding "as about 84 per cent votes were polled, I can only hope that things have gone in our favour."

She said that "do not see who is contesting in your area... think that it is me who is contesting as I have brought all the development at your doorsteps."

## TMC Jangalmahal leader arrested for train hijack

PNS ■ KOLKATA

In what could give a major setback to the Trinamool Congress' electoral exercise in the Jangalmahal areas, the National Investigation Agency on Sunday arrested its Jangalmahal leader Chhatradhar Mahato in connection with a ten-year-old murder case and a train hijack case.

Mahato, a former leader of the Maoist-backed People's Committee Against Police Atrocities (PCAPA) which then backed the TMC against the Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee Government, was picked up from his Lalgarh residence in the wee hours of Sunday, said his wife alleging no arrest memo was given to the family.

The NIA sources, however, said his wife refused to accept the arrest memo, adding that

Mahato physically resisted his arrest. The PCAPA leader, who had later joined the TMC, was recently given bail after more than 10 years of incarceration.

Mahato had failed to respond to repeated NIA summons in the case related to the murder of a CPI(M) leader and the hijacking of Rajdhani Express near Banstala Railway Station more than a decade ago.

Earlier on Thursday, the Calcutta High Court had directed Mahato to appear at the NIA office thrice a week in relation to a murder case.

He was arrested within hours of the elections ending in Jhargram district. His wife said, "About 40 people barged into our house literally breaking open the door and arrested my husband. They did not even show the warrant or any other papers."

## Opp leaders' phones tapped in Bengal, BJP will romp home: Shah

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With the BJP and the Trinamool Congress engaged in a war of purported audio tapes exposes against each other, senior BJP leader and Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday asserted that it showed that phones of Opposition leaders were tapped in West Bengal.

"Is this a democratic practice," he questioned even as he appealed to voters of Nandigram, where Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is locked in a high-profile contest with her former lieutenant and BJP candidate Suwendu Adhikari, to support his party saying they can bring about a change for better in the State by their votes.

He also claimed that the ground feedback about the first-phase of polling received by the party provides clear-cut indications that it will sweep 26 of the 30 Assembly seats in West Bengal and similarly, win



Union Home Minister Amit Shah addresses a Press conference at his residence in New Delhi on Sunday PTI

37 of the 48 seats in Assam. Shah claimed that his party would win over 200 seats in West Bengal to form the Government ousting the Mamata Government and improve its performance in Assam. He also expressed confidence of forming Government in Assam and Puducherry.

## Covid recovery rate slumps to 94.58%

2 Covid strains behind sudden spike in Maha; 312 die in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

New coronavirus infections at 62,714 and fatalities at 312 on Sunday were the highest single day rise so far this year. And Maharashtra continued being the biggest contributor to the Covid-19 tally bearing the brunt of two mutant strains of coronavirus — E484Q and L452R. Maharashtra (36,902 cases)



Artists give a finishing touch to an effigy based on coronavirus for Holika Dahan on the eve of Holi in Mumbai on Sunday PTI

followed by Punjab (3,122), Chhattisgarh (2665), Karnataka, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, continue to report a surge in the Covid daily new cases, contributing nearly 80 per cent of the total cases.

## 470 kids under 10 Covid +ve in Bengaluru since March 1

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Over 470 children below the age of 10 have been infected with Covid-19, since the beginning of this month in Bengaluru, as the city is witnessing a spike in infections.

A total of 244 boys and 228 girls have been infected from

March 1 to 26, official data showed. The cases among children were limited to eight to nine daily during the early days of this month but they have steadily risen to 46 on March 26. An epidemiologist said, children in many cases may also be spreaders among family members.

## Biotech seeks ₹100 cr from Govt to ramp up Covaxin production

Pune-based SII has also verbally requested for funds from Govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As the Government's move to widen the ambit of the nationwide vaccination programme to include more beneficiaries for inoculation is likely to increase the demand for the jobs, Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech has written to the Centre seeking funds worth ₹100 crore to ramp up the production of its coronavirus vaccine Covaxin.

Sources said the Pune-based Serum Institute of India



(SII) has also verbally requested for funds from the Government's Covid Suraksha scheme to increase its production.

The move follows in the wake of the increased demand for vaccines which is expected to go up further after April 1 as

the Government has announced that all above 45 years are eligible for Covid-19 jab in the country.

Currently, Bharat Biotech is producing 4 million doses of Covaxin per month at their Hyderabad-based plant. A Government-appointed inter-Ministerial panel on vaccine manufacturing and scaling up of production has reviewed the manufacturing facility of the Indian biotechnology firm.

Similarly, Serum Institute had planned ramping up production to produce 100 million doses of Covishield by March 2021. The inter-Ministerial group had also visited Serum Institute of India's production manufacturing plant in Pune on March 21 regarding their ramping up of production.

THE PIONEER wishes its readers a very Happy Holi. The offices of The Pioneer will remain closed on March 29. The next edition will be available on March 31



## CAPSULE

**TENSION IN WEST DELHI AFTER DEATH OF NIGERIAN**  
New Delhi: The death of a 43-year-old Nigerian national at DDU hospital on Sunday sparked violent protest in west Delhi's Tilak Nagar by his compatriots who alleged that he was assaulted by a cop. Police have denied the allegation.

**DELHI NCT BILL GETS PRESIDENT NOD**  
New Delhi: President Ram Nath Kovind on Sunday gave his assent to a Delhi NCT Bill.

## India beat England in all formats



Members of the Indian team celebrate as captain Virat Kohli walks with the winners trophy after their win in the third One Day International cricket match between India and England at Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Pune on Sunday. India clinch the series 2-1 AP

## NIA finds Vaze proof buried in Mithi river

CPUs, laptops DVRs seized

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a major breakthrough in the twin SUV recovery-businessman murder cases, the NIA on Sunday recovered several pieces of evidence, including two CPUs of computers, two number plates of a vehicle with the same registration number, two DVRs and a laptop, from the bed of Mithi River in north-central Mumbai, which allegedly link the arrested police officer to the two sensational crimes.

After interrogating him for days on end, the NIA took Sachin Vaze — who is a key accused in both the explosive laden SUV planting and subsequent alleged murder of businessman Mansukh Hiran to the



bank of the Mithi River that flows off the Bandra-Kurla Complex, where the divers recovered various pieces of evidence from its bed.

The NIA, which had been looking into the inputs it had received that Vaze had destroyed several pieces of evidence in the twin cases it is investigating — deployed a team of swimmers and divers to recover two CPUs of computers, two number plates of a vehicle with the same registration number that read MH-20FP 1539, two DVRs and a laptop from the Mithi river bed, in the presence of Vaze.

## Retired HC judge to probe ex-CP charges against Maha HM

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The Maharashtra Government will in all likelihood appoint a Commission of Inquiry headed by retired Bombay High Court judge to look into former Param Bir Singh allegations against State Home Minister and NCP leader Anil Deshmukh.

Though Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has not formally made an announcement about the setting up of a judicial enquiry, Deshmukh himself gave an indication to this effect on Sunday.

Talking to media persons in Nagpur, Deshmukh said, "At the last Cabinet meeting, I had asked the CM to investigate the allegations made by

Mumbai's former Police Commissioner. He has agreed to it and the probe will be done by a retired high court judge. The truth in the entire matter will come before the people."

The three alliance partners — Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress — have held series of meetings over the fallout of allegations made by Mumbai's former police commissioner Param Bir Singh against Deshmukh that the latter had asked suspended police officer Sachin Vaze last month to "collect" a staggering ₹100 crore per month from bars, restaurants and other sources. The Chief Minister had also spoken to NCP supreme Sharad Pawar, the chief architect of the MVA Government.

## Delhi gangster who escaped custody killed in encounter

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A wanted gangster, who had escaped from custody, was killed on Sunday following an exchange of fire with a Special Cell team at a flat in the Rohini area here, police said.

Several teams of the police's Special Cell and Crime Branch were working to trace and nab Kuldeep alias Fajja, who had escaped on March 25, they said.

The operation at Rohini was conducted around 1.45 am, police said. Kuldeep suffered injuries in the exchange of fire at the flat in Rohini's sector 14, they said.

The Special Cell got a tip-off on Saturday that Kuldeep was hiding in the flat at Tulsii Apartments. Before the operation, it arrested one of Kuldeep's



Police personnel at Tulsii Apartment after killing of criminals Kuldeep Fajja in an encounter at Rohini in New Delhi, on Sunday. Pioneer photo

associates Bhupinder Mann around 9:30 pm and he revealed that he was harbouring Kuldeep, police said.

"Police reached the area and raided the flat. They asked Kuldeep to surrender, but he opened fire at police. In retaliation, police

# BJP expels 7 Assam leaders for fighting as Independent

**Guwahati:** The BJP in Assam on Sunday said that it has expelled seven leaders from the primary membership of the party for six years for contesting as independent candidates in the assembly election after being denied tickets.



The state party president Ranjeet Kumar Dass has expelled the seven persons for six years with immediate effect for contesting as independents against the party's nominated candidates," Assam BJP general secretary Rajdeep Roy said in a statement.

Earlier on March 18, the Assam BJP had expelled 15 leaders, including former deputy speaker Dilip Kumar Paul, from the party for six years for joining the assembly poll fray as Independents after being denied tickets.

# NCP dismisses claim of Pawar meeting Shah

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI:

The unconfirmed reports that Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Sharad Pawar had a secret meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Ahmedabad sparked an intense debate in the State political circles on Sunday, with the NCP dismissing the reports as "baseless".



Reacting to reports in a section of the media that Pawar had met Shah in Ahmedabad that the Home Minister was quoted as saying: "Everything can't be made public, NCP chief spokesperson and Minority Affairs Minister Nawab Malik said: "Nothing of this sort (has happened). The news reports are baseless".



In a related development, Pawar's close aide and state Housing Minister Jitendra Awhad slammed the Opposition BJP for floating all kinds of rumours. "For the last 15 months some people are day-dreaming that they would return to power in the state," he said.

"Pawar saheb is a senior leader...he has enjoyed good relationships with several leaders of different political affiliations over the years and has even visited their homes," Awhad said.

Awhad cited the examples of late Prime Ministers Chandrashekhar (Janata Dal) and Atal Bihari Vajpayee (BJP), CPI (M) leader and former West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, Jammu & Kashmir National Conference Chairman and former Chief Minister Dr Farooq Abdullah, former Orissa Chief Minister Biju Patnaik and late BJP leader Pramod Mahajan, in this regard.

# Forge TN-like front against BJP at nat'l level: Stalin to Rahul

**Salem (TN):** DMK president MK Stalin on Sunday requested Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to stitch an alliance against the BJP at the national level, like the combine led by his party in Tamil Nadu and accused the Centre of unleashing a 'chemical' and 'cultural' attack against the state.

Addressing a public meeting here for the April 6 Assembly polls, Stalin alleged India was "suffocating due to the communal, fascist" forces and Gandhi had a big responsibility to protect the nation against it.

The rally here was the first in which leaders of all the constituents of the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance took part and it includes Congress party's Rahul Gandhi.

The ruling AIADMK is facing the polls in alliance with the Pattali Makkal Katchi, the BJP, the former union minister GK Vaasan led Tamil Maanila Congress (Moopanar) and other smaller parties.

The BJP could not win even a single Lok Sabha seat from Tamil Nadu in the 2019 Parliamentary polls as secular parties, led by the DMK came together, he said.

Also, the ensuing Assembly polls would be a 'washout' for the BJP in Tamil Nadu in view of his party led Secular Progressive Alliance, he claimed and cited opinion polls that favoured his party-led combine.

Stalin said the BJP got only a 37 per cent vote share in the Lok Sabha polls in 2019, which meant that the remainder, 63 per cent of people opposed it, but they voted for different parties. **PTI**

# Two held for gangrape of minor in UP's Kaushambi



**Kaushambi (UP):** Two men were arrested here on Sunday in connection with the alleged gang-rape of a girl, police said.

Additional Superintendent of Police Samar Bahadur Singh said the incident took place on March 25, when the girl, aged around 15, had gone to collect fodder for animals.

The girl lodged a police complaint on Saturday, the additional SP said, adding she was sent for medical examination.

The accused were arrested on Sunday and sent to jail, Singh said. **PTI**

# 4,204 prisoners released on bail, 41 on parole after Covid outbreak in J&K: DGP, Prisons

**Jammu:** Over 4,200 prisoners were released on bail and 41 on parole since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in March last year, Director General of Police (DGP), Prisons, V K Singh has said.

Saturday, he said a total of 542 inmates across various jails were infected with the coronavirus, but all of them recovered, except two elderly prisoners who succumbed due to comorbidities.

— 74 in Kot Bhalwal, Jammu and 61 in the Amphalla District Jail.

The inmates sang folk songs, Bollywood classics and Sufi songs during the programme, which received a thunderous applause from the audience.

He said there is only one COVID-positive patient among the prisoners, who is being treated at a hospital in Kathua district.

"Presently, there is only one COVID case from the Kathua District Jail, who is admitted to the local Government Medical College," the DGP said.

Jammu District Jail Superintendent Mirza Saleem Beig highlighted various steps taken by the prisons department for the welfare of prisoners and strengthening the prison administration.

"Since March last year, 4,204 inmates were released on bail and 41 on parole, in pursuance of decisions taken by the high-powered committee (constituted on the Supreme Court's directions to decongest jails to ensure social distancing among prisoners)," Singh said.

He said the prisons department has introduced a video-conferencing facility for the purpose of trial and remand, the e-mulaqat facility and the Prison Inmate Calling System, besides setting up modern interview rooms in jails.

He said the prison administration is committed to providing better correctional programmes to the inmates, including educational and vocational-training courses, awareness programmes and recreational activities. **PTI**

Speaking at a cultural programme organised at the Amphalla District Jail here on

He said a cognitive behavioural therapy was taken up for inmates suffering from insomnia and it benefited 135 of them

# Tension in west Delhi after Nigerian national's death

**New Delhi:** The death of a 43-year-old Nigerian national at DDU hospital on Sunday sparked violent protest in west Delhi's Tilak Nagar by his compatriots who alleged that he was assaulted by a cop. Police have denied the allegation.

however, claimed that Lyeanyi died after being lathi-charged by the police.

According to police, the agitated African nationals created ruckus following the death of Leohand Lyeanyi. They broke glasses at Deen Dayal Upadhyay (DDU) hospital. Initially, they were around 20 to 30, but their numbers increased to 100.

Denying the charges, the police maintained that the victim was not hit by them and his medico legal case (MLC) report showed no external injury on the body.

The mob also attacked the local people and police personnel, they said.

A senior police officer said they received information about Lyeanyi's death at around 3.30 am on Sunday from the DDU hospital.

The nationals also attacked officials of the High Commission of Nigeria who had come to meet them, police said. The Nigerian protestors,

He said the post-mortem report of the victim is awaited.

Police also said that they have found CCTV footage wherein the victim could be seen stepping out of an auto-rickshaw and sitting near a shop. He then collapsed, hitting his head on the ground. There was nobody around him, they said. **PTI**

# Mehbooba seeks people's support for struggle for restoration of J&K's Statehood, special status

**Srinagar:** PDP president Mehbooba Mufti on Sunday sought people's support for the struggle for restoration of Jammu and Kashmir's statehood and special status under the Constitution.

every minute. But, as a citizen of J-K and the leader of PDP, this is expected of me and I assure you that the party would make no compromise on the agenda of (party founder) Mufti (Mohammad Sayeed) Sahab and won't leave our people in lurch, whatever pressures be," she said.

Speaking at a daylong convention of party workers in Budgam district, Mehbooba said she will not budge or shy away from speaking up for the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

"I have decided for myself and taken a conscious decision to speak up for my people, struggle for their dignity and rights and advocate peace and reconciliation as a means to sustainable peace not only in J-K, but the whole of the subcontinent," she said.

Police also said that they have found CCTV footage wherein the victim could be seen stepping out of an auto-rickshaw and sitting near a shop. He then collapsed, hitting his head on the ground. There was nobody around him, they said. **PTI**

She asked for the support of the people of J-K, saying she cannot do it all alone.

"I need your constant support to get back what was unjustly snatched away from us... I urge the people of Jammu and Kashmir to stand up, decide and choose their sides for a

meaningful struggle towards the restoration of honour and dignity of Jammu and Kashmir," she said, referring to the revocation of the erstwhile state's special status under Article 370 of the Constitution and its bifurcation by the Centre in August 2019.

"The central government has used every means and resources to demolish me and my party, but here we stand tall with head high as we have nothing to hide or regret about," she added.

"I know the road is full of challenges and would test me every minute. But, as a citizen of J-K and the leader of PDP, this is expected of me and I assure you that the party would make no compromise on the agenda of (party founder) Mufti (Mohammad Sayeed) Sahab and won't leave our people in lurch, whatever pressures be," she said.

"I need your constant support to get back what was unjustly snatched away from us... I urge the people of Jammu and Kashmir to stand up, decide and choose their sides for a

Batting for cordial and peaceful relations between India and Pakistan, the former chief minister said it was high time that leadership of the two countries must sit across the table and resolve all the pending issues for durable peace. **PTI**

# Rape survivor tied, paraded with accused in MP village, six held

PTI ■ ALIRAJPUR (MP)

A 16-year-old girl was allegedly raped by a 21-year old man on Sunday in tribal-dominated Alirajpur district of Madhya Pradesh, following which villagers paraded both the accused and the victim in public by tying them with ropes, police said.

A video showing the girl and the accused tied with ropes, being beaten and forced to walk in public in the village under Jobat police station amidst slogans of "Bharat Mata Ki Jai" has gone viral on social media.

# BJP, TMC go all guns...

**From Page 1**  
Till date the Chief Minister and the Trinamool Congress held Marxist mercenaries responsible for the Nandigram deaths.

The girl was rescued by police, a senior officer said.

With both the sides putting in everything to wrench out a victory in the high-voltage fight between a former boss and a turncoat protégée, Mamata said, "I have arrived... and will stay here for the next four days... I will tell you so many untold things about the conspiracy hatched by this father-son duo."

Sub-Divisional Officer of Police (SDOP) Dilip Singh Bilwal said two cases were registered on Sunday on the FIRs lodged by the victim.

Nandigram goes to polls on April 1 when the fate of Adhikari and Mamata will be decided along with that of CPI(M) State DYFI president Meenakshi Mukherjee who is banking on 30 per cent Left votes from this zone which was in the Marxists hands from 1969 to 2009.

A total of six persons, including the man who is accused of rape, and five villagers, have been arrested.

The Chief Minister who reached the war zone on Sunday evening is scheduled to organise two roadshows in Nandigram-I and Nandigram-II blocks on Monday and

Tuesday.

Leaving no stones unturned, the BJP too is putting in everything to wrench out a victory. Home Minister Amit Shah will hold a massive roadshow in Nandigram on Tuesday in support of Adhikari where he is likely to reply to all the allegations that Mamata leveled against the Adhikaris on Sunday.

# Opp leaders' phone tapped in Bengal, BJP will romp...

**From Page 1**

"In Kerala, we would improve our performance and form the Government in time to come," he told reporters. Shah hoped that the AIADMK and NDA may form Government in Tamil Nadu.

The high-voltage game for Nandigram became more toxic on Saturday with the BJP coming out with an audio cassette in which the Chief Minister was literally heard appealing to a local BJP leader and Adhikari confidant Pralay Paul --- who left her company and joined the saffron outfit earlier --- to help her cause.

However, while the BJP has been showcasing a telephonic conversation Mamata had with a BJP leader, who was earlier in her party to woo him back to her fold, to claim that it showed that the TMC chief was losing, Shah, downplayed it saying everyone has a right to solicit support.

"The impact of the Home Minister's roadshow in Nandigram will sweep away whatever thin hope the Chief Minister is having," Paul said adding "she has not only messed up with her credibility by over-playing her ankle injury roundly accusing the people of Nandigram of conspiracy but also has made a mockery of things by linking the Adhikaris with Nandigram police firing... now people will not believe her one bit."

But then, the Home Minister hit out at the TMC for releasing the audio in which BJP vice president Mukul Roy is allegedly telling industrialist and party leader Shishir Bajoria about their approach to the Election Commission, saying this shows that phones of Opposition leaders were being tapped in the State. Shah asserted that there is nothing incriminating in that conversation as the BJP has given in writing to the poll watchdog what the

two leaders were heard discussing.

"In Bengal, there will be sampoorna parivartan," said Shah when asked about reports that the BJP and the TMC are evenly matched but the former is still having an edge. "Delhi press should have its ear to the ground... they failed in assessing outcomes of many State elections in the past," he said here addressing a Press conference.

# NIA finds Vaze proof buried in Mithi river

**From Page 1**

The NIA is expected to send recovered articles to Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL) for examination.

Shah said BJP would collect "positive votes" as it has "ignited new hope" in Bengal.

Mamata is seeking to recreate the 'Nandigram magic' of 2011 again by contesting from this Assembly constituency giving up her traditional Assembly seat of Bhawanipore.

The investigations have among others revealed that Vaze and Hiran had met on February 17, when the latter handed over Vaze the SUV keys. On his part, Hiran had lodged a complaint with the police claiming the vehicle was stolen.

However, while the BJP has been showcasing a telephonic conversation Mamata had with a BJP leader, who was earlier in her party to woo him back to her fold, to claim that it showed that the TMC chief was losing, Shah, downplayed it saying everyone has a right to solicit support.

Nandigram was the battle field where massive farmers protest against acquisition of land for establishing a chemical factory turned the tables on the Left-front Government and led to its ouster in 2011, bringing the Mamata-headed TMC to power in the State.

The former BJP president said the peaceful polling and the high voter turnouts are positive signs for the two States and thanked the voters. "Not a single person was killed or a single bullet fired," he said.

Hiran, a Thane-based businessman whose "stolen" SUV with 20 gelatin sticks was recovered by the police near Industrialist Mukesh Ambani's skyscraper mansion "Antilia" in south Mumbai on February 25, was found dead in mysterious circumstances in the marshy Reti-Bunder creek in the neighbouring Thane district on March 5.

It may be recalled that the police had recovered 20 gelatin sticks and a threat letter were recovered from what was later described as Mahindra Scorpio that was found abandoned in the vicinity of Mukesh Ambani's 27-storey residence "Antilia" on Carmichael Road in south Mumbai.

