

RANA KAPOOR FACES ED, CBI CASES; SAYS BEING TARGETED

Yes Bank founder arrested, daughter held at Mumbai airport for questioning

Painting bought from Priyanka being looked into; declared by her in IT returns: Cong



Rana Kapoor being taken by the ED to court in Mumbai Sunday. *Nirmal Harindran* YOUR MONEY SAFE: RBI PAGE 14

As crisis loomed, in 6 months, depositors took out Rs 18,000 cr

GEORGE MATHEW
MUMBAI, MARCH 8

ANTICIPATING TROUBLE in the wake of its failure to get capital infusion and rising non-performing assets, Yes Bank depositors pulled out over Rs 18,000 crore between April and September last year with experts not ruling out another 10-20 per cent more withdrawals from October 2019 to February 2020.

Early Sunday, Yes Bank founder Rana Kapoor was arrested in Mumbai by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on alleged money-laundering charges and remanded in the agency's custody till March 11 by a local court.

According to the bank's Annual Report and rating agen-

YES BANK DEPOSITS

YEAR	DEPOSITS
Sept 2019	₹ 2,09,497
March 2019	₹ 2,27,610
March 2018	₹ 2,00,738
March 2017	₹ 1,42,874
March 2016	₹ 1,11,720
March 2015	₹ 91,176
March 2014	₹ 74,192

*Figures in crores

cies, deposits fell to Rs 2,09,497 crore as on September 30, 2019, from Rs 2,27,610 crore on March 31, 2019, a decline of 8.64 per cent. During 2019-20, other banks witnessed a rise of 9.2 in deposits

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Ex-PDP minister Altaf Bukhari (centre) after launching the party in Srinagar on Sunday. *Shuaib Masoodi* THE APNI PARTY P 6

National outlook, ready to deal with Delhi: New party launched in J&K

Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party seeks release of detainees, may meet PM

ADIL AKHZER
SRINAGAR, MARCH 8

SAYING THAT circumstances "warranted the formation of a new political party", former Peoples Democratic Party leader and minister Altaf Bukhari announced the launch of a Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party (JKAP) on Sunday, comprising several ex-legislators belonging to the PDP and Congress.

Addressing a press conference at his residence in Srinagar, Bukhari called the JKAP "a regional party with a national outlook", "a party by the commoners, for the commoners and of the commoners". However, he added that he didn't see the prospects of elections soon.

With Kashmir in a state of political void since the scrapping of special status on August 5, and with the detention of three former chief ministers and other senior leaders continuing, Bukhari refused to comment on whether New Delhi was behind the initiative for a new political force in Jammu and Kashmir, or not.

"I don't buy these arguments," he said. "Altaf Bukhari is an individual, driven by his own decisions. I don't live by decisions taken by somebody else." However, Bukhari said, he wanted "to end the mistrust be-

Seeking to fill political vacuum

SINCE AUGUST 5, mainstream politics in Kashmir has been in complete paralysis. It is in this vacuum that the new political formation has taken shape, seeking to move beyond Article 370. However, it remains to be seen whether the JKAP will be accepted by public. Many see it as another bid by the Centre to impose political leaders on the state, in line with Delhi propping up Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad as counter to Sheikh Abdullah in 1953.

tween New Delhi and J&K". Fellow JKAP leader Gulam Hassan Mir said they were planning to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Apni Party's "March 8, 2020 Declaration" said it would "seek to ensure that JK's destiny is driven by people alone while

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Highly unjust, says HC about UP move to put protesters' photos on posters

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ALLAHABAD, MARCH 8

THE ALLAHABAD High Court Sunday termed as "highly unjust" the putting up of roadside banners by the Lucknow district administration with photographs and information of people told to pay compensation for damage to property during anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act protests, and hoped that these would be removed.

After the Uttar Pradesh government asserted that it was a "deterrent" action and the court should not interfere in such a matter, the bench led by Chief Justice Govind Mathur and Justice Ramesh Sinha reserved its order for Monday.

On Saturday, the court had taken suo motu cognisance of the issue and asked the District



Those on posters have said will go to court. *Vishal Srivastava*

Magistrate and Divisional Commissioner of Lucknow to explain the provisions under which such posters/hoardings had been put up on the streets of the state capital. It had also asked

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MEERUT TO PUT UP PHOTOS NOW PAGE 7

Couple held for IS-CAA protest link: Delhi Police

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

THE DELHI Police Special Cell Sunday arrested a couple from Kashmir with alleged Islamic State links, claiming that they were instigating protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. An FIR has been registered against the two, residents of Southeast Delhi's Jamia Nagar, under sections of sedition and criminal conspiracy and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

DCP (Special Cell) Pramod Singh Kushwah said Jahanzaib Sami (36) and wife Hina Bashir

Beg (39), who belong to Srinagar's Shivpora, "have links with the Khorasan module of IS (ISKP)". Police also accused Sami, who works with a private firm, of helping publish the February edition of IS magazine *Sawt al Hind* (Voice of India), adding "further evidence is being gathered".