Vaze, who was arrested on March 13 in connection with the gelatine sticks laden Scorpion recovery case, was earlier booked under sections 120 (B) (criminal conspiracy) 286 (negligent conduct with respect to explosive substance), 465 (forgery) 473 (making or possessing counterfeit seal) and 506 -2 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and 4 (a)(b)(i) of the Explosive Substances Act, 1908. The NIA invoked the stringent Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) against Vaze on March 24.

Vaze has among other things told the investigators that he had destroyed five of his mobile phones on March 6, a day after Hiran's body was recovered from Mumbra creek. Vaze was reportedly using 13 mobile phones.

**GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR**  
**SHER-I-KASHMIR INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL SCIENCES**  
**SOURA SRINAGAR - 190011**  
**Email: ammoimports@skims.ac.in, Fax: 0194-2403403**  
**IMPORTS SECTION**

**NOTICE**

**Subject :-** Procurement of Plasmaid Guardian (T2006) Mobile Air Decontamination Unit on Proprietary basis from M/S AIRINSPACE, FRANCE.

SKIMS intends to procure Plasmaid Guardian (T2006) Mobile Air Decontamination Unit on Proprietary basis from M/S AIRINSPACE, FRANCE from M/S EMINENT Medical Agency for the department of Cl. Hematology SKIMS being their proprietary item as claimed by the company.

In this connection, objections (if any) from companies manufacturing / marketing, such equipment capable of delivering the same result as intended from the above equipment, regarding the proprietary nature of the above item should be communicated within 15 days on the above mentioned email id/fax after which the claim of the company who has claimed for the proprietorship of the said item shall be accepted.

**NO: SIMS- 324-Heamatology-2021-1058-63-6174-76**  
**Dated 26-03-2021.**

**Sd/- Asstt. Materials Management Officer Imports.**

# Covid recovery...

**From Page 1**

The present active caseload now stands at 3.8 per cent of India's total positive cases. A net decline of 31,581 cases recorded from the total active caseload in the last 24 hours. Maharashtra (62.69 per cent), Kerala (5.43 per cent) and Punjab (5 per cent) cumulatively account for 73 per cent of the total active cases in the country.

# Didi mocks Shah...

**From Page 1**

She also attacked the Indian Secular Front of Abbas Siddique saying the ISF-Left and Congress alliance had tied up with AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi so as to cut the minority votes and help BJP win the elections. "I challenge the BJP that I will defeat them... defeat them... defeat them... I will throw them out of Bengal," she said. Earlier scuffling at the Home Minister Trinamool Rajya Sabha MP Derek O'Brien told the media that Shah was good at playing mind games but "mind games won't work here... better try these tricks in Gujarat Gymkhana." Earlier on Sunday Shah told reporters that the high voting percentage in first phase indicated the BJP had already garnered about 26 seats out of the 30 that went to polls. Incidentally on normal occasions a normal booth in Bengal polls anywhere between 82 and 88 per cent.

# Delhi gangster who escaped custody killed...

**From Page 1**

fired and Kuldeep suffered injuries. He was rushed to the Baba Saheb Ambedkar Hospital at Rohini where he was declared brought dead," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Pramod Singh Kushwah said.

# Retired HC judge to probe ex-CP charges...

**From Page 1**

It may be recalled on March 20, Singh — three days after he was shunted and posted in a relatively insignificant post as the Commandant General of Home Guards — had dropped a bombshell on the MVA government, in the form of an eight-page sensational letter written to chief minister Uddhav Thackeray, in

which he laid bare "misdeeds and malpractices" indulged in by the State Home Minister.

On his part, State Home minister Deshmukh — in a tweet put in the evening — debunked Singh's charge and said: "The former Commissioner of Police, Parambir Singh has made false allegations in order to save himself as the involvement of Sachin Waze in Mukesh Ambani & Mansukh Hiren's case is becoming clearer from the investigation carried out so far & threads are leading to Mr. Singh as well".

# Biotech seeks...

**From Page 1**

Department of Biotechnology Secretary Renu Swarup has said that the Government is ready to provide assistance under the Covid Suraksha scheme. Swarup emphasised that the scheme is meant to support the research

and development of coronavirus vaccines.

Mission Covid Suraksha was launched by the Central Government in November 2020 to help accelerate the development of approximately five-six vaccine candidates and ensure that these are brought closer to licensure and introduction in the market.

# City reports 1,881 new Covid cases, 9 deaths

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi reported 1,881 coronavirus cases on Sunday, while nine more people succumbed to the disease.

The positivity rate stands at 2.35 per cent. The 1881 new infections pushed the tally to 6,57,715, while 6,39,164 patients have recovered from the virus.

The active cases reached to 7,544, according to the health bulletin issued by the health department of the Delhi Government.

A total of 79,936 tests, including 53,422 RT-PCR tests, were conducted a day ago, the bulletin said.

The number of people under home isolation rose to 4,237. The containment zones rose to 1,710, it said.

Health Minister Satyendar Jain on Saturday ruled out any possibility of imposing another lockdown in the national



A health worker collects a swab sample from a man for Covid-19 test in New Delhi on Sunday  
Ranjjan Dimri | Pioneer

Capital, saying it was not a solution to check the spread of the coronavirus that is again surging rapidly.

The Health Minister had said that random testing is being done at the railway station

and airport to check people coming from outside to Delhi. He said that the concrete reason for the rise of the Corona case is not known, so we will have to follow all the safety measures.

# Will not attend public Holi event due to Covid: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday said he will not attend any public Holi programme due to the increasing number of coronavirus cases and appealed to the people to celebrate the festival with their families and avoid crowds.

"Corona cases have increased in the last few days, in view of this, I am not attending Holi programs being organized in public this time. Appeal to all of you to just celebrate Holi with your family and avoid crowds, follow the rules of Corona prevention," Kejriwal tweeted in Hindi.

The national capital reported 1558 coronavirus cases for the third consecutive day on Saturday, while ten more people succumbed to the disease.

The positivity rate stands at 1.70 per cent. The positivity

rate was 1.52 on Wednesday, 1.31 per cent on Tuesday, 1.32 per cent on Monday and 1.03 per cent on Sunday. The 1558 new infections pushed the tally to 655834, while 638212 patients have recovered from the virus. The active cases reached to 6625 on Saturday, according to the health bulletin issued by the health department of the Delhi Government.

The Delhi Disaster Management Authority on Tuesday ordered that there will be no public celebrations in the national capital during upcoming festivals such as Holi and Navaratri.

"The Government has set up a number of teams to ensure that people adhere to its directions on Holi. District magistrates and police have created district-wise teams. Legal action would be taken against violators," Health Minister Satyendar Jain had said.

# Eligible prisoners to be vaccinated in Tihar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Prisons Department has set up a Covid-19 vaccination centre inside Tihar Jail to vaccinate eligible inmates. An official said that the centre was set up on Tuesday in the central jail hospital at jail number 3.

A total of 326 inmates in Delhi's prisons are above 60 years, and over 300 are in the 45-59 age bracket with comorbidities. These two categories are eligible for vaccination in the ongoing nationwide drive.

According to jail officials, around 70 to 80 inmates of Tihar, Rohini and Mandoli jails have been vaccinated so far.

"If needed, a vaccination centre will be opened at Mandoli Jail too. Our teams from the central jail hospital in jail number 3 will visit the inmates at Rohini and Mandoli Jails to vaccinate them starting next week. If needed, a vacci-



nation centre will also be opened at Mandoli Jail," said Sandeep Goel, the Director General, Prison.

Earlier, Tihar Jail inmates were taken to the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital for the vaccination. The vaccination drive for prison inmates started on March 18 and 13 inmates got the COVID-19 jab on day one.

According to a senior jail official, family members of inmates eligible for getting vaccinated were asked to send the required documents through WhatsApp messag-

ing app. "The officials spoke to the families of the inmates... asked them to send the documents required for the registration through WhatsApp and then vaccinated them," a senior jail official said.

None of the inmates who have received the jab reported any complications, the official said. However, the officials said there are several inmates who do not have the required documents for the vaccination process.

"Due to which they were not selected for the shot. We are trying to figure out how they will be vaccinated," another official said.

On March 1, the second phase of the COVID-19 vaccination drive began in the national capital. In the first phase, starting January 16, over 3.6 lakh beneficiaries comprising healthcare workers and frontline workers, were vaccinated in Delhi.

# L-G greets people on Shab-e-Barat

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal on Sunday greeted Delhiites on the occasion of 'Shab-e-Barat', urging people to celebrate the occasion in their homes following the Covid-19 guidelines.

Bajjal tweeted, "Congratulations to all on the occasion of Shab-e-Barat, I would urge to celebrate the occasion at home and follow Covid-19 measures."

'Shab-e-Barat' is a traditional festival that is celebrated by Muslims all over the world. It begins after the sunset on Sunday and will be observed until the next day's sunset.

# Resilience played key role in Covid time: Dy CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a path-breaking conversation on mental health and socio-emotional learning at the Harvard Social Enterprise Conference, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia stressed on the need to inculcate resilience in our daily lives through education.

"During the pandemic period, staying at home was in itself a big trauma. Children faced an immense loss of learning and many people lost their jobs amid uncertainty during the period. These were tough times for all and resilience played a key role to overcome it," he said.

Deliberating upon the innovations spearheaded by Delhi Government for mental health and well-being, Sisodia

said, "As the need to work on well-being emerged, we developed the Happiness Curriculum and encouraged students and teachers to practice mindfulness.

The objective of our Happiness Curriculum has been to develop self-awareness and mindfulness, inculcate skills of critical thinking and inquiry, enable learners to communicate effectively and help children to apply life skills to deal with stressful and conflicting situations around them, he said, adding that almost 3-4 lakh students who practiced mindfulness and different activities helped their homes to be strong and emotionally sound.

"We have been able to encourage our ecosystems to think about long-term approaches to mental health

through the happiness curriculum," he added.

Talking about it further, he said "Failures are a part of life, but our students should be able to bounce back from them, analyse and learn from both successes and failures, and relentlessly persevere to achieve their goals."

Speaking of the key elements which need to be changed or introduced in public education, especially in the post-Covid world, Sisodia said, "The biggest takeaway from Covid, for our public education, has been that technology is here to stay. We need to quickly adapt our systems and encourage the use of technology. Adopting the right approaches to inculcate technology within our education would in fact make learning more inclusive."

"Our contribution to the rising need of technology is highlighted by the introduction of Delhi's first virtual school model. I can say that this would be our own kind of experiment in India, but the virtual school will carry the hallmarks of any regular government school in the city namely students, teachers, regular teaching-learning activities, assessments, and most importantly, provision of a holistic education to its students.

On the topic of building long-lasting resilient systems that sustain beyond governance and leadership, the Deputy Chief Minister said, "Leadership has to involve stakeholders and our leadership is not top-down, it is more collaborative. For example, when we were developing the

Happiness Curriculum, it was made sure that our teachers have a big role to play. Over time, you can see that we now have an entire cadre of teachers who believe in the vision and outcome of the Happiness Curriculum.

"Our Delhi Board of School Education will also eventually move towards testing mindset rather than testing knowledge. It will play a key role in ensuring that schools develop a holistic learner profile of students, assessing and pushing for social and emotional learning in schools," he added.

The Harvard Social Enterprise Conference has brought together top leaders, practitioners and students to engage in a virtual dialogue, debate, and expression around social enterprise.

# Senior BJP leader Mahendra Kumar joins AAP



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Impressed by the policies of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Government, senior BJP leader Mahendra Kumar Sonpal joined the party in the presence of National Convenor and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

Mahendra Kumar Sonpal who was the Delhi Pradesh president of BJP's Sindhi Cell.

Sonpal has been in active politics for the last 30 years and has worked in several states including Delhi, Gujarat among others. Many supporters of Sonpal also took the membership of AAP along with him.

# Under-construction flyover on highway collapses in G'gram, 3 hurt

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

A part of an under-construction flyover on the Dwarka Expressway near Daultabad village Chowk collapsed on Sunday morning at around 7.30 am.

The broken span is part of the 29-km expressway, which is intended to connect Kherki Daula on the Delhi-Gurugram Expressway with Shiv Murli near Mahipalpur.

According to the police, three persons were injured when the huge concrete slabs of the under-construction flyover fell on the Dwarka Expressway. The injured, said to be laborers, were hospitalized immediately. Later the area was cordoned off.

A police team along with Deepak Shahran, DCP (west) rushed to the spot to look sort of the situation. A civil defence team was also present on the spot.

Engineers from Larsen & Toubro, which is constricting the stretch were also present on the spot. The officials of the



National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has also visited the incident spot and has started an investigation.

"We had cordoned off the entire area while work to clear the debris began. Three workers were injured on the incident. They have admitted in a private hospital for further treatment. The flyover is being

constructed in the middle of the road, so it did not affect traffic movement on either side. State Disaster Response Force and civil defence teams were deployed at the spot," said the DCP.

Meanwhile, the eye witness told the police that they heard a loud sound when the concrete slab fell on the road.

They said a major accident was averted as there were not too many people at the site when the incident occurred due to Holi festival.

"On this portion, a number of 60 to 70 workers used to work but due to Holi festival only few workers were present at the site in which three of them were injured in the inci-

dent, a local resident present at the spot said.

"The span of that section of the flyover was under construction. We will have to investigate this to find out why it happened. This will be cleared after a detail investigation," said an official from NHAI.

However, the NHAI and Gurugram Police have launched separate probes into the matter.

"A high-level technical committee of the NHAI will probe the incident. The committee members will also visit the spot to look sort of the incident. Till then the construction work has been suspended. We will ensure that such incidents do not happen in the future. The area was cordoned off," said Nirman Jambulkar, Project Director of the NHAI.

"We have deployed police personnel as security measures to prevent people going to the incident spot. The concerned police station team will also probe the matter and if we received any complaint in connection with the matter it will

be considered as per the prescribed law. The police will soon record the statements of the victims," Shahran said.

Recently, Union minister for road transport and highways Nitin Gadkari had reviewed the construction work of the Dwarka Expressway to assess the status of the project and suggest improvement measures to the NHAI officials.

The NHAI has been working on this project since 2008. The expected cost of the project is ₹7,000 crores.

Work on the Dwarka Expressway project, started by the state government, was originally expected to be completed in 2014, but due to delays in land acquisition issues, the project was transferred by the state government to NHAI in 2016.

Once completed the project will solve two problems twin problems of traffic congestion and vehicular pollution in the Delhi-NCR region. The Dwarka Expressway project is a bypass to Delhi-Gurugram section of the Delhi-Jaipur Expressway (NH-48).

# Man found dead with injury marks on face in Gurugram

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

A 36-year-old man was found dead with injury marks on his face in Sector-47 area in Gurugram, police said on Sunday.

The body was recovered on Sunday morning at around 10.00 am from a ground near the DPS public school in Sector-47 after some children, who were playing cricket there alerted the police, they said.

"The deceased was identified as Shahnur Miya of Bihar, who lived with his family in Sector-46. The deceased's family member told the police that he along with his relative Jiyarul of West Bengal went somewhere on Saturday evening but did not return," a police official said.

"The deceased family suspected on Jiyarul who was fled soon after the incident and his



mobile was also switched off since then. The motive behind the murder will be cleared once the accused will be nabbed," Sundar Lal, Additional station house officer of Sadar police station said.

He said the victim's face was trashed with some blunt object or with stone.

"There were injury marks on the face of the deceased. The cause of death will be ascertained after an autopsy. The body has been sent for post-

THERE WERE INJURY MARKS ON THE FACE OF THE DECEASED. THE CAUSE OF DEATH WILL BE ASCERTAINED AFTER AN AUTOPSY. THE BODY HAS BEEN SENT FOR POST-MORTEM

mortem, he said.

A case was registered on the complaint of deceased's wife Milina Bibi against Jiyarul at the Sadar police station under IPC section 302 (murder) and a search has been launched to trace the culprit, he added.



Smoke billows out of Ghazipur landfill after a fire broke out in it in New Delhi on Sunday

# 60-foot tall Tricolour hoisted at Shakur Basti

New Delhi: Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain on Sunday attended the hoisting ceremony of the 60-foot tall national flag at Brij Vihar in Shakur Basti.

"Attended the flag hoisting ceremony of the newly constructed 60-feet tall national flag at Brij Vihar society in Shakur Basti. Watching our national flag hoisted filled me with immense pride and honour," Jain tweeted after attending the event.

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on March 9 while presenting the annual 'deshbhakti' Budget had proposed to allocate ₹45 crore to install high masts to hoist the national flag at 500 places in the national Capital. To celebrate the 75th anniversary of India's Independence this year, the Delhi Government had also announced that it would organise programmes promoting patriotism throughout the year.

# Modernisation need of hour in agri sector: PM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Modernisation in the agriculture sector is the need of the hour as already a lot of time has been lost, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday. Asserting that adopting modern practices in the agriculture sector is imperative, Modi, in his monthly radio programme 'Mann Ki Baat' said, in every aspect of life, modernisation is essential.

"In India's agriculture sector, modernisation is the need of the hour. It has been delayed and we have already lost a lot of time. In order to create new employment opportunities in the agriculture sector, to increase farmers' income, it is equally important to adopt new alternatives, innovations along with traditional agricultural practices," the Prime Minister said.

The country has witnessed this during the white revolution and bee farming is also emerging as one such alternative, said Modi. The Prime Minister's call for embracing modern practices in agriculture comes at a time when hundreds of farmers have been camping at Delhi's border points at Ghazipur, Singhu and Tikri since November last year demanding that the Centre repeal the three contentious farm laws.

During his radio broadcast, Modi also recalled that in March last year the nation first



## Mann Ki Baat

Noting that around time last year, the question was whether there would be a vaccine for Covid-19 and by when would it be rolled out, Modi said it was a matter of pride that the world's largest vaccination drive is underway in India.

Modi also said that India's 'Nari Shakti' is excelling in the sports field and lauded the recent sporting feats of cricketer Mithali Rajand shuttler P V Sindhu.

During his radio broadcast, Modi also recalled that in March last year the nation first heard about the Janata curfew.

◆ The country has witnessed this during the white revolution and bee farming is also emerging as one such alternative, said Modi.

◆ During his radio broadcast, Modi also recalled that in March last year the nation first

heard about the Janata curfew. The Janata curfew was imposed on March 22 last year on the Prime Minister's appeal. "From very early on, the people of India have put up a spirited fight against COVID-19," he asserted.

Noting that around time last year, the question was whether there would be a vaccine for COVID-19 and by when would it be rolled out, Modi said it was a matter of pride that the world's largest vaccination drive is underway in India. Modi also said that India's 'Nari Shakti' is excelling in the sports field and lauded the recent sporting feats of cricketer Mithali Rajand shuttler P V Sindhu.

On Mann Ki Baat com-

pleting 75 episodes, Modi said it seems like just yesterday when in 2014 "we began this journey" and thanked all the listeners.

"During Mann Ki Baat, we have discussed a wide range of subjects. We all have learnt so much. Diverse topics have been covered," he said.

Mann Ki Baat completes 75 episodes at a time when India is looking forward to marking our 'Amrut Mahotsav', Modi said underlining the importance of the celebrations of 75 years of Independence. "The sacrifices of our great freedom fighters must inspire us to think about our duties as a citizen. This is something Mahatma Gandhi talked about extensively," he said.

# 3 more Rafale fighter jets to join Air Force

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Three more Rafale fighter jets, made according to Indian specifications, will join the IAF in the next few days, thereby, bolstering the fleet strength to 15. In all the IAF will get 36 Rafale jets in the next two years.

India and France had inked a government to government deal in 2016 worth over Rs 60,000 crores. The first batch of four jets arrived at the Ambala base in September last year and since then two to three planes landed here from France in the following months.

The next two months will see ten Rafale jets including three in the next three to four days, sources said here on Sunday. The total of 36 jets will form two squadrons with one based at Ambala in northern India and the other in Hashimara in the east.

With its capabilities for long range strikes, the jets will

add to the IAF muscle to guard the entire 4,000 km long Line of Actual Control (LAC) facing China. In fact, the present 11 jets at Ambala are also involved in active flying sorties including patrolling the LAC, they said.

Like the earlier lot of Rafale jets, the three jets will fly straight from France to Ambala covering a distance of more than 7,000 km with mid-air refueling.

The twin-engine Rafale medium multi-role combat aircraft are capable of carrying out a variety of missions ground and sea attack, air defence and air superiority, reconnaissance, and nuclear strike deterrence.

They are manufactured conglomerate Dassault.

The India specific Rafale underwent at least 13 modifications as per the IAF requirements. Besides state of the art weaponry, it is also equipped with long-range Meteor air to air missiles.



# India, US start naval exercise in eastern Indian Ocean Region

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Months after holding the Malabar series of naval exercises involving four Quad countries India, US, Japan and Australia off the Indian coast, India and the US on Sunday commenced a two-day naval exercise in the eastern Indian Ocean Region.

This exercise reflected the growing congruence in the US and India defence and military partnership, officials said here on Sunday. The Indian Navy deployed its warship Shivalik and long-range maritime patrol aircraft P81 in the 'PASSEX' exercise while the US Navy wa represented by

the USS Theodore Roosevelt carrier strike group, they said.

A carrier battle group or carrier strike group is a mega naval fleet comprising an aircraft carrier, accompanied by a large number of destroyers, frigates and other ships.

"In a first, enhancing jointmanship, Indian Air Force fighters were also included in the exercise affording the IAF an opportunity to practice air interception and air defence with the US Navy," the Indian Navy spokesperson said.

The exercise came a week after US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin flew into India as part of his three-nation first overseas tour that signalled the Joe Biden administration's strong commitment to its relations with its close allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region.

During the visit, both sides resolved to further consolidate their robust defence cooperation through deeper military-to-military engagement with Austin describing the partnership as a "stronghold" of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

The officials said the exercise began on Sunday and will conclude on Monday. The spokesperson said the exercise is aimed at consolidating the synergy and interoperability achieved during the Malabar



exercise that took place in November last.

Besides the Indian Navy, the Malabar naval exercise was participated by the navies of the US, Australia and Japan. The four countries are part of the Quad or Quadrilateral coalition.

China has been suspicious about the purpose of the Malabar exercise as it feels that the annual war game is an effort to contain its influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

In July last, the Indian Navy carried out a military exercise with a US Navy carrier strike group led by the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Nimitz off the coast of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The USS Nimitz is the world's largest warship.

# 'Economic offender' held after deportation from Saudi Arabia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI on Sunday said it has arrested an absconding accused (Economic Offender), who was deported from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, at Delhi.

The accused, Sudeer Muhammed Cheriya Vannarakkal, was involved in five cases registered by the CBI at its Chennai office.

The CBI had managed to get a Red Corner Notice issued through Interpol against the accused who was located in Saudi Arabia and with the close assistance and coordination with the authorities there through Interpol channels, he was deported to India, the agency said.

It said the accused is being produced before the Competent Court at Ernakulam (Kerala).

The CBI had registered five cases on the orders of Kerala High Court and taken over the investigation of the cases, earlier registered at Police Station Kasargod (Kerala).

"In four cases, it was alleged that the accused and others floated a private company based at Kasargod (Kerala), made false promises and representations/ declarations to the public at large with the assurance to return of investment with higher/exorbitant rate of interest after 61 days of their investments and also promised to pay commission of 2 per cent per month to the agents who had mobilized the investments for the said company," it said in a statement.

During investigation, it was found that in 2009-11, all

**The complainant allegedly invested Rs 19 lakh in 2011 in the accused company and the accused did not pay returns as well as the principal amount to the complainant**

the seven accused including Vannarakkal of the accused private company floated a fraudulent scheme called Forex trade (trading with foreign currencies), promised a monthly returns of seven percent on the principal to the depositors and two percent to the agents for mobilizing the depositors.

Through the scheme, the accused persons collected huge deposits in cash to the tune of around Rs 9,93,68,000 from the depositors and cheated them by not repaying the assured returns as well as the principal amount, thereby caused huge loss to the depositors, it said.

After investigation, a chargesheet was filed in the court of chief judicial magistrate, Ernakulam. The accused were declared as Proclaimed Offenders by the Court.

The fifth case was registered on the allegations that the accused induced the petitioner/complainant to arrange Rs 50 lakh as deposit and promised to give monthly returns arising out of his 'Business' to the depositors.

The complainant allegedly invested Rs 19 lakh in 2011 in the accused Company and the accused did not pay returns as well as the principal amount to the complainant.

After investigation, chargesheet was filed in the Court of Chief Judicial Magistrate, Ernakulam.

## DWARKA EXPRESSWAY COLLAPSE

# NHAI suspends key personnel of L&T, AECOM

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) on Sunday said it has suspended key personnel of developer Larsen & Toubro and supervision consultant AECOM after a portion of an under-construction elevated road on Dwarka expressway collapsed this morning.

It said the personnel were

suspended pending the outcome of investigation by an expert committee being constituted to probe the incident.

A portion of an under-construction elevated road on the Dwarka Expressway collapsed here on Sunday morning, injuring three workers.

"Authority has viewed the incident seriously and pending the outcome of the investigation by the committee, the

concerned key personnel of the Contractor M/s L&T and Supervision Consultant M/s AECOM have been suspended as per Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) of NHAI," the NHAI said in a statement.

The accident site is being secured with necessary precautions taken to prevent any further damages, the statement said.

It said: "An unfortunate

incident happened in Gurgaon wherein under erection span and adjoining span (between pier no. 107-108 and Pier No. 108-109) of under construction flyover of package-III Dwarka Expressway collapsed during the early hours of 28.03.2021 around 7:30 AM." No casualties were reported and three workers suffered minor injuries, who have been discharged from hospital after receiving

first-aid.

Earlier, a team of officials from the National Highways Authority of India, including the regional officer and the project director also visited the site.

Union Road and Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari had earlier this month visited the expressway to inspect progress of the 30-kilometre project which is being built at the cost of Rs 10,000 crore.

## Arrest BSP MLA's husband wanted in murder case or face coercive action: SC

New Delhi: Stating that "an effort is being made to shield the accused", the Supreme Court has directed the Madhya Pradesh police chief to ensure the arrest of a BSP MLA's husband, who is wanted in a two-year-old murder case of Congress leader Devendra Chourasia, before April 5 and warned him of coercive action. It directed the DGP to file a reply mentioning when and for what reason security was granted to Govind Singh, the husband of BSP MLA Rambai Singh, and whether the security is still being provided to him. A bench of justices DY Chandrachud and M R Shah termed as "unacceptable" an affidavit by the DGP in which he stated that despite the efforts which were made in pursuance of the previous order of the court on March 12, the police have not been able to apprehend and arrest the accused.

"We issue a direction to the DGP to take steps to ensure that the previous order of this court is complied with before the next date of listing, failing which the court will be constrained to take coercive steps in accordance with law", the bench said.

PTI



ITBP and CRPF personnel take pledge for safe Kumbh 2021, at Har ki Pouri in Haridwar on Sunday

## Passenger tries to open emergency door mid-flight

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A passenger onboard a New Delhi to Varanasi SpiceJet flight tried to open the emergency exit door of the aircraft mid-air on Saturday, but was restrained by the flight crew with co-passengers help till the aircraft landed safely and handed over to the police in Varanasi. The crew immediately informed the Air Traffic Controller (ATC) for a priority landing.

SpiceJet issued a statement, "On 27th March 2021, a passenger travelling on SpiceJet flight SG-2003 (Delhi-Varanasi) tried to open the emergency door of the aircraft in an abusive and aggressive state while the aircraft was airborne." The airline said that the passenger was brought under control by the flight crew with co-passengers' help.

The SpiceJet flight SG-2003 landed safely in Varanasi where the said passenger was handed over to the local police by the CISF and airline's security staff.

According to sources, the passenger was seated at 1C and was roaming around in the aircraft after take-off and suddenly tried to open the exit door.

The entire incident was reported to the aviation regulatory body Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) by the airline. The airline company is yet to decide to put the above passenger on a no-fly-list.

# Man sent to jail for not paying ₹2.6 cr arrears to estranged wife

New Delhi: The Supreme Court has sentenced a man to three months' imprisonment for contempt of court after he did not pay an outstanding of Rs 2.60 crore along with Rs 1.75 lakh monthly maintenance to his estranged wife.

The top court said the husband has already been given a long rope and he has not utilised the chances given to him to pay the maintenance to his estranged wife.

A bench of Chief Justice S A Bobde and Justices A S Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian said in a recent order, "We have already given (the respondent) a long rope. The respondent (husband) has not utilised the

chances so given. Therefore, we punish the contemnor/respondent for committing contempt of this court and sentence him to imprisonment for a period of three months in civil prison."

The top court noted that the husband has not complied with its order of February 19, giving him a last opportunity to pay the entire outstanding maintenance amount along with the monthly sum fixed earlier by the court.

On February 19, the top court had said a husband cannot abdicate the responsibility of paying maintenance to his estranged wife and gave a last opportunity to the husband, failing which he would be

imprisoned.

The man, who claimed to have been working on a project of national security in the telecom sector, had said that he had no money and sought two years' time to pay the entire amount.

The top court had said that the man has lost credibility by failing repeatedly to follow the court's order and wondered how a person with this kind of case was associated with a project of national security.

It had told the man, a Tamil Nadu resident, that "husband cannot abdicate from his responsibility to provide maintenance to his wife and it is his duty to provide the maintenance".

It had noted that the man has been directed by the trial court and the decision upheld

by the top court and the high court to pay money to his wife under two heads which include



monthly maintenance of Rs 1.75 lakh and the other is the past arrears of maintenance from 2009 which amounts to approximately Rs 2.60 crore.

The top court had said to his counsel that the husband has not complied with even a single order of courts and if he does not make the payments within two-three weeks, he will be sent to jail.

The wife had filed a case under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act before the metropolitan magistrate court in Chennai in 2009.

The court had allowed the wife to share the house until the husband made alternative

arrangements for her permanent residence.

It had directed the husband to pay Rs 2 crore as maintenance to the wife; Rs 50 lakh compensation for deserting her for 12 years; Rs 50 lakh for living in extra marital life; Rs 50 lakh for leaving his wife to face the court cases; Rs 50 lakh for forcing her to take a job in a media company; Rs 50 lakh for mental torture and agony by openly living with foreign women, and Rs 50 lakh for not paying rent to the shared household. PTI

On the appeal filed by the husband against the order, the sessions court directed him to pay Rs 1 lakh per month towards maintenance from the

date of filing the petition which is January 6, 2009 and Rs 75,000 per month for residential accommodation from the said date.

The high court upheld the order of the sessions court on December 2, 2016, after which the husband filed the appeal in the top court, which was dismissed by the top court on October 26, 2017 with a direction that within six months he would pay the maintenance and arrears.

Thereafter a review petition was filed in 2018 by the wife and the husband was directed to clear the arrears of maintenance Rs 1.75 lakh by the 10th day of every month.

PTI

# BJP accuses CPM of attacking its candidates

## KERALA POLLS

**KOCHI:** With hardly eight days to go for the April 6 Assembly election, the political landscape of Kerala has become murkier as the Congress and the BJP accusing the ruling CPI(M) of unleashing violence against their candidates and their election materials in many constituencies.

CK Padmanabhan, former BJP State president who is taking on Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan at Dharmadam in Kannur district is living in fear because of the threats issued by the CPI(M) cadre. "They destroyed the flex boards and publicity materials. My election committee office too came under attack. I don't know the reason behind the attacks though there was no provocation of any kind from our side," Padmanabhan told *The Pioneer*.

Sobha Surendran, the BJP candidate at Kazhakoottam in Thiruvananthapuram is facing the wrath of the CPI(M) cadre for challenging Katakampalli Surendran, Kerala Minister for tourism and Temple administration.

"Our candidates at Kazhakoottam, Kattakkada and Muvattupuzha are being attacked by the Marxists without any provocation. We are not surprised by the CPI(M)'s attitude because they are known for intolerance towards their rivals," said CP Radhakrishnan, former Lok Sabha member who is in charge of the party's Kerala affairs.

Radhakrishnan said that CPI(M) cadre tried to disrupt the election rally of Sobha Surendran. "They drove their bikes into the rally being led by Sobha with the sole intention of preventing the candidate from holding any rallies or campaigns. This is because they were upset over the unprecedented support Sobha is getting from the voters. The fear of losing the election is discernible among the CPI(M), particularly in their candidate Katakampalli Surendran," said the BJP leader.

The media, especially the vernacular media have been projecting the ruling Left Democratic Front led by the CPI(M) as winners in this election much against the precedence in Kerala. The ruling front used to get voted out in all elections and the opposition come to power for the next five years. Media reports forecast that the Pinarayi Vijayan led LDF Government, facing a series of graft charges, would come back to power in this election.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, Kerala saw the Congress-led UDF walking away with 19 out of the 20 seats at stake from the State. There are enough indications that the LDF is waging an electoral battle with its back to the wall as the Central Government agencies come out on a daily basis with reports of scams, corruption and nepotism

charges. The fact that Sabarimala and inclusion of more than 4.5 lakh fake voters in the electoral role are the main narrative of this election would make it difficult for the LDF to realize their dreams of retaining power," said P Rajan, veteran commentator. He said though there were attempts by the media to belittle the Sabarimala issue, it has not succeeded. The BJP and the UDF are on record telling that they would bring legislation to preserve and safeguard customs and traditions.

But Valsa Mani, editor of Kala Kaumudi, a popular newspaper, is of the view that the LDF has an edge over the UDF in this election. "It is not because of the strength of the CPI(M) but due to the failure of the Congress leadership to present a cohesive force against the LDF.

The Congress is at its lowest ebb while the BJP is yet to mature as a fighting force," said Valsa. She said the BJP's only option lies in aligning with Muslim League and projecting its leader P K Kunhalikutty as chief minister.

She does not rule out the possibility of a hung assembly too. "Things would take an interesting turn if both the fronts fail to touch the magic number of 71 on their own. Then we will see some interesting action," said Valsa.

# M4 carbine recovery at encounter sites concerns J&K security forces

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Regular recovery of US made M4 carbine from the encounter sites in Kashmir valley continue to haunt the officers of the counter terrorism grid in Jammu and Kashmir.

During the gunfight in Shopian late Saturday night another M4 carbine was recovered along with one AK-47 rifle and other ammunition.

Two categorized terrorists, one each belonging to pro-Pakistan Hizbul Mujahideen and Lashkar-e-Toiba outfit, were eliminated while one Indian army jawan sacrificed his life in the initial exchange of firing.

As per available records, it was on November 7, 2017 for the first time a US made M4 carbine was recovered from an encounter site in South Kashmir's Pulwama district.

Three Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorists including Talha Rashid, nephew of JeM Chief Maulana Masood Azhar was gunned down in the fierce gunfight alerting the security grid about the revival of JeM in the region.

The recovery of M4 carbine had also established the complicity of the Pakistan army with the terrorist outfits operating in Kashmir valley as the sophisticated weapon was procured from the US to arm soldiers of the Pakistan army.

At that point of time, one of the senior army officers of the rank of GoC, Victor Force had maintained that a consignment of 5-10 weapons could have been ferried to Kashmir valley for distribution among the terrorist cadres by the infiltrating terrorists.

In June 2020, one M4 carbine was air-dropped by a drone brought down



by the BSF in the Hiranagar sector of Kathua district. More than one dozen such weapons have been recovered from the encounter sites in the last one year. Sources in the police department claimed, in several past encounters M4 carbine has been recovered which clearly indicated terrorist handlers have been regularly smuggling these weapons via road link to the Kashmir valley.

Sharing details of the Shopian encounter a police spokesman said, "Anaytullah Sheikh son of Mohd Amin Sheikh resident of Ramnagri Shopian affiliated with proscribed terror outfit HM and Adil Ahmad Malik son of Nazir Ahmad Malik resident of Danwathpora Kokernag, affiliated with proscribed terror outfit LeT (TRF) were eliminated in the encounter while Havaladar Pinku Kumar, hailing from Baghat district of Uttar Pradesh made a supreme sacrifice during the operation.

According to a Defence Spokesman, "Havildar Pinku Kumar was part of an Operation WANGAM. At around 07:00 pm, a cordon and search operation was launched in the village and at around 08:15 pm, the terrorists fired indiscriminately on the search party. Late Havildar Pinku Kumar showed highest level of courage and valour by returning effective fire, in which he sustained a gunshot wound in head and was grievously injured. His Bleeding was controlled with combat first aid and he was immediately evacuated to 92 Base Hospital for treatment where he succumbed to his injuries on 27 March 2021".

As per police records, terrorist Anaytullah Sheikh was active since 2018 and has recently infiltrated back from Pakistan and another terrorist Adil Ahmed Malik was active since 01/09/2020. They were involved in several terror crime cases including attacks on security forces and civilian atrocities.

# Scholars call to preserve tradition of reciting Vedas

IAN S ■ BENGALURU

Nearly 100 teachers and scholars on Sunday called for preserving the hoary oral tradition of reciting the Vedas and the Shastras.

"As Vedas encompass science and knowledge, the power of chanting them takes away calamities, violence and other negative influences to create harmony and friendliness in everyone's hearts," said Art of Living's (AOL) Veda Pathshala Principal, Vishwajeet Chinamani Gokarna Ghanapathi here.

Inaugurating the second Karnataka Veda Vidvat Sammelan at AOL's international centre here, he said the oral tradition of Vedic mantras preserved the four Vedas and their branches over the centuries.

Composed in Vedic Sanskrit, the four Vedas - Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda are the oldest scriptures of Hinduism and Indian literature.

The conclave, organised by AOL's Ved Vignan Maha Vidya Peeth Trust in collaboration with the Ujjain-based Maharshi Sandipani Veda Vidya Pratishthan, discussed the ways and means to preserve the Vedic tradition through Chaturveda Prayanam.

"The Prayanam initiative is to ensure the oral Vedic tradition is not lost, as the vibrations of the chants will help increase prosperity and bring peace in society," said Ghanapathi. Maharishi Sandipani Veda Vidya Pratishthan Principal Sandipani said during the Vedic era, there were nearly 1,130 shakhas (stanzas), including 21 in Rigveda, 100 in Yajurveda, 1,000 in Samaveda and nine in Atharvaveda.

"Unfortunately, we lost the tradition of the most shakhas barring 9-10 of them... the most precious words of our heritage," he said.

The 100 Vedic scholars are from Mysuru and Bengaluru as well as Gokarna, Swarnavalli, Honnavar in the state.

# DMK does not respect women: Srinivasan

**Chennai:** All India BJP Mahila Morcha president Vanathi Srinivasan has said that the DMK does not respect women and the recent statement by its leader A Raja against Chief Minister K Palaniswami and his mother, shows his disrespect towards women.

Vanathi, the NDA candidate from Coimbatore South Assembly seat led a protest march of women party activists at Coimbatore city and condemned the DMK leaders, saying that they have always disrespected women.

The former Union Minister, Raja, has said in a public speech that while DMK leader M.K. Stalin had come the hard way up in the party, Palaniswami on the other hand touched the feet of V.K. Sasikala to become what he is today.

# Yechury prevented MNM-Left alliance in TN: Kamal Haasan

**Chennai:** Superstar-turned-politician Kamal Haasan has said that the "tough stand" taken by CPI-M General Secretary Sitaram Yechury had led to the failure of an alliance between his Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) and the Left Front.

Charging the Communist Party of India-Marxist, and Yechury in particular, with "not knowing about changing times", he said that the CPI-M General Secretary had certain pre-conceived notions on MNM and him which were wrong. Talking to a private Tamil channel, Kamal also noted that the DMK had given Rs 15 crore to the Communist Party of India, and Rs 10 crore to the CPI-M during the

2019 general elections, as per its affidavit to Election Commission, and as this became a major controversy, the Left parties claimed that the money was accepted to pay for the expenses of DMK workers in the constituencies where they were contesting as alliance partners. Reacting to Kamal's comments, CPI-M Politburo member G. Ramakrishna said that he does not know anything about left politics. Talking to IANS, Ramakrishna, who hails from the state, said: "Kamal Haasan does not understand the importance of left politics and how we work. His statement does not merit a response from me and the party."

# Bihar police headquarters seeks reports on 211 dismissed cops

**Patna:** The Bihar police headquarters has written to the superintendents of all the police districts, seeking whereabouts of the 211 dismissed cops, who were involved in illegal liquor trades across the state.

The liquor prohibition cell of Bihar dismissed 211 police personnel including constables, inspectors, sub-inspectors, home guard personnel, Bihar Special Armed Force (BSAF) and chowkidars, since the enforcement of the liquor ban in the state in April 2016.

The unit has asked SP, SSP, of all districts, commandants of home guard and BSAF to submit their reports by April 6.

"We have asked all the 43 police districts to provide details including addresses, phone numbers, present occupations of the dismissed police personnel. The reason is to ascertain whether they are living normal lives or involved in any criminal activity like smuggling of liquor," said a senior police officer.

The officer added that the initiative comes after an inspector has been recently arrested for his alleged involvement in liquor smuggling in Muzaffarpur district. He was dismissed from the service three years ago for his alleged connection with the liquor mafia, when he was the SHO of Kajra police station.

# Covid situation worsens in J&K as 309 new cases reported

**Jammu:** Covid-19 situation in Jammu and Kashmir continues to get worse as 309 new cases and four deaths were reported in the last 24 hours and the total number of active cases here on Sunday crossed the 2,000-mark.

According to the health department officials, out of 309 new cases, 63 were reported from Jammu division while 246 from Kashmir.

Out of four deaths, one was from Jammu and three from Kashmir division as the death toll reached 1,989. 117 recoveries were also

Out of four deaths, one was from Jammu and three from Kashmir division as the death toll reached 1,989

reported taking the total recoveries to 126,003.

Out of total 2,001 active cases, 513 are from Jammu and 1,488 are from Kashmir division.

# BJP's Central leadership sees victory at hustings in Puducherry

**Chennai:** The BJP's central leadership is eyeing to garner power in Puducherry as the BJP, AINRC and AIADMK alliance is sitting pretty in the Union Territory.

With several opinion polls predicting a landslide victory for the NDA coalition in the upcoming Assembly elections, the BJP's national leadership has exuded confidence that the combine will emerge victorious at the hustings.

Single phase polling to 30 seats in Puducherry is slated for April 6. The All India N.R. Congress (AINRC) is contesting 16 seats, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) 9 seats and the remaining 5 seats by All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK).

The NDA had announced N.Rangaswami, former Chief Minister and President of AINRC, as the Chief Ministerial candidate and ever since the BJP alliance has been hitting the right chord.

In the 30-member Assembly, the saffron party has hardly a member but has always been backed by 3 nominated members.

The election manifesto of the NDA alliance was released by the Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

Meanwhile, a galaxy of senior party leaders including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Minister Nitin Gadkari will be attending the electioneering in Puducherry.

Union Ministers Amit Shah and Irani are the two senior leaders who will be attending the public programmes in the UT.

Prime minister Narendra Modi will be attending the NDA public programme at 5pm on Tuesday at the Anglo-French stadium.

BJP leader in-charge of Puducherry, Nirmal Kumar Surana told IANS, "The NDA alliance is led by former Chief Minister N Rangaswamy of the AINRC and he knows the in-and-out of the state. We are leaving no stone unturned and the NDA combine is heading for a comfortable majority. With the arrival of senior national leaders of the party, the BJP campaign will gain momentum and we are in course of a huge electoral victory in this assembly elections." IANS

# 5 killed as truck rams into roadside eatery in Bihar

**Patna:** At least 5 persons were killed and 10 others injured after a speeding truck rammed into a roadside eatery in Bihar's Nalanda district on Sunday, police said.

"The incident took place at around 3 pm when a truck going towards Nalanda from Jehanabad district, rammed into an eatery, leaving 5 persons, including the owner of the shop, dead on the spot. Prime facie it appears that the driver might have lost his control over the wheels," said Shri Krishna Murari Prasad, SDPO Hilsa Nalanda.

During the mishap, over 20 persons were present at the eatery. About 5 persons were seriously injured. Police added that the toll may rise later.

The injured are being treated at private clinic and Sadar hospital. Sources, however, said that 3 more lives were lost during the treatment.

Following the mishap, locals resorted to violence, pelting stones at police team who then tried to pacify the crowd. An Assistant Sub-inspector rank officer was injured in the incident.

"We have impounded the truck and search is on for the errant driver. An FIR was registered under rash and negligence driving amounting to murder in Telhara police station. Further investigation is on," the officer added.

# Kerala couple who did not take treatment for Covid succumb to virus

**Chennai:** A Keralite couple, who did not take treatment for Covid-19 despite their deteriorating health, succumbed after finally being taken to a hospital, by their neighbours.

The couple were identified as Ravindran, 62, from Kollangode in Palakkad district and working as the public relations officer in a private company, while his wife Vandana, 56, was the Vice Principal of a private educational institution. The couple did not have any children and were living alone in their flat.

Their relatives and friends used to keep in contact over telephone but even after the couple complained of weakness and fatigue, they did not consult a doctor.

Talking to IANS, neighbour Rajesh Menon said: "After we could not see them outside the flat for a couple of days, we searched inside and found them in a critical condition. We immediately took them to the hospital but unfortunately we could not save them."

The couple tested positive for coronavirus at the hospital but could not be saved.

Their last rites were held at a crematorium on Sunday evening

# New Covid cases breach 3,000-mark in Karnataka

**Bengaluru:** Riding on the second wave, new Covid cases in Karnataka crossed the 3,000-mark after four months, increasing its positivity rate for the day to 2.89 per cent, said the state health bulletin on Sunday.

"With 3,082 new cases registered on Saturday, the state's Covid tally rose to 9,87,012, including 23,037 active cases, while 9,51,452 recovered so far, with 1,285 during the last 24 hours," said the daily bulletin.

The infection claimed 12 lives across the state during the day, including seven in Bengaluru, two in Mysuru and one each in Kalaburagi, Tumakur and Udupi.

As the epi-centre of the pandemic, Bengaluru reported 2,004 fresh cases, taking its Covid tally to 4,28,173, including 15,882 active cases, while recoveries rose to 4,07,709, with 786 discharged in the day.

Of the 204 patients in the intensive care units (ICUs), 79 are in Bengaluru hospitals, 17 in Kalaburagi, 14 in Tumakur and 10 in Mandya, with the rest spread in the remaining 27 districts across the southern state.

Out of 1,06,328 tests conducted during the day, 6,575 were through rapid antigen detection and 99,753 through RT-PCR method.

Case fatality rate was 0.38 per cent on Saturday across the state.

Meanwhile, only 3,806 people were vaccinated across the state during the day. Among them were 2,457 seniors above 60 years of age, 1,123 comorbid in the 45-59 age group, 106 healthcare workers and 120 frontline workers.

Cumulatively, 33,83,872 beneficiaries received the jab since the vaccine drive was launched across the state on January 16.

# Major fire erupts at cardiology institute in Kanpur, no injuries

**Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh):** A major fire erupted in the cardiology institute in Kanpur on Sunday morning.

Patients in the ICU were immediately evacuated. There were no reports of any casualties. The cause of the fire is also not known.

Fire tenders were rushed to the spot. The electricity supply was cut off and patients and their attendants were brought out from the stairs. Kanpur police commissioner Aseem Arun said that the fire had been brought under control. He said that prima facie, it appeared that the fire was caused by short-circuit.

The Chief Minister has taken cognizance of the incident and has directed the district officials to arrange for treatment of patients in other hospitals. He has also set up a high-level committee comprising Principal Secretary (health) and DG Fire services to probe the incident. The committee will visit the site of the incident and submit its report. The Chief Minister has further directed all hospitals and medical facilities in the state to strengthen their firefighting equipment," said Additional Chief Secretary (home) Avaniash Awasth.

# 8 TN pilgrims killed in Andhra road accident

**Amaravati:** Eight pilgrims from Tamil Nadu were killed in a road accident in Andhra Pradesh's Nellore district in the early hours of Sunday, police said.

A tempo, carrying the pilgrims, rammed into a stationary truck near a petrol bunk at Damaramadugu in Bucciredippalem mandal.

Seven others were injured in the accident and were admitted to a hospital in Nellore.

According to the police, the accident occurred around 2 a.m. when a group of people from Tamil Nadu were returning home after pilgrimage to Srisailem temple and other shrines.

Front portion of the tempo was badly mangled in the collision. Police rushed to the scene and extricated the bodies and shifted the injured to the hospital.

Tempo driver and five others seated in front seats died on the spot. Two others succumbed while being shifted to hospital.

The deceased included three women. A total of 15 people were travelling in the tempo.

Police suspect that the tempo driver might have slept at the wheel, leading to the accident. Poor visibility in the area is also believed to be the reason for the collision.

Police said they have registered a case for further investigations.

# SPO kills constable in J&K's Udhampur

**Jammu:** A special police officer (SPO) shot and killed a colleague in Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur district.

Police sources said SPO, Manohar Lal fired at selection grade constable, Kaka Ram in Udhampur market around 10.50 p.m. on Saturday with his service rifle.

"The injured policeman was shifted to hospital where he succumbed to critical injuries.

"While the exact circumstances of the incident are being investigated, preliminary inquiry suggests that there had been an altercation between the two," sources said.

SPOs are engaged in J&K to combat militancy by depleting the recruitment pools of militant outfits. They are paid a fixed monthly packet and in most cases, no weapons training is given to them

# Man in UP booked for threatening Kalyan Singh

**Farrukhabad (Uttar Pradesh):** A man has been booked for issuing death threats to former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and former Rajasthan Governor Kalyan Singh.

The accused, Gautam, had issued the threat through a video that reached former MLA Urmila Rajput, who then lodged a complaint with the police.

Police said that Rajput's husband had received the video recently.

In the video, Gautam can be seen making derogatory remarks and issuing threats to kill Kalyan Singh.

Inspector Farrukhabad Kotwali, Ved Prakash Pandey, told reporters, "Urmila Rajput filed a complaint with Farrukhabad Kotwali police demanding that an FIR be lodged and inquiry be instituted into the video clip being shared on WhatsApp showing

Gautam threatening former Rajasthan Governor Kalyan Singh."

A case has been registered against Gautam under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code including 507 (criminal intimidation) by an anonymous communication, 153 A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc. and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony), Pandey further said.

"Investigations are underway and the content of the video is also being examined. Besides, separate teams have been formed and raids are underway to arrest the accused," he added.

Rajput has also urged the state government to probe the video where 'highly derogatory remarks' have been made against Kalyan Singh.

# Man who shot UP cop arrested after encounter

**Agra:** The main accused who allegedly shot dead Sub-Inspector Prashant Yadav on March 24 in Agra's Khajauli was arrested by the Uttar Pradesh Police in the Jaipur area.

The accused was arrested after a brief encounter with the police in which he was injured. The sub-inspector was shot dead while trying to resolve a dispute between two brothers over harvesting of crops.

Superintendent of Police (city) Botre Rohan Pramod said acting on a tip-off, a police team barricaded the area in Jaipur for checking vehicles on Saturday evening.

The suspect, Vishwanath, was spotted coming towards the police team. When he was asked to stop, he whipped out a country made pistol and fired at the police party. The police returned fire and the accused was injured in both legs.

He has been admitted to a primary health centre for treatment.

The SP said that the police have seized two country made weapons and a bike from his possession.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

# Insouciance

There is no room for complacency at this stage in the ongoing fight against COVID. Please look alive

There are no regular similarities between Coronavirus and tsunami, save that both are devastating by nature and take a toll on humans. However, looking at the simile closely, one would realise that both advance in the same fashion. Tsunami, which is a wave or a ripple, travels alternating between a crest and a trough and COVID-19 also follows a somewhat similar trajectory. At one point, the number of infections reaches its peak, then drops significantly to the ebb, only to rise again and hit a new acme. The moot questions haunting us currently include: Are we heading for another peak? Will the tsunami of Coronavirus engulf all of humanity? Is there any way out of it, or are we staring at Doomsday? What about our mammoth vaccination programme and other preventive efforts? Will they prove futile? With the scientists and Governments across the globe struggling hard with the newly emerging variants and the treacherous ability of the virus to mutate, there are no easy solutions to these puzzles. However, what is more flabbergasting is that why haven't we learnt our lessons yet? We have state-of-the-art warning systems to alert us of tsunami, and people do pay heed, but all the warnings with respect to COVID-19 precautions are literally falling on deaf ears. Why we, as citizens, are failing in our duty to take the necessary precautions?



Despite all the efforts and awareness campaign undertaken by the Government for educating people about the importance of wearing masks and maintaining social distance, our insouciance is not dying. Many people, while using public transport and even otherwise, can be seen brazenly flouting the rules, such as "Do gaj ki doori, mask hai zaroori" (maintaining the distance of two yards and wearing the mask is important)". Especially in the Metro trains, many people can be seen standing or sitting next to each other without the required spacing, besides not wearing a mask. Protocols like mask-wearing and social distancing have literally been thrown out of the window. While the United Nations has lauded our efforts and expressed gratitude to India for its gift of COVID-19 vaccines to the UN peacekeepers, saying that the donation will help the Blue Helmets to continue their life-saving endeavours, the nation should within be ashamed by how its own people are behaving. There are incidences of people engaging in fights with civil volunteers and municipal employees who have been deployed to keep a check on the violations. We cannot afford to drop our guard at this moment when the vaccination drive is on in full swing. Seeing the size of our population, we need to amp it up but we must keep in mind that getting the job is no panacea in itself. We still need to take full precautions as there is no substitute for it. Fighting the pandemic is our duty and we have no right to endanger our life or the lives of others. Not everyone can render extraordinary service to the nation but, let's remember, small efforts collectively go a long way, too. We all must consider ourselves warriors in that sense.

## PICTALK



People celebrate Holi at Sri Bankey Bihari temple in Vrindavan

# CAA doubts in Assam not really unfounded



PRAFULL GORADIA

Unless one has lived in or frequently travelled to Assam, it is difficult to understand what nightmares the Ahomiyas have when they think of infiltration

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act brings nightmares to the Assamese people for fear of further arrival of Bengali-speaking people from Bangladesh. The immigrants may be legal but the dilution of the local culture and the threat to the political voice of the Assamese would be about the same, regardless of how good the newcomers may be.

Before offering the remedy, two points need to be made. One, the Assamese, whether *adivasis* or more especially the modernised Assamese, are dead scared of being outnumbered by the Bengali-speaking people, whether Hindu or Muslim. Merely assuring people that protecting their culture is as much the Centre's concern as securing the culture of the entire country, would not satisfy them.

Unless one has lived in or frequently travelled to Assam, it is difficult to appreciate what nightmares the Assamese have when they think of infiltration, whether legal or otherwise. They are a gentle people with a soft, peace-loving nature. They have their own festivals. They were gifted by nature with plenty of land and even more water and rivers. They do not have to work stupendously hard for survival. The climate is mostly warm and humid; it does not make itself congenial for hard work. They are not competitive by nature and, understandably, shudder at the fear of this ethos being disturbed by the outsiders.

Believe it not, until two decades ago, it was popular impression that the Congress' strategy for winning elections in Assam was "Ali, Coolie and Bengali". Coolie implied the tea garden workers and their families. Ali and Bengali are self-explanatory; they are mostly people who had over the years immigrated to Assam. Even the tea garden workers were *adivasis* brought from Jharkhand and other neighbouring areas to plant and pluck the bushes. To this day, it is difficult to find an original Assamese who is a plucker in a tea garden. In sum and substance, the Congress depended on the



settlers from "outside" to win a majority vote.

In 1947, MA Jinnah nearly convinced the British rulers that Assam was a Muslim-majority province and, therefore, should go to Pakistan. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in his book *Eastern Pakistan*, stated that the tribals were not only not Hindus but also unfit for civilised life. The generally vague conclusion of the sympathisers for Pakistan was that Eastern Bengal and Assam should be combined into one province. Similar was the case made under the first partition of Bengal by Viceroy Lord Curzon in 1905. Fortunately, it was undone by 1911. Lord Pethic Lawrence, the Secretary of State for India in the Richard Clement Atlee Government of 1945-49, also swallowed this theory about an amalgamation of the two.

The deception was almost done when Gopinath Bordolai, an Assam Congress leader, rushed out to persuade those in the positions of power and influence that the Jinnah contention was untrue. As a result, Assam was saved for India except for Sylhet district, which had a Muslim majority. Why wonder then that the Assamese are afraid of allow-

ing illegal migrants to settle down there? Incidentally, until 1874, Assam was a part of the Bengal Presidency. It was then separated and placed under the rule of a Chief Commissioner. To make Assam a viable separate province, three Bengali-speaking districts of the Presidency, namely, Goalpara, Sylhet and Cachar, were merged into the new province. That is how Assam began to host Bengalis as well as Muslims. The going of Sylhet to East Pakistan in 1947 relieved this pressure to an extent.

Assam, however, can ill afford to host more immigrants; the Assamese population is so small. The recent Citizenship (Amendment) Act is a major irritant for them, especially since what was discovered in 1979. Some young men discovered in the electoral rolls of the Mangaldai Assembly constituency that many a voter was an obvious infiltrator. In order to spread the protest and try and stop such distortion of the electoral rolls of the State, the All Assam Students Union (AASU) was formed. Some members also went on to establish the Assam Ganatantra Parishad (AGP), a major political party. A few

members took to terrorism under the name of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA).

The solution to a potentially very serious national problem would lie in making the Cachar region a separate Union Territory having no special political connection with Assam. Cachar has a population of nearly 40 lakh people, of whom a little over half are Hindu. Under two per cent are Christian and the rest are Muslims. More or less, all speak and write Bengali. Its economy is viable, especially with the help of over 100 tea gardens which produce five crore kilograms, worth around ₹800 crore, annually.

That would separate about 16 per cent of Assam's total population and virtually all of them are Bengali, whether Muslim or Hindu, a great relief to the Assamese. This is a surefire way to bring happiness to the Assamese people after at least a century. In any case, the Cacharis would be pleased at being demi-independent, with Silchar becoming a mini *rajdhani*.

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



BELIEVE IT NOT, UNTIL TWO DECADES AGO, IT WAS POPULAR IMPRESSION THAT THE CONGRESS' STRATEGY FOR WINNING ELECTIONS IN ASSAM WAS 'ALI, COOLIE AND BENGALI'. COOLIE IMPLIED THE TEA GARDEN WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES. ALI AND BENGALI ARE SELF-EXPLANATORY

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### MODERNISE THE RAILWAYS

Sir — The recent incident like the grounding of a huge container ship in the Suez Canal exposes the weaknesses of the maritime system. High-velocity winds have been blamed for the container ship blocking the narrow strait that connects the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Maritime transport carries over 90 per cent of global merchandise trade, digitalising the sector would bring wide-ranging economic benefits and contribute to strengthening the sector.

In the recent years, the global maritime industry has embarked on an intensive journey of digital transformation. Associated with this has been the extensive embracement of ship automation. Further, there is the technological developments linked to the design and development of unmanned vessels. Also, there is a need to strengthen the railway network in India, particularly the safety standards. Ships carrying cargo and other items should also be protected from sea robbers and pirates. All the countries must reach an agreement and come up with a comprehensive solution with respect to it.

Similarly, the Indian Railways is the lifeblood of the country's economy, moving people and goods at affordable prices every day. The Indian Railways employees value their jobs. And they are understandably worried about what privatisation would entail. The Government must not privatise it. The Government must try to modernise the railways without privatising it. However, it can choose to work on a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model.

P Senthil | Mumbai

### DON'T DROP THE GUARD AGAINST CORONA

Sir — As the fears of a second wave of Coronavirus continue to loom over Maharashtra, the Government has said that a night curfew would be imposed across the State starting March 28. The situation has arisen because the people were careless and not following the rule of social distancing, nor wearing the masks properly. Maharashtra recorded 36,902 Coronavirus

## US sees China as archrival



This refers to the editorial 'Democracy vs S' (March 27). Washington suffered from a leadership crisis since the COVID pandemic invaded our lives and if a super power is facing internal issues, then its contemporaries would take over. China has been eyeing to reach the pinnacle of the hierarchy of global superpower, but even the Dragon's misadventures in Ladakh, South China sea, Xinjiang province have backfired. By setting a narrative across the world that COVID-

19 was a 'China virus', the US unanimously made Beijing the scapegoat and worsened its relations with multiple partners like Vietnam, Australia, Japan and even India to an extent.

The US has been vocal about China's alleged illegal crackdown in Taiwan and Hong Kong where protests have been taking place to restore democracy. Sensing an opportunity when Indo-China border conflict took place, the US opened the doors of Quad alliance and involved the major players in the Indo-Pacific including Australia and Japan to counter China in its own den.

Washington realises that to reclaim its superpower hegemony in this post-pandemic world order, strategic and diplomatic ties are necessary to counter the Dragon's advances amid trade war but India needs to be wary in such circumstances and should avoid becoming a collateral damage to the US-China power warfare. New Delhi must set its priorities right and should keep its interest at the forefront. It should not end serving the US interest at its cost. On the other hand, it's not easy to alienate China, which has a significant say in the world trade.

Nischai Vats | Sultanpur

infections on Friday, the highest one-day rise since the pandemic began, along with 112 deaths.

The cases have spiked across several States in since late February, following a near-full reopening of the economy and flouting of safety measures. On the other hand, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan has said that night curfew and weekend lockdowns won't have much effect on Coronavirus transmission but public health measures, such as the vaccination drive, could slow India's second COVID wave. We must understand that wearing masks and maintaining social distancing are essential to keep Coronavirus at bay.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

### VACCINATION IS NOT SURESHOT REMEDY

Sir — The efficacy rate of different vaccines notwithstanding, the immunity conferred

may not last very long, which in other words means that those who have been administered the vaccines could still be vulnerable to COVID-19. Even if the vaccination drive is increased manifold, it would take years to vaccinate the entire population.

Therefore, vaccines are not foolproof and even a little bit of laxity on the part of those vaccinated will render them vulnerable again. So, a second course may be a must after every year until 70 per cent of the population is inoculated. For now, the Government has to accelerate the vaccination drive. In places such as Mumbai, the younger generation, which moves about a lot, should be vaccinated *en masse* to contain the spread.

Nitesh Mandwariya | Neemuch

## SOUND BITE

The Congress has gone to the people with a vow to fulfil its 'five guarantees' which will be a gamechanger for the future of Assam and its people.



Congress leader — Mallikarjun Kharge



We order the vaccines, also pay for them, but before importation we are told that the manufacturers are still afraid of the US sanctions.

Iranian President — Hassan Rouhani

Unfortunately, I have tested positive for COVID-19. All those who have come in contact with me in the last 10 days are requested to please get themselves tested.



Actor — Pareswari Rawal



Personally, I would like to start better. I would like to improve on how I have been starting, bowling with the new ball.

Cricketer — Prashid Krishna

The year was the most challenging year for Railways. One year of lockdown. COVID-19 has demonstrated the resolve of the Railways to fight back and emerge stronger.



Railways Minister — Piyush Goyal

## The real sufferers

COVID-19 may be a universal tormentor but hapless women and kids within the walls are its collateral

The second wave of the Coronavirus pandemic is surging in India, thanks to our utter disregard for the established COVID-19 protocols. The number of cases has touched 11,908,910, with 4,52,612 active infections and the number of deaths touching 1,61,275. States like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Goa and Andhra Pradesh are seeing a major spike in infections. The situation is obviously quite serious as the new strains are more virulent. Even though at the moment a hard, nationwide lockdown is not being mulled, the Government might have to opt for a countrywide shutdown. Already, local lockdowns are being announced in various districts in the States hit by the second wave. However, India cannot afford another lockdown. For one, the economy cannot withstand another such shock. Besides, thousands of women and children across India cannot be forced to stay captive inside their homes once again and be subjected to physical, emotional and mental abuse by their family members. It is a cruel fact that the first lockdown witnessed a silent pandemic of domestic violence (DV) as there was a surge



in gender-based violence in homes as family dynamics changed and so did the economic situation.

Not only did women have to juggle household chores and manage their office work and teach fretful children cooped up at home, they had to bear the brunt of the anger and frustration bottled up inside the main bread-earners of the family who had to either face a major salary cut, go on a sabbatical or, worse, lose their job. Many men, already habitual of beating up their wives, got more time and opportunity to do so. By the second month of the lockdown, complaints about domestic abuse doubled and rose from 116 in the first week of March to 257 in the final week. According to official data, the National Commission for Women (NCW) registered an increase of 2.5 times in complaints of domestic violence in April last year. The NCW received 1,477 complaints between 25 March and 31 May. Not just women, children were also subjected to abuse by family members. The phenomenon was witnessed across the world, but that is no consolation for helpless women and terrified children trapped for days on end with their tormentors. At least for the sake of the abused women and children, we need to be more responsible this time around. So sanitise, mask up and get that jab. Do your bit to help the helpless, India!



## FIRST COLUMN

## WISDOM CANNOT BE TAUGHT

Knowing that a tomato is really a fruit is knowledge but realising that you can't put it in a fruit salad is wisdom



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

In life, we are all faced with issues of decision-making. William Shakespeare captured it well through the character of Hamlet who wondered, "To be or not to be, is the question." However, all issues of decision-making are not always centred around a fundamental dilemma. There are any number of situations which require decision-making on a daily basis. The truth is that except for involuntary actions like breathing or digestion, everything requires an application of the mind. How much of that is conscious and logical is a matter of knowledge, information and judgement. There are many situations where decision-making is almost a reflex action because there is no time to reflect upon a situation, gather all the necessary information and then come to a calculated decision. Even if that were to happen, there are risks. In an era where it is common to talk of risks of COVID-19, there are contradictory views. However, around us life goes on as usual for a large majority of people. The amount of construction which is going on is almost a standing advertisement that nothing has changed for those who cannot afford a change.



Construction sites have toddlers as usual and men and women are carrying building material as if nothing has changed. In daily life decision-making on the spur of the moment is the law. Long-range considerations are a matter of luxury, both of time and the ability to take a long-range view. Along with the decision process there is also a concurrent process of conflict that may arise out of opposing positions. A conflict may be on substantive reasons or simply a matter of perception or values. What is not often recognised is that differences may be mutually exclusive or indeed inclusive. The core of conflict remains a process of incompatibility. Put in a gross manner a conflict emerges when two pieces of matter try to concurrently occupy the same space. Mutual accommodation is the only solution. However, getting the parties to agree to a resolution through fair and equitable decision-making is the route to a solution. At times inconsequential matters can cause huge conflict and even beginning to seek a resolution is seen as a win-loss situation. Resolving conflict in many cases is a matter of preference rather than the hard reality. The moralist very often sees this as a banter between evil and good.

The dialectical materialist sees conflict rooted in needs and material existence. Yet, at another level needs themselves can be beyond discussion. The farmer needing water to grow his crop is a need beyond discussion. However there, the quantum and timing of availability of water can become a huge source of decision-making. This may take the form of a conflict. A resolution of these seemingly intractable issues lies in realising that the act of survival itself requires coexistence. Different points of view at times need not be mutually exclusive. The wise among the species realise that differences between people can be real and legitimate and need not necessarily verge on attempts at mutual elimination. The act of living makes it necessary to come to terms with differences and work together. There are yet more aspects to the processes of decision-making and conflict. A bigger challenge arises in recognising a conflict when it is realised that the desired goal can only go to one person. Clearly there are many shades of conflict and conflict-resolution and coexistence, too. A tricky situation arises when both parties see the other person's legitimate claim to the ideal solution but are at loggerheads on the process. Both parents may wish the child to grow up well and yet have differences on which school to send him/her to. There is no substitute for maturity and wisdom. Knowing that a tomato is a fruit is information but realising that you can't put tomato in a fruit salad is wisdom. Wisdom comes from within. It cannot be taught. (The writer is an internationally-acclaimed management consultant. The views expressed are personal.)

## Decoding denialism of terror in Pakistan

Irrational conspiracy theories, fake media experts, selective facts and straw-man arguments are part and parcel of the dangerous moral panic that can destroy societies such as ours



NADEEM PARACHA

On November 12, 2009, *The New York Times* (TNYT) ran a video report on its website. In it, the reporter Adam B Ellick interviewed some Pakistani pop stars to gauge how lifestyle liberals were being affected by the spectre of so-called "Talibanisation" in Pakistan. To his surprise, almost every single pop artiste that he managed to engage, refused to believe that there were men willing to blow themselves up in public in the name of faith. It wasn't an outright denial, as such, but the interviewed pop acts went to great lengths to "prove" that the attacks were being carried out at the behest of the US, and that those who were being called "terrorists" were simply fighting for their rights. Ellick's surprise was understandable. Between 2007 and 2009, hundreds of people had already been killed in Pakistan by suicide bombers.

But it wasn't just these "confused" lifestyle liberals who chose to look elsewhere for answers when the answer was right in front of them. Unregulated talk shows on TV news channels were constantly providing space to men who would spin the most ludicrous narratives that presented the terrorists as "misunderstood brothers."

From 2007 till 2014, terrorist attacks and assassinations were a daily occurrence. Security personnel, politicians, men, women and children were slaughtered. Within hours, the cacophony of inarticulate noises on the electronic media would drown out these tragedies. The bottom-line of almost every such "debate" was always, "Ye hum mein se nahin" (these terrorists are not from among us)." In fact, there was also a song released with this as its title and "message."

The perpetrators of the attacks were turned into intangible, invisible entities, like characters of urban myths that belong to a different realm. The fact was that they were very much among us, for all to see, even though most Pakistanis chose not to. Just before the 2013 elections, the website of an English daily ran a poll on the foremost problems facing Pakistan. The poll mentioned unemployment, corruption, inflation and street crimes, but there was no mention of terrorism even though, by 2013, thousands had been killed in terrorist attacks.

So how does one explain this curious refusal to acknowledge a terrifying reality that was operating in plain sight? In an August 3, 2018 essay for *The Guardian*, Keith Kahn-Harris writes that individual self-deception becomes a problem when it turns into "public dogma." It then becomes what is called "denialism."

The American science journalist and author Michael Specter, in his book *Denialism*, explains it to mean an entire segment of society, when struggling with trauma, turning away from reality in favour of a more comfortable lie. Psychologists have often explained denial as a coping mechanism that humans use in times of stress. But they also warn that if denial establishes itself as a constant disposition in an individual or society, it starts to inhibit the ability to resolve the source of the stress.

"Denialism", as a social condition, is understood by sociologists as an undeclared "ism", adhered to by certain segments of a society



JUST BEFORE THE 2013 ELECTIONS, THE WEBSITE OF AN ENGLISH DAILY RAN A POLL ON THE FOREMOST PROBLEMS FACING PAKISTAN. THE POLL MENTIONED UNEMPLOYMENT, CORRUPTION, INFLATION AND STREET CRIMES, BUT THERE WAS NO MENTION OF TERRORISM EVEN THOUGH, BY 2013, THOUSANDS HAD BEEN KILLED IN TERRORIST ATTACKS

The writer is a journalist, author, cultural critic, satirist and historian. The views expressed are personal. Courtesy: Dawn



whose rhetoric and actions in this context can impact a country's political, social and even economic fortunes.

In the January 2009 issue of the *European Journal of Public Health*, Pascal Diethelm and Martin McKee write that the "denialism" process employs five main characteristics. Even though Diethelm and McKee were more focused on the emergence of "denialism" in the face of evidence in scientific fields of research, I will paraphrase four out of the five stated characteristics to explore "denialism" in the context of extremist violence in Pakistan from 2007 till 2017.

The first characteristic is the identification of conspiracies. When the overwhelming body of evidence points to a truth, it is argued that this is not the truth because those presenting the evidence have engaged in a complex conspiracy.

The deniers have their own interpretation of the same evidence. In early 2013, when a study showed that 1,652 people had been killed in 2012 alone in Pakistan because of terrorism, an "analyst" on a news channel falsely claimed that these figures included those killed during street crimes and revenge murders. Another gentleman insisted that

the figures were concocted by foreign-funded NGOs "to give Pakistan and Islam a bad name."

This brings us to "denialisms" second characteristic: The use of fake experts. These are individuals who purport to be experts in a particular area but whose views are entirely inconsistent with established knowledge. During the peak years of terrorist activity in the country, self-appointed political experts and religious scholars were a common sight on TV channels.

Their "expert opinions" were heavily tilted towards presenting the terrorists as either "misunderstood brothers" or people fighting to impose a truly Islamic system in Pakistan. Many such "experts" suddenly vanished from TV screens after the intensification of the military operation against militants in 2015. Some were even booked for hate speech.

The third characteristic is about selectivity, drawing on isolated opinions or highlighting flaws in the weakest opinions to discredit entire facts. In October 2012, when extremists attempted to assassinate a teenage school girl, Malala Yousafzai, a sympathiser of the extremists on TV justified the assassination attempt by mentioning "similar incidents" that he discovered in some

obscure books of religious traditions. Within months Malala became the villain, even among some of the most educated Pakistanis. When the nuclear physicist and intellectual Dr Pervez Hoodbhoy exhibited his disgust over this, he was not only accused of being "anti-Islam", but his credibility as a scientist, too, was questioned.

The fourth characteristic is about misrepresenting the opposing argument to make it easier to refute. For example, when terrorists were wreaking havoc in Pakistan, the arguments of those seeking to investigate the issue beyond conspiracy theories and unabashed apologies, were deliberately misconstrued as being criticisms of religious faith.

Today we are seeing all this returning. But this time, "experts" are appearing on TV pointing out conspiracies and twisting facts about the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccines. They are also offering their expert opinions on events such as the *Aurat* march (women's march) and, in the process, whipping up a dangerous moral panic.

It seems, not much was learned by society's collective disposition during the peak years of terrorism and how it delayed a timely response that might have saved hundreds of innocent lives.

## POINT COUNTERPOINT

THE DISCREPANCIES IN THE VOTER TURNOUT RAISE A QUESTION ON THE GENUINENESS OF THE DATA ISSUED BY THE EC.  
— TMC MP  
DEREK O'BRIEN



THE TRINAMOOL CONGRESS IS LOSING, WHICH IS WHY THEY ARE COMING UP WITH FALSE NARRATIVES.  
— WEST BENGAL BJP PRESIDENT  
DILIP GHOSH

## Dragon's threat real or imagined, but nuclear war will be a folly!

After a prolonged absence, the tradition of raising a bogey is back, though now it's a Chinese threat in the Pacific, not a Russian threat in the Caribbean

In the early decades of the Cold War, this was the season when the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) defence chiefs would announce their spending plans for the next year and they would almost always "discover" some new threat from the erstwhile Soviet Union to justify the money. In the US, for instance, the Intelligence services traditionally found a Soviet armoured brigade hiding in Cuba every February or March.

After a prolonged absence, the tradition is back, though now it's a Chinese threat in the Pacific rather than a Russian threat in the Caribbean. Last week, Admiral Philip Davidson of the US Navy told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the Chinese were getting ready to invade Taiwan with-



GWYNNE DYER

Gwynne Dyer's new book is 'Growing Pains: The Future of Democracy and Work'. The views expressed are personal.

in the next six years. "I worry that they're accelerating their ambitions to supplant the US and our leadership role in the rules-based international order...by 2050," said the Admiral. "Taiwan is one of their ambitions before that, and I think the threat is manifest during this decade — in fact, in the next six years."

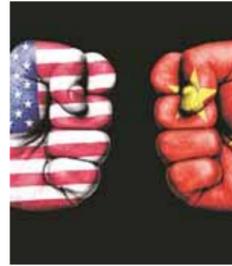
Then, should we expect a war with China by the 2027? Since the US Navy could not stop a Chinese amphibious invasion of Taiwan by conventional weapons alone — it's too far from the US, too close to China and Beijing has lots of ship-killing missiles — it would necessarily be a nuclear war, or else America would just have to abandon its not-quite-ally.

Of course, Admiral Davidson didn't go into those awkward details. He was just

trying to frighten the senators into giving the Navy more ships. And he couldn't hold a candle to General Lord Richards, former head of the British armed forces, who went to bat at the weekend to argue against cuts to the British army (down 10,000 soldiers to only 72,000).

"I'm thinking Russia and China," said General Richards. "I don't necessarily buy that they're about to start World War-III with us, but they still possess large numbers. If all we've got is high-tech stuff, and they've got half a million troops that can come across the border at you, then high-tech capabilities aren't going to be of much good."

But what border is that? Russia's western border is almost 2,000 km away and Britain is an island. The nearest Chinese territory is



some 3,500 km away. But then the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson shuts Richard by explaining that soldiers won't matter so much because the UK is getting more nuclear weapons. Johnson is cancelling Britain's pledge to possess no more than 180 nuclear weapons (enough for every city of over a million people in both Russia and China) and raising its declared limit

by 40 per cent to 260 warheads. The UK will also "reserve the right" to use nuclear weapons against unspecified "emerging technologies" that are not necessarily nuclear, including "cyber-threats."

Davidson and Richards are just reviving a traditional spring ritual and treating the public like fools. We're sliding into a new Cold War, and this is what is expected of them by the institutions they have devoted their lives to. The British Prime Minister is both foolish and careless, but he is not planning to drop actual thermonuclear bombs on several hundred million human beings.

Johnson just doesn't understand that declaring his willingness to use nukes first against a non-nuclear threat — or sounding like

that's what he means — is a profound breach with the doctrine of nuclear deterrence that has kept great-power war at bay for three-quarters of a century. It sounds all right to him!

By the final stage of the Cold War the political and military establishments on both sides had sobered up and were very careful in their choice of words. They didn't make idle threats, they stopped fabricating "spring surprises", and they did not assume that the other side would know when they were just chest-thumping for domestic political purposes.

That generation, which eventually managed to turn the monstrous doomsday machine off, is gone now. In their place is a generation of senior politicians and military officers who don't truly fear major war. It hasn't hap-

pened within living memory, and they do not really believe it still could. Their counterparts in China and Russia are less vocal, but almost certainly the same.

Compared to those who held their jobs on both sides at the end of the Cold War, they are little boys at play, but it's the same old game. War between nuclear-armed powers would be insane, but it is not impossible. And they are doing this in the midst of a global pandemic.

Moreover, they are talking like this in the opening phase of a huge climate and environmental crisis that will require a high level of global cooperation to survive. There is a cycle of learning and forgetting again in both military and political affairs and we are hitting the "forgetting" phase at just the wrong time.

# Myanmar protests continue after killings

PTI ■ YANGON (MYANMAR)

Protesters in Myanmar returned to the streets Sunday to press their demands for a return to democracy, just a day after security forces killed more than 100 people in the bloodiest day since last month's military coup.

Protests were held in Yangon and Mandalay, the country's two biggest cities, as well as elsewhere. Some of the demonstrations were again met with police force.

At least 114 people were killed Saturday as security forces cracked down on protests against the February 1 coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government, according to the online news service Myanmar Now. The reported fatalities included several children under 16 years old.

Similar tallies of the death toll were issued by other Myanmar media and researchers, far exceeding the previous highest death toll on March 14. The number of killings since the coup is now more than 420, according to multiple counts.

The coup reversed years of progress toward democracy after five decades of military rule and has again made Myanmar the focus of international scrutiny.

The Saturday killings by police and soldiers took place throughout the country as Myanmar's military celebrated the annual Armed Forces Day holiday with a parade in the country's capital, Naypyitaw.



Anti-coup protesters run around their makeshift barricade they burn to make defense line during a demonstration in Yangon, Myanmar, on Sunday

The bloodshed quickly drew international condemnation, both from diplomatic missions within Myanmar and from abroad.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was shocked by the killings of civilians, including children.

"The continuing military crackdown is unacceptable and demands a firm, unified & resolute international response," he wrote on Twitter.

In the United States, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a tweet that his country was "horrified by the bloodshed perpetrated by Burmese security forces, showing that the junta will sacrifice the lives of the people to serve the few."

The military chiefs of 12

nations issued a joint statement condemning the use of force against unarmed people.

"A professional military follows international standards for conduct and is responsible for protecting — not harming — the people it serves," it said. "We urge the Myanmar Armed Forces to cease violence and work to restore respect and credibility with the people of Myanmar that it has lost through its actions."

The statement was issued by the defence chiefs of Australia, Canada, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand, South Korea, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The human rights group Amnesty International revived

criticism that the international community was not doing enough to end the state violence in Myanmar.

"UN Security Council member states' continued refusal to meaningfully act against this never-ending horror is contemptible," said Ming Yu Hah, the organisation's deputy regional director for campaigns.

The Security Council has condemned the violence but not advocated concerted action against the junta, such as a ban on selling it arms.

China and Russia are both major arms suppliers to Myanmar's military as well as politically sympathetic, and as members of the council would almost certainly veto any such move.

# Suicide bomb hits Palm Sunday Mass in Indonesia, 14 wounded

PTI ■ MAKASSAR (INDONESIA)

Two attackers blew themselves up outside a packed Roman Catholic cathedral during a Palm Sunday Mass on Indonesia's Sulawesi island, wounding at least 14 people, police said.

A video obtained by The Associated Press showed body parts scattered near a burning motorbike at the gates of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Cathedral in Makassar, the capital of South Sulawesi province.

Rev. Wilhelmus Tulak, a priest at the church, said he had just finished celebrating Palm Sunday Mass when a loud bang shocked his congregation. He said the blast went off at about 10:30 am as a first batch of churchgoers was walking out of the church and another group was coming in.

He said security guards at the church were suspicious of two men on a motorcycle who wanted to enter the building and when they went to confront them, one of the men detonated his explosives.

Police later said both attackers were killed instantly and evidence collected at the scene indicated one of the two was a woman. The wounded included four guards and several churchgoers, police said.

The attack a week before Easter in the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation came as the country was on high alert following December's arrest of the leader

of the Southeast Asian militant group, Jemaah Islamiyah, which has been designated a terror group by many nations.

Indonesia has been battling militants since bombings on the resort island of Bali in 2002 killed 202 people, mostly foreign tourists. Attacks aimed at foreigners have been largely replaced in recent years by smaller, less deadly strikes targeting the government, police and anti-terrorism forces and people militants consider as infidels.

President Joko Widodo condemned Sunday's attack and said it has nothing to do with any religion as all religions would not tolerate any kind of terrorism. "I call on people to remain calm while worshipping because the state guarantees you can worship without fear," Widodo said in a televised address.

He offered his prayers to those injured and said the government would cover all costs of medical treatment. He said he had ordered the national police chief to investigate the attack and crack down on any militant network that may be involved.

At the end of Palm Sunday Mass in St Peter's Basilica, which opened Holy Week ceremonies at the Vatican, Pope Francis invited prayers for the victims of violence.

He cited in particular "those of the attack that took place this morning in Indonesia, in front of the

Cathedral of Makassar".

Indonesia's National Police spokesperson Argo Yuwono told a news conference in the capital, Jakarta, that police were still trying to identify the two attackers on the motorbike and whether they were linked to a local affiliate of the banned Jemaah Islamiyah network or were acting independently.

Indonesian forces in December arrested the group's leader Aris Sumarsono, also known as Zulkarnaen. Over the past month the country's counterterrorism squad has arrested about 64 suspects, including 19 in Makassar, following a tipoff about possible attacks against police and places of worship.

While Jemaah Islamiyah has been weakened over the past decade by a sustained crackdown, in recent years a new threat has emerged in militants who fought with the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria and returned to Indonesia or those inspired by the group's attacks abroad.

Indonesia's last major attack was in May 2018, when two families carried out a series of suicide bombings on churches in the second-largest city of Surabaya, killing a dozen people including two young girls whose parents had involved them in one of the attacks.

Police said the father was the leader of a local affiliate of the Islamic State group known as Jemaah Anshorut Daulah.

# Pak PM Imran Khan greets Hindus on Holi



PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Sunday greeted the Hindu community on the occasion of Holi.

The festival is being celebrated in Pakistan on Sunday and Monday.

"Wishing all our Hindu community a very happy Holi, the festival of colours," the prime minister tweeted.

Several other leaders, including National Assembly Speaker Asad Qaiser, also wished the Hindu parliamentarians and the community at large on their special occasion.

"This festival of light and colours provides an opportunity to spread happiness," he said, praising the role of the Hindu community in the upliftment of Pakistan.

Qaiser said all minority communities have the right to openly celebrate their religious festivals in Pakistan.

Hindus form the biggest minority community in Pakistan. According to official estimates, 75 lakh Hindus live in Pakistan.

# Coronavirus variants from Brazil, South Africa are less susceptible to antibodies, says study

PTI ■ BERLIN

Variant forms of the novel coronavirus which were first reported in South Africa and Brazil are less efficiently inhibited by antibodies from recovered patients and vaccinated individuals, a new study confirms.

According to the research, published in the journal Cell, recovery from COVID-19 as well as vaccination may offer only incomplete protection against these mutant virus forms.

"This is worrisome because the rapid spread of variants that might not be efficiently inhibited by antibodies could undermine our current vaccination strategy," said Stefan Pohlmann, a co-author of the study from the German Primate Center in Göttingen.

These virus variants have mutations in the spike protein -- the structure on the surface of the virus that is responsible for attachment to host cells -- the researchers said.

In order for the virus to enter a cell, they said it must first attach to the host cell surface using its spike protein, which is located on the viral envelope.

The spike protein is also the target for antibody therapies and vaccines aimed at preventing the virus from replicating in the body, they researchers added.

Based on the research, the scientists said an antibody used for COVID-19 therapy did not inhibit the South African and Brazilian coronavirus variants -- B.1.351 and P.1.

"Moreover, these variants were less well inhibited by antibodies from convalescent or vaccinated individuals, they partially bypassed the neutralising effect of the antibodies," said Jan Munch, another co-author of the study.

The study noted that vaccination or recovery from COVID-19 may offer reduced protection from SARS-CoV-2 variants B.1.351 and P.1.

"Our findings show that it is important to limit the spread of the virus as much as possible until widespread vaccination is feasible. Otherwise, we risk the emergence of new variants that cannot be effectively controlled by the currently available vaccines," said Markus Hoffmann, first author of the study.

# Mexico's real Covid-19 death toll now stands at over 321,000

AP ■ MEXICO CITY

Mexico's Government acknowledged Saturday that the country's true death toll from the coronavirus pandemic now stands above 321,000, almost 60 per cent more than the official test-confirmed number of 201,429.

Mexico does little testing, and because hospitals were overwhelmed, many Mexicans died at home without getting a test. The only way to get a clear picture is to review "excess deaths" and review death certificates.

On Saturday, the government quietly published such a report, which found there were 294,287 deaths linked to COVID-19 from the start of the pandemic through Feb 14. Since Feb. 15 there have been an additional 26,772 test-confirmed deaths.

The higher toll would rival that of Brazil, which currently has the world's second-highest number of deaths after the United States. But Mexico's population of 126 million is far smaller than either of those countries.

The new report also confirms just how deadly Mexico's

second wave in January was. As of the end of December, excess death estimates suggested a total of about 220,000 deaths related to COVID-19 in Mexico. That number jumped by around 75,000 in just a month and a half.

Also suggestive were the overall number of "excess deaths" since the pandemic began, around 417,000. Excess deaths are determined by comparing the deaths in a given year to those that would be expected based on data from previous years.

A review of death certificates found about 70.5% of the excess deaths were COVID-19 related, often because it was listed on the certificates as a suspected or contributing cause of death. But some experts say COVID-19 may have contributed to many of the other excess deaths because many people couldn't get treatment for other diseases because hospitals were overwhelmed.

Former President Felipe Calderon wrote in his Twitter account Saturday that "more than 400,000 Mexicans have died, above the average for previous years ... Probably the highest figure in the world."

# New York lawmakers agree to legalise recreational marijuana

AP ■ NEW YORK

Lawmakers reached an agreement late Saturday to legalise recreational marijuana sales in New York.

At least 14 other states already allow residents to buy marijuana for recreational and not just medical use, and New York's past efforts to pass marijuana have failed in recent years.

Democrats who now wield a veto-proof majority in the state Legislature have made passing it a priority this year, and Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo's administration has estimated legalization could eventually bring the state about USD 350 million annually.

"My goal in carrying this legislation has always been to end the racially disparate enforcement of marijuana prohibition that has taken such a toll on communities of colour across our state, and to use the economic windfall of legalisation to help heal and repair those same communities," Sen. Liz Krueger, Senate sponsor of the bill and chair of the Senate's finance committee, said.

The legislation would allow recreational marijuana sales to adults over the age of 21, and set up a licensing process for the delivery of cannabis products to

customers. Individual New Yorkers could grow up to three mature and three immature plants for personal consumption, and local governments could opt out of retail sales.

The legislation would take effect immediately if passed, though sales wouldn't start immediately as New York sets up rules and a proposed cannabis board.

Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes estimated Friday it could take 18 months to two years for sales to start.

Adam Goers, a vice president of Columbia Care, a New York medical marijuana provider that's interested in getting into the recreational market, said New York's proposed system would "ensure newcomers have a crack at the marketplace" alongside the state's existing medical marijuana providers.

"There's a big pie in which a lot of different folks are going to be able to be a part of it," Goers said. New York would set a 9 per cent sales tax on cannabis, plus an additional 4 per cent tax split between the county and local government.

It would also impose an additional tax based on the level of THC, the active ingredient in marijuana, ranging from 0.5 cents per milligram for flower to 3 cents per mil-

ligram for edibles.

New York would eliminate penalties for possession of less than three ounces of cannabis, and automatically expunge records of people with past convictions for marijuana-related offenses that would no longer be criminalised.

That's a step beyond a 2019 law that expunged many past convictions for marijuana possession and reduced the penalty for possessing small amounts.

And New York would provide loans, grants and incubator programme to encourage participation in the cannabis industry by people from minority communities, as well as small farmers, women and disabled veterans.

Proponents have said the move could create thousands of jobs and begin to address the racial injustice of a decades-long drug war that disproportionately targeted minority and poor communities.

"Police, prosecutors, child services and ICE have used criminalisation as a weapon against them, and the impact this bill will have on the lives of our oversurveilled clients cannot be overstated," Alice Frontier, managing director of Neighbourhood Defender Service of Harlem, said

# Expelled from US at night, migrant families weigh next steps

AP ■ REYNOSA (MEXICO)

In one of Mexico's most notorious cities for organised crime, migrants are expelled from the United States throughout the night, exhausted from the journey, disillusioned about not getting a chance to seek asylum and at a crossroads about where to go next.

Marisela Ramirez, who was returned to Reynosa about 4 a.m. Thursday, brought her 14-year-old son and left five other children -- one only 8 months old -- in Guatemala because she couldn't afford to pay smugglers more money. Now, facing another agonizing choice, she leaned toward sending her son across the border alone to settle with a sister in Missouri, aware that the United States is allowing unaccompanied children to pursue asylum.

"We're in God's hands," Ramirez, 30, said in a barren park with dying grass and a large gazebo in the center that serves as shelter for migrants. Lesdny Suyapa Castillo, 35, said through tears that she would return to Honduras with her 8-year-old daughter, who

lay under the gazebo breathing heavily with her eyes partly open and flies circling her face. After not getting paid for three months' work as a nurse in Honduras during the pandemic, she wants steady work in the U.S. To send an older daughter to medical school. A friend in New York encouraged her to try again.

"I would love to go, but a mother doesn't want to see her child in this condition," she said after being dropped in Reynosa at 10 p.m.

The decisions unfold amid what Border Patrol officials say is an extraordinarily high 30-day average of 5,000 daily encounters with migrants. Children traveling alone are allowed to remain in the U.S. To pursue asylum while nearly all single adults are expelled to Mexico under pandemic-era rules that deny them a chance to seek humanitarian protection.

Families with children younger than 7 are being allowed to remain in the U.S. To pursue asylum, according to a Border Patrol official speaking to reporters Friday on condition of anonymity. Others in families -- only 300 out of 2,200 on Thursday -- are

expelled.

Reynosa, a city of 700,000 people, is where many migrants are returned after being expelled from Texas' Rio Grande Valley, the busiest corridor for illegal crossings. The Border Patrol has said the vast majority of migrants are expelled to Mexico after less than two hours in the United States to limit the spread of COVID-19, which means many arrive when it's dark.

In normal times, migrants are returned to Mexico under bilateral agreements that limit deportations to daytime hours and the largest crossings. But under pandemic authority, Mexicans and citizens of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras can be expelled to Mexico throughout the night and in smaller towns.

Border Patrol Chief Rodney Scott acknowledged in an interview last year that agreements limiting hours and locations for deportations are suspended "on paper" but said U.S. Authorities try to accommodate wishes of Mexican officials. The U.S. Also coordinates with nongovernmental organisations.

# Police in Belarus capital arrest more than 100 protesters

AP ■ KYIV

Police in the capital of Belarus arrested more than 100 people who assembled for a protest march Saturday to call for the resignation of the country's authoritarian president.

The planned event in Minsk indicated that supporters of the political opposition seek to revive the wave of mass protests that gripped Belarus for months last year but were dormant during the winter.

During the first sizable anti-government protests of 2021, more than 200 people were detained Thursday.

At least five journalists were among those arrested; it was not immediately clear what charges they could face, but some journalists arrested while covering last year's protests were sentenced to two years in prison.

Protests broke out in August after a disputed election that gave President Alexander Lukashenko a sixth term in office.

Lukashenko, who has been characterized as Europe's last dictator, has strongly repressed opposition and independent news media during 26 years in power.

The post-election protests were the largest and most persistent show of opposition the former Soviet republic has seen in that time, with some of them attracting as many as 200,000 people.

# 2 tugboats speed to Egypt's Suez Canal as shippers avoid it

AP ■ SUEZ (EGYPT)

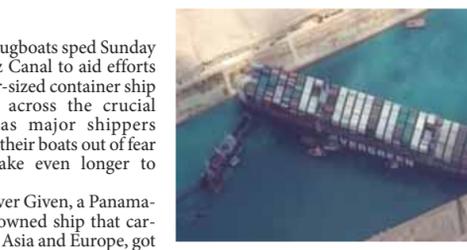
Two additional tugboats sped Sunday to Egypt's Suez Canal to aid efforts to free a skyscraper-sized container ship wedged for days across the crucial waterway, even as major shippers increasingly divert their boats out of fear the vessel may take even longer to free.

The massive Ever Given, a Panama-flagged, Japanese-owned ship that carries cargo between Asia and Europe, got stuck Tuesday in a single-lane stretch of the canal.

In the time since, authorities have been unable to remove the vessel and traffic through the canal -- valued at over USD 9 billion a day -- has been halted, further disrupting a global shipping network already strained by the coronavirus pandemic.

The Dutch-flagged Alp Guard and the Italian-flagged Carlo Magno, called in to help tugboats already there, reached the Red Sea near the city of Suez early Sunday, satellite data from MarineTraffic.Com showed. The tugboats will nudge the 400-meter-long (quarter-mile-long) Ever Given as dredgers continue to vacuum up sand from underneath the vessel and mud caked to its port side, said Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement, which manages the Ever Given.

Workers planned to make two attempts Sunday to free the vessel coin-



Ciding with high tides, a top pilot with the canal authority said.

"Sunday is very critical," the pilot said. "It will determine the next step, which highly likely involves at least the partial offloading of the vessel."

Taking containers off the ship likely would add even more days to the canal's closure, something authorities have been desperately trying to avoid. It also would require a crane and other equipment that have yet to arrive.

The pilot spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity as he wasn't authorised to brief journalists.

On Saturday, the head of the Suez Canal Authority told journalists that strong winds were "not the only cause" for the Ever Given running aground, appearing to push back against conflicting assessments offered by others. Lt. Gen. Osama Rabea said an investigation was ongoing but did not rule out human or technical error.

# 1 dead, six injured in stabbing attack at Canadian library

AP ■ VANCOUVER (BRITISH COLUMBIA)

A man went on a stabbing spree inside and around a library, killing one woman and injuring six other people in North Vancouver, British Columbia, authorities said.

Sgt Frank Jang of the Integrated Homicide Investigation Team said a suspect was in custody. He said the man is in his 20s and has had interactions with police in the past. Jang said officials didn't have any information yet about a motive.

One witness, Steve Mossop, said he and his partner stopped in traffic when they saw a bloodied woman who told them she had just been stabbed. They then saw several victims within about 100 meters of each other, he said.

"There was a man, there was an older woman, there was a younger woman, a mom -- a random group of individuals in the wrong place at the wrong time," Mossop said.

"It seemed like he was just running in a direction, whoever was in his path happened to be victimized," Mossop said of the attacker.

# ANNUAL CLOSURE OF GOVT ACCOUNTS ON MAR 31 Banks to conduct special clearing operations: RBI

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Banks will conduct special clearing operations for annual closure of government accounts on March 31, which is the last day of the current fiscal year, the RBI has said.

The Reserve Bank has issued directions to the banks for smooth clearing operation and asked them to mandatorily participate in it.

With regard to annual closing of accounts related transactions of the central and state governments, special measures are put in place for 2020-21, the RBI has instructed all the member banks to maintain sufficient balance in their clearing settlement account.

Normal clearing timings as applicable to any working Wednesday shall be followed on March 31, 2021, the RBI said in a notification addressed to the member banks, urban and state cooperative banks, payments banks, small finance banks as well as the NPCI.

To facilitate accounting of all the government transactions for the current financial year 2020-21 by March 31, 2021, it has been decided to conduct special clearing exclusively for government cheques across the three CTS grids on March 31, 2021, the RBI said.

Under this, presentation



clearing will take place between 1700 to 1730 hrs and return clearing will take place between 1900 and 1930 hrs at the three CTS (cheque truncation system) grids located in New Delhi, Chennai and Mumbai.

"It is mandatory for all banks to participate in the special clearing operations on March 31, 2021. All the member banks under the respective CTS grids are required to keep their inward clearing processing infrastructure open during the special clearing hours and maintain sufficient balance in their clearing settlement account to meet settlement obligations arising out of the special clearing," said the regulator. Besides, it has asked the banks under the respective CTS grids to adhere to the instructions issued to them by the President of the respective CTS grid.

Under the CTS system, there is no need to present a cheque physically for clearance, instead an electronic image is being transmitted to the paying branch through the

clearing house, with the relevant data. This eliminates the cost of movement of the physical cheques and reduces time for collection and clearance of cheques.

All government transactions done by agency banks for 2020-21 must be accounted for within the same financial year, the RBI said.

The central bank said all agency banks should keep their designated branches open for over the counter transactions related to government transactions up to the normal working hours on March 31, 2021.

"Transactions through National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT) and Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) System will continue up to 2400 hours as hitherto on March 31, 2021. "Special clearing will be conducted for collection of government cheques on March 31, 2021 for which the Department of Payment and Settlement Systems (DPSS), RBI will issue necessary instructions," it said.

With regard to reporting of and state government transactions to RBI, including uploading of GST/e-receipts luggage files, the reporting window of March 31, 2021 will be extended and kept open till 1200 hours on April 1, 2021, the RBI said.

# TRAI writes to key Ministries, associations, NIC, others on new norms for bulk SMS

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

TRAI has written to key ministries, associations like COAI and Nasscom and nodal agencies like NIC in a massive information outreach as it pulls out all stops to ensure smooth implementation of its new regulations on bulk messages after March 31.

Sources in the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) said NIC has assured the regulator that it is in a state of readiness to assist government organisations and agencies, and resolve any issues, as new rules for commercial messages come into force.

The National Informatics Centre (NIC) provides technology support to governance services.

The regulator has written to key stakeholders across sectors informing them at length about the rules, and urging them to advise entities and organisations under their jurisdiction to "strictly comply with the new regulatory requirement without further delay".

As part of this outreach program, TRAI also sounded out industry associations CII, FICCI, ASSOCHAM, Nasscom and COAI, urging them to inform their member organisations about new regulatory requirements, the sources said.

TRAI has also written to entities such as NIC, CDAC as well as all government organisations that are availing benefits of concessional SMSes.



This is in addition to outreach to key central ministries, and chief secretaries of states on the issue.

TRAI's new regulatory requirement for commercial messages, based on blockchain technology, aims to curb unsolicited and fraudulent messages.

The norms require bonafide entities sending commercial text messages to register message headers and templates with telecom operators.

The SMSes and OTPs, when sent by user entities (banks, payment companies and others), are checked against the templates registered on the blockchain platform -- a process called SMS scrubbing.

The allotment of header, registration of template, and various others checks and balances would allow the verification of identity and purpose of communication by genuine entities.

Earlier this month, however, transactions, including banking, credit card payment and certain other services that involve SMSes and OTP generation, had faced a major out-

age when telcos implemented the TRAI norms without the balancing measures in place by principal entities (which send out bonafide bulk, commercial messages).

Following the disruption, TRAI had given a temporary breather to such companies, but had insisted that they take immediate measures to comply with the norms.

The telecom regulator, this Friday, released a list of 40 "defaulter" principal entities, including large banks like HDFC Bank, State Bank of India and ICICI Bank, that were not fulfilling its regulatory norms on bulk commercial messages, despite repeated reminders.

Toughening its stance on the issue, TRAI warned that defaulting entities should comply with the stipulated requirements by March 31, 2021 "to avoid any disruption in the communication with customers" from April 1, 2021.

"As sufficient opportunity has been given to principal entities/ telemarketers to comply with the regulatory requirements and that the consumers cannot be deprived of the benefits of the regulatory provisions any further, therefore it has been decided that from April 1, 2021, any message failing in the scrubbing process due to non-compliance of regulatory requirements will be rejected" by the system, TRAI had said in a statement recently.

# 7 of top 10 companies lose over ₹1 lakh crore in m-cap

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Seven of the 10 most valued domestic companies witnessed a combined erosion of Rs 1,07,566.64 crore from their market valuation last week, with Reliance Industries accounting for around half of the losses.

Last week, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 849.74 points or 1.70 per cent.

Only Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Hindustan Unilever Limited and HDFC from the top-10 list saw a rise in their market capitalisation.

The valuation of index major Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) tumbled Rs 55,565.21 crore to reach Rs 12,642.43.20 crore.

The market capitalisation of Bajaj Finance plunged Rs 16,197.55 crore to Rs 3,12,327.04 crore and that of State Bank of India (SBI) went lower by Rs 12,494.45 crore to Rs 3,18,697.88 crore.

Kotak Mahindra Bank's valuation dipped Rs 11,681.66 crore to Rs 3,51,272.18 crore and that of ICICI Bank declined Rs 5,467.63 crore to Rs 4,00,093.61 crore.

The market capitalisation of Infosys tumbled Rs 3,751.92



crore to Rs 5,69,352.11 crore. HDFC Bank's valuation eroded by Rs 2,408.22 crore to reach Rs 8,22,616.51 crore.

In contrast, Tata Consultancy Services added Rs 1,812.54 crore to take its valuation to Rs 11,34,924.45 crore.

Hindustan Unilever's valuation climbed Rs 364.19 crore to Rs 5,43,924.22 crore and that of HDFC rose Rs 62.77 crore to Rs 4,56,741.20 crore.

In the ranking of top-10 most valued firms, Reliance Industries ruled the chart, followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, Infosys, Hindustan Unilever, HDFC, ICICI Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, SBI and Bajaj Finance.

# Coal India likely to post marginal production degrowth in FY21

PTI ■ KOLKATA

World's largest miner Coal India is likely to post marginal contraction of its output for the year 2020-21 by 5-6 million tonne in 2020-21 as its production will be below the 600 million mark, sources said on Sunday.

In 2019-20, the miner produced 602 million tonne down from 606.9 million in 2018-19 when it registered its highest production.

It will be the second year in a row when the miner will register degrowth. The miner had projected a 660 million tonne production target and by mid-year the company had been expecting to attain 630-640 million tonne of output.

Officials attributed Covid-19 disruptions as the key factor behind lower demand resulting in a stockpile building up, compelling the mining giant to moderate output.

"Till March 27, the production was 585 million tonne and 11 million tonne is expected to be added in the remain-



ing days of the month.

So, total production could be between 596- 597 million tonne," sources told PTI.

Offtake for the year is expected to be around 577 million tonne.

Inventory with Coal India stood at around 77.8 million tonne as of February-end, up from 66.8 million tonne at the end of January 2021.

Domestic power plants are well stocked with coal supplies. Coal stocks at power plants stood at 31.9 million tonne at the end of February, enough to last 17 days. This has resulted in a fall in coal offtake for the third straight month. Coal offtake fell by 7 per cent year on year during February 2021.

# Amid surge in Covid-19 cases, RBI likely to maintain status quo: Experts

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Amid uncertainty created by surge in coronavirus cases, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is likely to maintain status quo at its next monetary policy review and wait for some more time before taking any action to spur growth.

The RBI is slated to announce its first bi-monthly monetary policy of the 2021-22 fiscal on April 7, 2021 after a three-day meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) headed by RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das. On February 5, after the last MPC meet, the central bank had kept the key interest rate (repo) unchanged citing inflationary concerns.

According to experts, the RBI is likely to continue with the accommodative monetary policy stance and wait for an opportune time to announce monetary action with a view to ensure the best possible outcome in terms of pushing growth without sacrificing the main objective of containing inflation.

In a report, Dun & Bradstreet said the recent surge in the COVID-19 cases and the

restrictions imposed by several states will impose further uncertainty and hurdles to the pace of revival of industrial production.

Dun & Bradstreet Global Chief Economist Arun Singh said long-term yields are hardening, leading to rise in borrowing costs.

"In this context, the Reserve Bank of India faces the difficult task of managing the inflationary pressures while preventing a rise in the borrowing cost.

"Despite the rising inflationary pressures, we expect the RBI to keep the policy repo rate unchanged in the forthcoming monetary policy review in view of the uncertainty posed by the sharp rise in COVID-19 cases," he said.

When asked about his expectations from the next MPC, ANAROCK Property Consultants Chairman Anuj Puri said that with consumer inflation fluctuating and not yet stable and the policy repo rate also being substantially reduced by 115 basis points since February 2020, the RBI may consider keeping the rates on hold.

"It is likely to keep an eye

on how the inflation and the economic recovery pans out in the coming months amid the rising COVID-19 cases in the country.

"India is witnessing a second wave with partial lockdowns being imposed across different states and cities. In such a scenario, it is only likely that the RBI will maintain status quo," he said.

Moreover, Puri added that even while the real estate industry's perennial hope is fixed on lower interest rates, the prevailing lowest-best home loan rates starting as low as 6.70 per cent are enticing enough for homebuyers. In a recent report, UBS Securities India economist Tanvee Gupta Jain expected the RBI to maintain comfortable liquidity in the near term to ensure least disruption to the government's borrowing programme and support the economic recovery at a time when COVID-19 cases are resurging in India.

"We continue to expect the central bank to pursue policy normalisation in the second half of FY22 to keep inflationary pressures contained and preserve financial stability," Jain said.

# Cairn to file lawsuits to pierce corporate veil, seize PSU assets to enforce \$1.2 bn arbitration award

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

UK's Cairn Energy Plc plans to bring lawsuits in the US and other countries to pierce the corporate veil between the Indian government and its owned companies such as in oil and gas, shipping, airline and banking sectors, to seize their overseas assets to recover USD 1.2 billion ordered by an international arbitration tribunal.

The firm has moved courts in the US, UK, Canada, France, Singapore, the Netherlands and three other countries to register the December 2020 arbitration tribunal ruling that overturned the Indian government's Rs 10,247 crore demand in back taxes and ordered New Delhi to return USD 1.2 billion in value of shares it had sold, dividends seized and tax refunds withheld to recover the tax demand.

With the government so far refusing to honour the arbitration award and instead choosing to challenge it, Cairn is looking to enforce it by seizing overseas Indian assets, Dennis Hranitzky, head of the sovereign litigation practice at Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, a law firm representing the company, told PTI.

These assets can poten-

tially be non-diplomatic ones and those owned by entities or companies controlled by the Indian government in those nine countries.

"Cairn plans to bring lawsuits in the coming weeks to pierce the corporate veil to establish that (certain) state-owned entities are India's alter ego under Bancec" for enforcing the arbitration award, he said.

The Bancec guidelines deal with determining when a judgment against a foreign state is enforceable against its agencies.

The lawsuit will be similar to the one brought by Crystallex International Corp to attach property of Petroleos de Venezuela, S.A (PDVSA), the state-owned oil company of Venezuela, in Delaware couple of years back after the Latin American country failed to pay the firm USD 1.2 billion that an arbitration tribunal had ordered to pay in lieu of the 2011 seizing gold deposits held and developed by the firm.

"Indian assets across several jurisdictions have been identified that Cairn will be seeking to seize to enforce the award," he said, refusing to name the assets the firm may be looking to attach to recov-

er the USD 1.2 billion plus interest and cost that the arbitration tribunal had ordered.

"Until we have commenced proceedings to seize the assets, this information is proprietary," he said.

Cairn is pulling out all stops to recover the damages award, including hiring a team of asset recovery experts.

Sources said the assets that can be attached could range from airplanes to ships, to oil and gas cargoes and bank accounts of state-owned entities.

"Cairn is moving forward with its enforcement plans with all deliberate speed. The timetable for proceedings to seize assets varies from country to country. Under the laws of some countries, these proceedings can begin right away, whereas in others we will have to wait until after the award is recognised," he said without giving details.

Cairn had previously said the money ultimately belongs to its shareholders -- which include large investors such as BlackRock, Fidelity and Franklin Templeton, and the ramifications of India not honouring the award will "run across the international investment community more widely".

# Govt unlikely to continue with zero coupon bond route to recap PSU banks

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government is unlikely to take zero-coupon bond route to further recapitalise public sector banks after the Reserve Bank expressed some concerns in this regard, sources said.

The government, they said, would resort back to recapitalisation bonds bearing a coupon rate for capital infusion in these banks.

To save interest burden and ease the fiscal pressure, the government last year decided to issue zero-coupon bonds for meeting the capital needs of the banks.

The first test case of the new mechanism was a capital infusion of Rs 5,500 crore into Punjab and Sind Bank by issuing zero-coupon bonds of six different maturities last year. These special securities with tenure of 10-15 years are non-interest bearing and valued at par.

However, the RBI raised some concerns with regard to calculation of an effective capital infusion made in any bank through this instrument issued at par, sources said.

Since such bonds usually are non-interest bearing but issued at a deep discount to the face value, it is difficult to

**To save interest burden and ease the fiscal pressure, the government last year decided to issue zero-coupon bonds for meeting the capital needs of the banks**

ascertain net present value, they added.

As a result, sources said, it has been concluded to do away with zero-coupon bond for recapitalisation.

These special bonds are non-interest bearing and issued at par to a bank, they said adding that it would be an investment that would not earn any return and rather depreciate with each passing year.

This innovative mechanism was adopted to ease the financial burden as the government has already spent Rs 22,086.54 crore as interest payment towards the recapitalisation bonds for PSBs in the last two financial years.

During FY 2018-19, the government paid Rs 5,800.55 crore as interest on such bonds issued to public sector banks for pumping in the capital so that they could meet the regulatory norms under the Basel-III guidelines.

In the subsequent year, according to the official document, the interest payment by the government surged three times to Rs 16,285.99 crore to PSBs as they have been holding these papers.

For the current financial year, interest payment for recap bonds have been reduced to Rs 19,292.77 crore from Rs 25,239.4 crore pegged in the Budget estimate.

Under this mechanism, the government issues recapitalisation bonds to a public sector bank which needs capital. The said bank subscribes to the paper against which the government receives the money. Now, the money received goes as equity capital of the bank.

So the government doesn't have to pay anything from its pocket. However, the money invested by banks in recapitalisation bonds is classified as an investment which earns them an interest.

In all, the government has issued about Rs 2.5 lakh crore recapitalisation in the last three financial years. In the first year, the government issued Rs 80,000 crore recapitalisation bonds, followed by Rs 1.06 lakh crore in 2018-19. During the last financial year, the capital infusion through bonds was Rs 65,443 crore.

# IRFC mop up ₹ 1,375 crore from domestic market at 6.8%

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC), the dedicated financing arm of the Indian Railways, on Friday, raised Rs 1,375 crore through issuance of domestic bonds.

The fund has been raised at 6.80 percent coupon rate with 20-year maturity, which is about 18 basis points lower than the benchmark par yield Government security as per yesterday's close in CCIL. This is one of the rare occasions when a top-rated government issuer has pierced the sovereign curve in the domestic market with such a huge margin. This shows the confidence reposed by the large debt investors in the country for IRFC papers scotching the speculations in certain quarters about rising cost and heightened risk perception post IPO and dilution of Government stake.

"The bond issuance received a very good response from the investors comprising long term / ultra-long-term investors including primarily the provident funds. The issue was oversubscribed by six times as compared to the base issue size of Rs 500

crore," said a company statement.

The company has decided to retain a sum of Rs.1375 crore, based on the borrowing target mandated by the ministry of Railways for the current fiscal, it further said.

With the current issuance, the cumulative fund raising through 20-year bond issuance in the domestic capital market during the current fiscal has touched around Rs.13,970 Crore. The corporate bonds in the domestic market are liquid for tenor up to 10 years. Such large issuances by IRFC has deepened the corporate bond market for long / ultra-long tenors and has set a new benchmark yield curve for pricing similar issuances in the future.

IRFC has been playing a critical role in the growth, expansion and modernization of Indian Railways.

The company was assigned an annual borrowing target in excess of Rs. 1 trillion during the current fiscal. The CAGR of yearly disbursements by IRFC to Indian Railways over the last 6 years has logged a level of around 45.70%.

The annual borrowing target has been successfully

met through borrowing from diversified sources both from domestic and overseas market including highest single year external commercial borrowings of around USD 4.08 billion. The external commercial borrowings include USD 750 Million overseas bond issuances for a tenor of 10 years in the Reg-S / 144A format under the Company's Global Medium Term Note Programme (GMTN) and borrowing of USD 3 Billion through foreign currency loan from a leading public sector bank for tenor ranging from 7 to 10 years. The 10 year USD 750 Million bond issuance got overwhelming response with oversubscription by almost 4 times. Despite the fact that the Company's bond issuances are not eligible for inclusion in the EMBI Index post IPO, it managed to get the tightest pricing possible of 2.80% (167.5 bps over 10 year UST).

The pricing obtained by IRFC is a departure from the usual market convention of premium over the secondary market yield. Bonds issued by IRFC were priced at 7 to 10 bps lower than its secondary market yields of its own listed papers.

# Cochin Shipyard's shipbuilding facility in WB to be operational by June '21



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Public sector Cochin Shipyard is expected to operationalise a Rs 170 crore modern shipbuilding facility that it is building in West Bengal by June 2021.

The state-owned company, under the administrative control of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, recently emerged as the lowest bidder for a Rs 10,000-crore contract by the Indian Navy to build next generation missile vessels.

Cochin Shipyard Limited, through its wholly-owned subsidiary Hooghly Cochin Shipyard Limited (HCSL), is currently setting up a modern shipbuilding facility at Nazrungle, West Bengal at an estimated project cost of Rs 169.76 crore, as per a document of the Ministry of Shipping.

"The facility is expected to be operationalised in the first quarter of the financial year 2021-22," the document said.

HCSL targets to construct various types of vessels like Ro-Ro vessels, river-sea cargo vessels for bulk, liquids, containers, passenger vessels and other watercraft for the inland waterways.

Cochin Shipyard has also commissioned a new marine engineering training institute "Vigyana Sagar", which was dedicated to the nation by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 14, 2021.

The company recently inked a pact with Dredging Corporation and IHC Holland BV to locally build world-class dredgers in India.

Currently, India depends on foreign dredgers for dredging work worth about Rs 2,000 crore per annum.



**Bollywood**  
 'I want to emphasize the fact that the notion of limitations is in the mind.'  
 —Vidyut Jammwal

https://www.dailypioneer.com/vivacity/

# UNITED COLOURS OF HOLI

From pyre ashes, *gula* and flowers to *lathmar*, here are some ways people celebrate the festival. By TEAM VIVA

They say, cultural and religious diversity is the very essence of India. And hence, the term: Unity in diversity. It also somewhere reflects in the way various regions of the country celebrate Holi. Cities, villages and tribal communities across the country engage in the festivities each with its own peculiarity. On the occasion, let's check out some different ways people play the festival.

**SHIMGA OR RANGPANCHAMI**  
 Usually, at this time bright colours fill the air. Holi is celebrated with much pomp and splendour in Maharashtra. Lasting for five days to a week, this festival of colours is popularly known as *Shimga or Rangpanchami*. The tribals such as Andh, Arakh, Gond, Kathodi, Bhaniya, Dhodia constitute 8.61 per cent of the population. Even though they are a marginal community, they are deeply-rooted in their heritage and culture and have retained many of their native customs. The traditions and customs of every tribe are different from each other but the significance of Holi is paramount for all the tribes. The festival lasts from the full moon to the new moon in some areas and until the next full moon in others. The festival has many unique facets. For some groups, it is associated with the worship of nature and for others, with fertility or agriculture or prosperity or



forging new relationships.

**LATHMAR HOLI**

It takes place days before the actual Holi in the neighbouring towns of Barsana and Nandgaon near Mathura in Uttar Pradesh. But what is this tradition where women beat men with sticks during this peculiar celebration? Well, according to a legend, it's because Lord Krishna used to visit his beloved Radha's town, Barsana. Krishna teased Radha and her friends, who were offended by his advances and drove him out of Barsana. And that is why men of Nandgaon visit Barsana every year and are greeted by women hurling sticks (aka *lathi*) at them. They try to protect themselves but those who fail are captured by these women who then dress them in female apparel and make them dance in public. The festivities take place at the Radha Rani temple in Barsana, which is said to be the only temple in the country that is dedicated to Radha.

**PHOOLON WALI HOLI**

On *Ekadashi*, prior to the festival, the Banke Bihari temple at



Vrindavan celebrates the festival where only flowers are used and hence, the name *Phoolon Wali Holi*. The ambience, filled with fragrance and flowers, takes you to a different world altogether.

**HOLA MOHALLA**

The Guru Granth Sahib contains passages prescribing the celebration of Holi by serving god. The colours of the festival are manifest in the lord's love. As Holi starts with *Holika Dahan* on the full moon night of *Phagan* or *Phalgun*, it is referred to as the festival of *Phalgun* even though the actual day of Holi falls on the first day of the lunar month of *Chett*. Shri



Guru Gobind Singh Ji added a martial element to this celebration by creating *Hola Mohalla* which falls a day after Holi. Paying tribute to the mettle and valour of the Sikh men, it is celebrated as an event that exhibits martial arts, stunts, and mock fights followed by the usual tradition of playing with colours. According to Guru Gobind Singh's court poet Bhai Nand Lal, colours were thrown by the participants after completion of the mock battles. Rosewater, amber, musk and saffron-coloured water was used.

**DOL JATRA OR BASANT UTSAV**

Holi is celebrated as *Basant*

*Utsav* or *Dol Jatra* in West Bengal. It welcomes the blooming season with great enthusiasm and happiness. Women here dress mainly in yellow, which signifies abundance. There are recitals of Rabindranath Tagore's poetry as well as traditional song and dance programmes. The day after Holi is celebrated as *Dol Jatra*. On this day, a grand procession of Lord Krishna is taken through the streets of Bengal accompanied by singing and dancing revellers.

**PYRE ASHES**

Did you know that people also celebrate the festival with pyre ashes? Well, devotees of Lord Shiva at Manikarnika Ghat in Varanasi revel in the festivities by picking ashes from cremation grounds. Although it may sound strange but this tradition, known as *chita-bhasma* Holi, has been observed for many centuries. It is celebrated in the hope of attaining *moksh* (salvation). One festival and so many diverse ways to celebrate it... However, what is common is the spirit of joy which remains intact everywhere.

**WEBBED**



**AJEEB DAASTAANS**

Four shorts explore the surprising ways in which unexpected catalysts inflame the uncomfortable emotions simmering under fractured relationships. Starring Fatima Sana Shaikh, Jaideep Ahlawat and Armaan Ralhan, it releases on Netflix on April 16.



**THE REAL HOUSEWIVES OF BEVERLY HILLS**

The hit reality franchise takes up residence in Beverly Hills, where well-heeled frenemies fight, drink and primp their way to maximum drama. Starring Lisa Vanderpump, Kyle Richards and Kim Richards, it releases on Netflix on April 15.



**THE SERPENT**

In the 1970s, merciless killer Charles Sobhraj preys on travellers exploring the 'hippie trail' of South Asia. Based on shocking true events. Starring Tahar Rahim, Jenna Coleman and Billy Howle, it releases on Netflix on April 2.

## 'I am proud'

PRIYANKA CHOPRA JONAS says that awards like the Oscars and Baftas are amazing but not the reason why she picks projects

Actor-producer Priyanka Chopra Jonas is understandably on cloud nine with *The White Tiger* making an impact in the awards circuit this season. The film, co-starring and executive-produced by Priyanka, is in contention for an Oscar and two BAFTAs.

"It means a lot to me, I am so proud of the whole team. We believed in the story collectively and, importantly, the story needed to be translated into a film that would connect with a wider audience," Priyanka says.

At the forthcoming Oscars, *The White Tiger*, based on Arvind Adiga's book of the same name, has a nomination in the Best Adapted Screenplay category for writer-director Ramin Bahrani. At the BAFTAs, actor Adarsh Gourav is nominated alongside Anthony Hopkins and the late Chadwick Boseman, among others, in the Leading Actor category, while Bahrani is in the race for a Best Adapted Screenplay trophy.

As soon as nominations for sundry awards ceremonies were announced this year, a section of social media began comparing it with Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire*, which belongs to the same genre as Bahrani's film. Boyle's film won eight Oscars and six BAFTAs in 2009, and turned its lead duo Dev Patel and Freida Pinto into overnight global stars.

At 38, Priyanka had achieved international fame long before she got down with making and acting in *The White Tiger*. Her lead actor Adarsh Gourav stands to gain tremendously of course, if he manages to score a win at the BAFTAs, though that could be a challenge in a year when the late Boseman has been winning hearts with his role in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*.

While the nominations are an honour, Priyanka says her involvement with the project is not necessarily about the awards.

"We had already done the hard work by the time the awards rolled by, so I don't think it affected my role as an actor or producer in any way for this film. For me, as an actor and a producer, the audience has always been my end goal. Nominations and wins — especially awards like the Oscars and Baftas — are truly amazing but it's not why I pick projects," she asserts.

Priyanka lists "content stories, ones that resonate, ones that need to be told, ones that entertain a wide global audience" as her primary intent when it comes to filmmaking.

"You will never be true to content if you make it to win at the awards," she says.

For her, the biggest boost that such nominations bring is that they push India, Indian cinema and Indian artistes towards the right direction when it comes to the conversation of inclusivity and diversity.

"I think the nominations are another step towards what we have all been working so hard for — equal opportunity and a seat at every table. We deserve it, not because of some quota that needs to be filled but because we prove every day that we can deliver what is needed. This applies to every industry and not just entertainment," she says.

"I'm just proud to be in such august company, with women (from) across the world, working hard, breaking barriers, driving innovation, every day," she signs off.

—IANS

## Let the music play

Ditch *Rang Barse* and tune into these mint fresh tracks to celebrate the festival

What's Holi without new Holi songs? Bollywood filmmakers have churned out songs about the festival of colours down the decades. This year may have seen no new film song owing to the complete shutdown of Bollywood through most of 2020, but many singers have come out with new non-film songs for Holi.

Here are a few brand-new Holi tracks for your playlist:

**Tera Suit by Tony Kakkar**

Pop singer Tony Kakkar, brother of singer Neha Kakkar, came out with an eclectic music video featuring *Bigg Boss* fame Jasmin Bhasin and Aly Goni. The song dropped on March 8 and currently has 49,569,107 views on YouTube. The best part about the peppy music video is the usage of colours and the chemistry of the two actors.

**Vilaayati Sharaab by Darshan Raval and Neeti Mohan**

The number by singers Darshan Raval and Neeti Mohan is pictured on television by Heli Daruwala and Telugu star Allu Sirish. After Rashmika Mandana, Sirish is the latest star from the South actor to feature in a Hindi single. The number has become an instant hit. Neeti calls it a proper dance and a fun number. "It was released around Holi, and we always look to, you know, dance on such kinds of songs. It was a really nice song, which took us about two months, to record and shoot for," she said.



**Rangi Sari Gulabi Chunariya by Jashan Bhumkar**

Indie singer Jashan Bhumkar has come up with a new song *Rangi Sari Gulabi Chunariya* on the occasion of Holi. The song, which was released on YouTube on March 25, currently has 1,036,752 views. It's a semi-classical composition, drawn from the *Thumri* and *Dadra*. "I have sung my own version of a very traditional and celebrated semi-classical composition, from the *Thumri/Dadra* genre," Bhumkar said.

**Holi Hain by Vipin Mishra**

National Award-winning singer Vipin Mishra, who has composed music for films like *Aurangzeb* and *Aloo Chaat*, has come out with *Holi Hain*, featuring singer Keerthi Sagathia. It is penned and composed by the Indie artiste The Vipin Mishra Project. Mishra said, "Since Holi won't be the usual due to COVID, we thought let's celebrate it with music and a groovy song echoes the spirit of Holi — of love, togetherness and fun." —IANS

## TRENDBLAZER



**SANYA DECODES WHAT PAGGLAIT MEANS**

Actor **SANYA MALHOTRA** has decoded the title of her new film *Pagglait*. She says for her person who listens to their heart and does not seek external validation is a *Pagglait*.

In the film, Sanya is Sandhya, a young woman who becomes a widow within a few months of marriage. While the family grieves, Sandhya is unable to bring herself to mourn the death of her husband.

**fairtalk**  
 PARINEETI CHOPRA



'I think Amole (Gupte) sir is an extremely effortless actor and during the shooting of *Saina*, I learnt so much of minimalism in performance. He really taught me how less is more in acting, how just by staying silent, little movements of eyes can depict how an individual is screaming from inside.'

**dailytalk**  
 AMYRA DASTUR



'I learnt rappelling while shooting the title track of their forthcoming film *Koi Jaane Na* in Panchgani. It was my first time on a para plane. I'm extremely scared of heights and flying so this truly helped me face my fears and pushed me to perform well even though I was quite scared.'

**FEEL SYMMETRY WITH LILLY: DREW**

Actor **DREW BARRYMORE** says she feels a certain symmetry with Indian-Canadian comedian **LILLY SINGH**.

"Lilly and I have the most exciting thing in common which is our love for macaroni and cheese," Barrymore said on *The Drew Barrymore Show*, while hosting Lilly as a guest.

The actress shared that she loves that they both are trying to figure out to be true to themselves.

"I really do feel a lot of symmetry with you Lilly," she said on the show.



# CLICK WITH LOVE

Here are a few tips to help you capture the colours of Holi like never before

Indian festivals make for great photo opportunities and Holi, the festival of colours is certainly one of them. While everyone should be taking extra care during the celebrations this year, there will be special moments that deserve to be captured forever in pictures. Whether it is to take a slow-motion video of you in your favourite outfit or a close-up of an intricate flower arrangement at home, you will need a good camera to make the memories last forever. Flipkart shares the following tips and tricks to help you take great-looking pictures.

**EXPLORE THE PORTRAIT MODE**  
 Portrait mode blurs the background and keeps the focus on the subject. Photos clicked with this mode look classy and professional and will definitely up your Instagram game. If you are looking for phones that offer this option, you can try the POCO M3. It is a budget-friendly option and is loaded with top-notch features like 48 MP Ultra HD Mode, Panorama Mode, Google Lens, Pro Colour and much more. Its secondary camera aka selfie camera is also equipped with best-in-class features like AI Beautify, Movie Frame, Time Lapse, and more.

**GO FOR A NATURAL LIGHT SETTING**  
 Photos taken under natural sun-



light are clearer and sharper than others. In the absence of proper lighting, photos become noisy and unclear. Using the 'flash' can sometimes affect photo quality. iPhone cameras are great for taking pictures in natural light. The iPhone 12 is equipped with Smart HDR 3 technology that automatically adjusts white balance and contrast in low light. The iPhone 11 is another option that offers Smart HDR technology. Both these products have impeccable night modes for both front and rear cameras. iPhone 12 also comes with the IP 68 water-resistant technology that can with-



stand dust, sand and even water — a perfect smartphone for Holi photography.

**SELFIES AND FRONT CAMERA PREFERENCES**

Like all pictures, the quality of selfies is determined by the sensor resolution (for detailed pictures) and camera aperture (the lower, the better). If you wish to purchase a phone that is pre-equipped with selfie modes, you can go for the realme X7 Pro 5G which comes with AI Beauty, Super Nightscape, AI Portrait and more, to help you take breathtaking selfies. If you often shake the camera while clicking selfies, go for Vivo X60 Pro. This piece of technology is built using a Gimbal module that prevents camera shakes by moving in the opposite direction.

**STAY IN FOCUS**

A good camera should be able to shift focus with a change in the subject or the position of the subject. This is where having a Quad camera becomes important. Whether you wish to take close-ups or wide-angle photos, a Quad camera enables you to cover a wide variety of subjects without worrying about the quality of photos. A great option for a Quad camera is the realme 8 Pro that offers a wide zoom range. It has a 108 MP Primary camera and will allow you to click the best angles with a razor-sharp focus. If you are a photography enthusiast, you might also want to invest in Samsung Galaxy S21. Loaded with features like 108 MP for the rear camera, 40 MP front camera and 1000x Space Zoom, etc, this phone is perfect for both indoor or outdoor photography.

**HAVE A SOLID POWER BACKUP**

If you intend to go on a picture-and-video-taking spree, it is better to have a phone with a solid power backup to get you through the day. For instance, a smartphone like the Samsung Galaxy F62, which has a 7000 mAh battery that can work for 24 hours on a single charge, should be good enough. It is a great option if you are looking for a smartphone with impeccable camera capabilities and high battery capacity.



## Establish a better world

The absence of values in education might have disastrous consequences, says RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJJI

In the last few decades, with the advancement in science and technology and with urbanisation and expansion of cities, man's capacity to do good or bad, particularly bad, has increased manifold. Under such a scenario, there is an urgent need to impart values in education, which if not done, may lead to disastrous results. This education is needed for another reason as well. Since we live in social relationships, we have both rights as well as duties and everyone has to learn to do their part and to respect the rights of others; then only we can have a just society. These rights and duties are actually interwoven with values. Hence, values in education become essential to establish a better world. The state, in defending the rights of its members, can enforce certain duties through legislation and can make possible the realisation of certain rights. But it cannot deal effectively with the motives and attitudes of a person nor is it able to enforce finer qualities such as mutual helpfulness, cooperation and sympathy. That can be done only through teaching values.

Again, in the modern world, because of the increasing complexity of society, life has become a network of secondary and institutionalised groups and specialised professionals. This has produced inconsistency between what a man professes and what he does. On one hand, he wishes to follow a professional code of conduct and, on the other, he wants material gains even against his conscience. Similarly, he has loyalty to some group which may go against the well-being of society as a whole. So, education in moral values is necessary so that he may keep wider interests in his mind, else, there is always the likelihood of conflict on the basis of class, caste, race, ethnicity, profession, etc.



Man, wearing the mask of loyalty, may do much harm to the well-being of society as a whole, if he is not cultured in proper values. It can, thus, be understood that all our present-day problems, be it group rivalry, jingoism, hypocrisy, double standards, various kinds of wrong-doings and anti-social acts, are due to the fact that even though we have education in various disciplines, we do not have education in spiritual discipline.

The failure of a European country to prevent the excesses under the dictatorial regime was due precisely to this reason. Throughout the nineteenth century, this country had rapid development of specialisation in science and technology but value education was pushed aside or that also became technical and the concern of specialists only. As a result, it became a nation of highly trained specialists interested in facts in their respective fields but unconcerned with the large problems of life and the world, which resulted in moral paralysis of the people in that country. If therefore, we wish to avoid moral paralysis in the world, we will have to do something to impart value education.

One can't really say that value education will guarantee the right conduct. However, it will definitely give an understanding of what is right and what is wrong to the people and will create a tendency within them to have the right conduct. Also, it will give a man a moral outlook on life, and ethical purpose, and meaning of life. It will also enlighten him about the purity of means and motives. He will understand that not only we must have high ideals but we must also adopt the right means to attain those ideals. Also, it will explain to us that our motives must be genuine, for only goodness of goals is not enough.

Last year, on March 24, the Central Government imposed India's first nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of COVID-19 virus. These restrictions brought everything to a halt — industries were shut, trains and flights were suspended, schools and offices closed. India's economy, like rest of the world, was threatened by the pandemic. The worst affected in this situation were the people who had migrated to other cities from their native villages, who were already finding it hard to survive and with the sudden lockdown, their vulnerabilities were further exposed. This led to a migrant crisis that is said to be the biggest human exodus since the partition of the country in 1947. Lakhs of migrants, left stranded in unknown cities, decided to take long journeys to return to their villages on foot. Millions walked hundreds, thousands of kilometers — many died on their way. A year later, their struggle continues.

# The plight of migrant laborers

Due to modernisation, a lot of labour has been replaced by machines that has, in turn, decreased job opportunities for them. Migration, they say, is the only option despite the horrid experience they had to suffer during the lockdown last year. By LILADHAR NIRMALKAR



**The inevitable dilemma**  
 After the five-month long lockdown, when both state and central governments started to uplift restrictions in a phased manner, labourers, who had exhausted all the little money they had, started looking for work again. Forced by extreme poverty and hunger, they worked for extremely low wages in and around their villages. With wounds of the lockdown still fresh, they were determined to not return to the cities that had abandoned them but as soon as the roads were opened and railways announced special trains, they started having second thoughts. The limited prospects and resources in their villages started to create pressure in the community. Thinking about survival, and calculating the risks, these helpless labourers have

started to return to the cities. One such state where the labourers have started migrating to the cities again is the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh. Most of the labourers of Baijanpuri village and its surrounding areas in Bhanupratappur Block in Kanker district have already

moved or are planning to migrate to other states in search of work opportunities. A month before the lockdown, Gajendra Rawate, a resident of Baijanpuri, had travelled 300 km to Maharashtra to work as a construction labourer. "I had to face several challenges while returning to my village after the

lockdown was suddenly imposed. After my return, I started doing work that offered very little to survive," he shared. Echoing his thoughts were Daleswar Koratiya, Suresh Yadav and Makhhan Koratiya of the same village who were also in Maharashtra at the time of the lockdown. With no promising

jobs here, all of them are planning to return to Maharashtra. All the labourers from village Jampara in Kanchur Gram Panchayat have again migrated due to lack of work. Mukesh Kumar who belongs to the same group of migrants, informed that after the end of paddy harvesting season, there is no work left in this area. "We migrate to big cities like Bangalore. Till next sowing season, we work in cities earning fair wages and then return to work in the fields in our villages," informed Mukesh. is one of the major reasons why villagers choose to migrate.

**High expectations from MGNREGA**

Ever since its inception in 2006, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has served as a credible lifeline for millions of vulnerable rural people. In the wake of the COVID-19 lockdown, MGNREGA was expected to play a crucial role and support the returning workers. However, it has not been able to meet the employment demand of rural workers over the past few years, couldn't serve to this newly created gap of unemployment.

In cities, the labourers would get anything between ₹300 to 400 for a day's work while under MGNREGA, they are paid only ₹190 for the same work. For labour work other than under MGNREGA, the per capita wage in Baijanpuri region varies from ₹150 to 200 per day. Comparative high wages in cities

**Claims vs reality**

While commenting on the current situation, as the labourers have started to migrate back to the cities, Pankaj Brijpuria, District Labour Officer, said "About 3,700 labourers had returned to the district during the lockdown. The efforts have been to provide them ample employment opportunities under MGNREGA. Even then, if villagers want to go out for work, we cannot stop them." This is contrary to the lived experiences narrated by the labourers.

In several areas, work under MGNREGA has started while many other areas are still waiting for its execution. In modern times, a lot of labour work has been replaced by machines and that has decreased job opportunities for labourers at local level. Migration, they say, is the only option despite the horrid experience they had to suffer during the lockdown last year. —Charikha Features

“Do what you feel in your heart to be right – for you'll be criticised anyway.” —Eleanor Roosevelt

**CHOLESTEROL A KEY TO ALZHEIMER'S, DIABETES**

Examining the role of cholesterol in both Alzheimer's disease and Type-2 diabetes, researchers have identified a small molecule that may help regulate cholesterol levels in the brain, making it a potential new therapeutic target for Alzheimer's disease. There is no known cure for Alzheimer's disease and in the last decade, scientists have found increasing evidence linking the underlying causes of Type 2 diabetes and Alzheimer's disease. Type-2 diabetes occurs when insulin becomes less efficient at removing glucose from the bloodstream, resulting in high blood sugar that can cause abnormal cholesterol levels. A similar situation occurs in Alzheimer's disease, but rather than affecting the body as a whole, the effects are localised in the brain.

**TECHNIQUE TO DETECT BIOMARKER FOR CANCER**

Researchers are working to develop a new screening technique that's more than 300 times as effective at detecting a biomarker for cancers like cancer than current methods. The technique, published in the Journal of the American Chemical Society, uses nanoparticles with nickel-rich cores and platinum-rich shells to increase the sensitivity of an enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA). ELISA is a test that measures samples for biochemicals, such as antibodies and proteins, which can indicate the presence of cancer, HIV, pregnancy and more. When a biochemical is detected, the test generates a colour output that can be used to quantify its concentration. The stronger the colour is, the stronger the concentration. The tests must be sensitive to prevent false negatives that could delay treatment or interventions, the researchers said.

**AEROBICS HELP IN DIALYSIS-RELATED SYMPTOMS**

Aerobic exercise may reduce several hemodialysis-related symptoms experienced by patients with kidney failure, a new study finds. The study indicated that aerobic exercise lessened several hemodialysis-related symptoms, including restless leg syndrome, symptoms of depression, muscle cramping, and fatigue. "We found that as little as 20 to 30 minutes of aerobic exercise two to three times per week seemed to improve several common symptoms in people undergoing hemodialysis and make them feel better," said researcher Clara Bohm, from the University of Manitoba in Canada. "There have been very few rigorous, well-designed studies published that look at the effect of exercise on symptoms in people undergoing hemodialysis, and larger studies that use standardised measurement tools are needed to help us determine the effect of exercise on common symptoms in these patients more clearly," Bohm added.

**EATING OUT OFTEN UPS RISK OF ALL-CAUSE DEATH**

Dining out is a popular activity worldwide, but a team of researchers has found that eating out very frequently is significantly associated with an increased risk of all-cause death. The study, published in the Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, said that among the study participants, 2,781 deaths occurred, including 511 deaths from cardiovascular disease and 638 deaths from cancer. "Our findings from this large nationally representative sample of US adults show that frequent consumption of meals prepared away from home is significantly associated with increased risk of all-cause mortality," said researcher Yang Du from University of Iowa in the US. Although some restaurants provide high-quality foods, the dietary quality for meals away from home is usually lower compared to meals cooked at home.

**MIDLIFE LONELINESS MAY UP DEMENTIA RISK**

Being persistently lonely during midlife appears to make people more likely to develop dementia and Alzheimer's Disease (AD) later in life, a new study finds. The study, published in the journal 'Alzheimer's & Dementia', also indicated that people who recover from loneliness appear to be less likely to suffer from dementia. "Whereas persistent loneliness is a threat to brain health, psychological resilience following adverse life experiences may explain why transient loneliness is protective in the context of dementia onset," said researcher Wendy Qiu from the Boston University School of Medicine. Loneliness is a subjective feeling resulting from a perceived discrepancy between desired and actual social relationships. Although loneliness does not itself have the status of a clinical disease, it is associated with a range of negative health outcomes, including sleep disturbances, depressive symptoms, cognitive impairment, and stroke.

# All's well that ends well

## Sam Curran's gutsy 95 not out goes in vain as India complete treble against England after tenterhooks win in third ODI by seven runs

PTI ■ PUNE

The Indian cricket team completed one of its best four-month spells across formats, pipping England by a mere 7 runs after surviving Sam Curran's determined assault in an edge-of-the-seat third and final ODI for a well-deserved hat-trick of series victories.

For India, near domination of England in all three formats at home comes straight after humbling Australia in their own backyard earlier this year during a gruelling tour.

The 2-1 triumph against the reigning world champions in 50-over cricket will certainly please Virat Kohli but he will not at all be amused by the fact that India nearly let the game slip away with some unimaginative bowling and poor fielding at the death.

Rishabh Pant, Hardik Pandya and Shikhar Dhawan hit stroke-filled half-centuries but Indian lower-order also caved in meekly to settle for a below-par 329 on a great batting track.

But Bhuvneshwar Kumar (3/42) and new all-rounder in making Shardul Thakur (4/67 and 30 runs) got the breakthroughs at just the right times before player of the match Curran (95 not out off 83 balls) almost changed the result singlehandedly coming in at No. 8.

England finished on 322 for 9.

"When the top-two battle each other, we'll get exciting games. No one will throw in the towel, and Sam played a really good innings to keep them in the hunt," Kohli said in the post-match presentation.



India's Rohit Sharma and Shikhar Dhawan shake hands with England's Sam Curran at the end of the third ODI between India and England at MCA Stadium on Sunday AP

Yorker specialist Thangarasu Natarajan bowled a brilliant final over with England needing 14 but Curran could manage only six runs because the Indian bowled mostly in the block-hole.

It was a gettable total on a flat pitch but Kohli's ploy to attack with predominantly pace attack paid off for the better part of the game before Curran launched a swift counter-assault.

"...It took great character to play the way he (Sam Curran) did, and he has those amazing qualities in abundance. I know he will be disappointed he didn't get us over the line, but we are all very proud of him and his performance," said England captain Jos Buttler, standing in for an injured Eoin Morgan.

Bhuvneshwar brought in his nearly decade long experience with a beautiful inswinger that castled Jason Roy (14).

He then bowled another in-cutter which left series top-scorer Jonny Bairstow (1) on the wrong side of the Decision Review System after the opener was forced to remain inside the crease when Pant came up

to the stumps. Ben Stokes (35 off 39 balls) got a reprieve when he looked all but out with Hardik dropping a dolly at mid-off.

And when it looked that Stokes will dispatch Natarajan into the deep square leg stands, he managed to hit the full toss straight to Shikhar Dhawan, who did his famous thigh slap celebration.

Jos Buttler (15 off 18 balls) was then trapped leg before by Thakur as England stared down the barrel at 95 for 4 when Liam Livingstone (36) and Dawid Malan (50) joined forces for a 60-run stand.

Livingstone's on-drive and a pull off Thakur were classy shots and once he was set, he lofted Krunal Pandya for a six over long-on.

However, Livingstone had a lapse of concentration while trying to check his shot off an innocuous full-toss from Thakur which ended in the simplest of return catches.

With half of the team gone for 155, the match became a no-contest when Thakur had Malan pulling straight to Rohit Sharma at short mid-wicket.

But then Curran, first with Adil Rashid and then

with Mark Wood, nearly changed the game before India prevailed.

Earlier, Pant's sparkling knock of 78 off 62 balls was well supported by Hardik (64 off 44 balls) but India lost their last four wickets for a mere eight runs to finish at least 30 short of a competitive total on another belter.

Pant, during his career-best knock plundered, four maximums and five boundaries, while Hardik had five fours and four sixes during their 99-run stand for the fifth wicket.

However, Krunal Pandya's (25 off 34 balls) serious limitations while facing express pace were exposed by Wood (3/34) as India lost the momentum during the final 10 overs despite a brilliant 103-run opening stand inside 15 overs between Rohit Sharma (37; 6x4) and Shikhar Dhawan (67 off 56; 10x4).

It was a day when India's top order was troubled by English spinners with Adil Rashid's (2/81 in 10 overs) googlies in successive overs removing Rohit and Dhawan.

Skipper Virat Kohli (7) tried to rock back and play a cut shot only to be bowled by a Moeen Ali off-break.

However, Pant started off from where he had left in the last game and ditto for Hardik as they took apart Rashid by reading wrong 'uns well.

Hardik smashed three sixes off Ali which forced the captain to take him out of attack as 200 came in the 30th over.

Once both were dismissed in quick succession, it required a 30 off 21 balls from 'new all-rounder' Thakur for a total in excess of 325 on the board.

## Kohli surprised at Shardul not getting man of the match

PTI ■ PUNE

India captain Virat Kohli on Sunday said he was surprised that Shardul Thakur was not adjudged man-of-the-match for the third and final ODI against England and Bhuvneshwar Kumar missed the man-of-the-series honours despite strong performances.

Sam Curran was handed the man-of-the-match award for his heroic 83-ball 95 not out in a lost cause. Shardul took four wickets for 67 runs but conceded 18 runs in the 47th over to give England a shot at victory.

England top-order batsman Jonny Bairstow got the man-of-the-series award for his 219 runs in the three games, including a hundred to top the run-scorers' chart. Bhuvneshwar took six wickets in the series at an economy rate of 4.65 and an average of 22.50.

"I'm surprised Shardul wasn't the man of the match, and *Bhuvi* wasn't the man of the series. A lot of credit to them for bowling so well in adverse conditions," Kohli said at the post-match presentation, wrapping up series victories across formats against the tourists.

India dropped at least four catches, including that of Curran, at crucial junctures to pile on the pressure but Kohli sought to play it down.

"It's most disappointing for the guy who drops the catch, but as much as you get disappointed, catches get put down and sometimes they cost you. That is a part of the game."

"There's no lack of intent, and our body language was outstanding. Eventually we got over the line," he said. Asked about the intensi-

ty shown by both the teams in the white-ball leg, Kohli said, "When the top-two teams battle each other, we'll get exciting games. We knew England are not going to throw in the towel, and Sam played a really good innings to keep them in the hunt."

"However, our bowlers picked up wickets, and it moved from us finishing it off to them getting over the line before Hardik (Pandya) and Nattu (T Natarajan) pulled it back. Prasadh (Krishna) and Krunal (Pandya) were impressive."

"But death overs batting was extremely good, despite the early wickets, and if the top three can get a hundred, then we can get 370s and 380s later."

"This win has been sweet because it's against the top team in the world, and we're looking forward to the IPL. It's been an amazing season, series, and this was a great way to finish it off."

England captain Jos Buttler said his team was disappointed to lose the series but learnt a lot during the tour.

"A fantastic game, both sides made some mistakes but played some brilliant cricket. We witnessed an incredible knock from Curran to nearly get us over the line, but congratulations to India on winning," he said.

"We've learnt a lot as a side and seen many guys stand up and take the lead. The white-ball leg was incredibly competitive. These are the conditions we will face in the near future in the (T20) World Cup."

"It's a great experience for the young guys to play a top-class side like India and they will be better cricketers for it."

## Conway, Sodhi fire NZ to big win

AFP ■ HAMILTON

An unbeaten 92 from Devon Conway and a four-wicket burst from Ish Sodhi ensured New Zealand romped to victory by 66 runs in the opening T20 against Bangladesh in Hamilton on Sunday.

Conway, whose rollicking innings included 11 fours and three sixes, shared in a 105-run stand with debutant Will Young (53), as New Zealand posted an impressive 210 after winning the toss and electing to bat.

Mohammad Naim made an enterprising start to the Bangladesh reply with two boundaries off the opening over from Tim Southee.

But once the tourists reached 39 in the fifth over the innings fell apart as first Lockie Ferguson removed Naim for 27 and then Sodhi suffocated the momentum with his four wickets in eight deliveries.

At the end of their 20 overs Bangladesh were 144 for eight and Sodhi had the impressive figures of four for 28.

New Zealand went into the match without six frontline players including Kane



Ish Sodhi celebrates with New Zealand teammates after he takes wicket ©ICC

Williamson and Trent Boult and stand-in captain Tim Southee said it was pleasing to see the new blood perform with the bat.

"Devon is just carrying on what he's done at this level, making it look extremely easy," Southee said with Conway now having four fifties and a 65.42 average from 12 T20s.

"It's great to be able to see guys come in and perform. If you had five or six guys out a few years ago we would be scratching around but there's a number of guys now knocking

on the door."

A disappointed Bangladesh skipper Mahmudullah pointed the finger at a mediocre batting display from his side and called for a big improvement before game two in Napier on Tuesday.

"We have let ourselves down in our batting department," he said.

"Ish (Sodhi) is an experienced campaigner, he uses conditions really well, the ball was gripping a little bit here but we can't make the same mistakes again and again."

## No 1 Barty sets up Azarenka clash

AFP ■ MIAMI

World No 1 Ashleigh Barty looked sharp in a straight-sets victory over Jelena Ostapenko on Saturday at the Miami Open, where men's second seed Stefanos Tsitsipas cruised past lucky loser Damir Dzumhur.

Defending champion Barty defeated the former French Open champion 6-3, 6-2 to set up a fourth-round clash with former world number one Victoria Azarenka.

Azarenka beat 24th seed Angelique Kerber 7-5, 6-2 in a battle of former world number ones.

Tsitsipas — ranked fifth in the world but seeded second behind world No 2 Daniil Medvedev in the Masters 1000 event was untroubled in a 6-1, 6-4 over lucky loser Damir Dzumhur.

The three-time Grand Slam semi-finalist next faces 28th seed Kei Nishikori, who outlasted Slovenia's Aljaz Bedene 7-6 (8/6), 5-7, 6-4.

Rain was the only thing that



slowed down men's fourth seed Andrey Rublev in a 6-1, 6-2 victory over American Tennis Sandgren.

Rublev, up 6-1, 5-2, was unable to convert three match points before the players had to leave the court for the second of two rain delays, but he wasted no time in closing out the match when play resumed.

Canadian Denis Shapovalov also had to wait out the delay to finish off a hard-fought 6-7 (5/7), 6-4, 6-4 victory over Ilya Ivashka.

## Hamilton wins season opening Bahrain race

AFP ■ SAKHIR

Lewis Hamilton produced another stunning demonstration of his supreme racing talent on Sunday to resist a charging Max Verstappen and win a thrilling season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix.

The defending seven-time champion defended with supreme skill over the closing laps in his Mercedes to hold off the Red Bull driver and claim a record-stretching 96th Formula One victory.

Hamilton came home seven-tenths of a second ahead of the Dutchman, who was forced to hand back the race lead in the closing laps after passing the champion with a move that had taken him off the track and beyond the limits.

As expected, Hamilton and his heir apparent delivered an exhilarating exhibition of racing as they stormed to the flag — the pair leaving third placed Valtteri Bottas, in the second Mercedes, to finish adrift by 37 seconds.



Lewis Hamilton celebrates on the podium after winning the Bahrain Grand Prix AP

It was Hamilton's first season-opening triumph since 2015 and surprised many observers after Red Bull had dominated pre-season testing and two days of practice and qualifying ahead of the race.

"Firstly, can I just say it's the first time I've seen fans in a long time," said a delighted Hamilton. "What a difficult race that was — stopping early we knew it was going to be tough, but we had to cover Max and it was always going to take something pretty special to do it."

A disappointed Verstappen said: "Of course, it's a shame, but you also have to see the positives. We're putting the fight on to them so it's great to start the year like that."

Lando Norris was fourth for McLaren ahead of Sergio Perez, who had started from the pit lane in the second Red Bull, Charles Leclerc of Ferrari and Daniel Ricciardo, of McLaren.

Carlos Sainz was eighth for Ferrari ahead Japanese rookie Yuki Tsunoda of AlphaTauri and Aston Martin's Lance Stroll.

## Krishna-Vishnu pair goes down in final

PTI ■ PARIS

The Indian pair of Krishna Prasad Garaga and Vishnu Vardhan Goud let slip a strong start to go down to England's Ben Lane and Sean Vandy in the men's doubles finals of the Orleans Masters badminton tournament on Sunday.

The unheralded Indians, the only ones left in contention from the country on the final day, lost 21-19, 14-21, 19-21 in a 56-minute battle with the fourth seeds.

Krishna and Vishnu had paired for the first time in this event and would be pleased with the results they managed.

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty were the first Indian pair to win a super 100 event at



Hyderabad in 2018.

The duo also went on to win Thailand Open 500 and reaching the finals of French Open 750 event.

Krishna had earlier paired with Shlok Ramchandran, while for the 20-year-old Vishnu, it's his first International tournament at the senior level.

## India end best-ever WC campaign with 2 more Golds

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India pulled the curtains down on its best-ever ISSF World Cup campaign with two more Gold medals here on Sunday, somewhat making up for missing out on the chance to swell its unprecedented tally of 15 Olympic quotas.

Dominating the event from start to end, hosts India topped the chart with an incredible tally of 30 medals, half of them being Gold.

The country also bagged nine Silver and six Bronze medals in what could be the last major international outing for rifle and pistol shooters before this summer's Tokyo Olympics.

On the last competition day, shotgun shooters Prithviraj Tondaiman, Lakshay Sheoran and Kynan Chenai ended India's campaign with a Gold medal in the men's trap team event.

Before that, the trio of Shreyasi Singh, Rajeshwari



India's shotgun shooters Shreyasi Singh, Rajeshwari Kumari and Manisha Keer celebrate after win in women's trap team final on Sunday

Kumari and Manisha Keer claimed the Gold medal in the women's trap team final after blanking Kazakhstan 6-0.

Vijayveer Sidhu, Gurpreet Singh and Adarsh Singh looked

crumbled. But that boy (Vijayveer), he is very young and he shot very well... In the long run you will see a lot of good things from him," National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) president Raninder Singh said after the tournament.

The national shooting

body's chief was satisfied with the performance of his athletes.

"Athletes morale is high, but, as I had said earlier this is not a marker for Olympics. But it's important that we have done well, because it leaves us morally high, these things matter, psychologically it's important for us."

"We have also set an example for rest of the shooting community so that they don't shy away from not hosting tournaments because of Covid-19. We are making sure that we will have regular international engagements that's why I was asked to conduct this first," Raninder said.

## Olympic team selection on April 3

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The head of Indian shooting body Raninder Singh on Sunday said the team for Tokyo Olympics will be announced on April 3 or 4 and it will include two reserves per event owing to the threat posed by Covid-19 pandemic.

Indian shooters have secured an unprecedented 15 Olympic quota places for the country but, as per the federation's selection policy, the

final team will be picked taking into account the scores in all tournaments and trials leading up to the Games.

"I plan to call it on the 3rd or 4th (April) but subject to availability of people because I would like to do it in person rather than on zoom," Raninder said after the end of the ISSF World Cup.

"But if we have to do it on zoom, we will do it on zoom. I want to close this now so that they can get on with their

preparation and it's already too late. Although we will only know the ranking quotas from the 6th of June, I can't wait till then," he added.

"NRAI will also announce two reserves per event when announcing the Olympic team in case some contracts the virus before Olympics or falls ill..."

The federation is also trying to keep the Olympic squad in bio bubble till the Tokyo Games.