"They were propagating the banned terrorist outfit's ideology of hatred against non-Muslims... They were also inciting Muslims to take up a violent struggle against the State, and against the CAA," Kushwah said.

A senior police officer said they had been tracking the module for long and the person the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



HEARTBREAK IN MELBOURNE

India team after losing the Women's T20 World Cup final to Australia by 85 runs, in Melbourne, Sunday. *AP REPORT P 18*

Valley to Chennai: Meet the 7 women who took over PM's social media

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

FROM A crafts exponent in Kashmir to a motivational speaker from Chennai who lost her hands to a grenade blast. From a former sarpanch in Maharashtra to a mushroom farmer in Bihar.

They were among the seven women who got to take over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's social media accounts, with a total of over 137 million followers, on International Women's Day — six days after he posted a teaser that he was "thinking of giving up" the accounts on Sunday.

The *Indian Express* tracked down each of them: Malvika Iyer, a grenade blast survivor and disabilities rights activist; Sneha



Iyer lost hands in a blast

Mohandoss, founder of Foodbank India; Arifa Jan, founder of Namda Handicrafts in Kashmir; Kalpana Ramesh, a

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NARISHAKTI AWARDS, P 8

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

STREE SHAKTI PART OF RASHTRA SHAKTI
BY RAJNATH SINGH
PAGE 10



CITY

AFTER RIOTS, AWAY FROM HOME PAGE 4

Coronavirus: 5 more in Kerala; 3 came from Italy, not screened

Man in 70s back from Iran dies in Leh, samples sent for testing

SHAJU PHILIP & ADIL AKHZER
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
SRINAGAR, MARCH 8

THE NUMBER of coronavirus cases in India reached 39 Sunday, with five more infections reported from Kerala. In Ladakh, where two patients are already under quarantine, officials said that a man in his 70s, with a travel history to Iran, died Sunday — his blood samples have been sent for testing.

A senior official in Leh told



A bus being disinfected in Delhi Sunday. *P 11*

INSIDE

KERALA FAMILY SAYS NOT TOLD ABOUT SCREENING

NEW DELHI DRIVE; MORE CASES IN UP

QUARTER OF ITALY NOW IN LOCKDOWN
PAGES 5, 7, 13

The Indian Express that the "death of the male on Sunday morning primarily doesn't seem to have taken place due to coronavirus infection". "The patient had multiple ailments and was hospitalised a few days ago. We have sent the samples for testing and the result is awaited," said a health official.

The Ladakh administration, meanwhile, ordered closing of all government and private schools in Leh district till March 31.

In Kerala, Health Minister K K Shailaja said that a family of three, which "did not report" for screening at the international airport in Kochi where they arrived on February 29 from Italy via Doha in Qatar, and two of their relatives have tested positive for coronavirus.

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102-year-old readies CV as BJP puts him to freedom fighter test

AMRITA DUTTA
BENGALURU, MARCH 8

"I HAVE been writing my CV," says H S Doreswamy, peering closely at a bunch of papers he has been scribbling on. In the dim light of his ground-floor residence in south Bengaluru, the 102-year-old reads out a summary of his life, from his birth in the city in 1918 to a family of landed gentry to his participation in the Quit India movement and Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan movement, and, most recently,

a campaign to revive lakes in Bengaluru. "You can read it and tell me if there is anything anti-national in it," he says.

A familiar figure in civil society movements in Karnataka for decades, Doreswamy finds himself at the centre of a political storm. It began when the BJP MLA from Bijapur, Basangouda Patil Yatnal, called him a "fake freedom fighter" and a "Pakistani agent" last month, seeking proof of his involvement in the Independence movement. Several senior BJP leaders, including Union minister Pralhad

Joshi, backed Yatnal.

Last Tuesday, in response, the Congress produced a document, dated 1971, signed by the senior superintendent of the Bengaluru Central Jail, attesting that, as a 25-year-old unmarried man, Doreswamy had been imprisoned there from "December 18, 1942 (and) released on December 8, 1943".

Of the many allegations made against Doreswamy by BJP leaders is his "connection" with Amulya Leona Noronha, the 19-year-old held on February 20 for "sedition" over



H S Doreswamy accused of being a 'Pak agent'. *Amrita Dutta*

slogans she had raised at an anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act rally, on the basis of a photograph which shows him at her residence in Koppa.

"He is the conscience of our state," says historian Ramachandra Guha, calling the campaign against Doreswamy "shocking and scandalous". "A man of great decency and honesty, he has been a part of several social and ecological movements, has spoken up for farmers and the landless. He has criticised Congress governments for their shady land deals... But what

shocks me the most is the silence of Chief Minister B S Yeddyurappa, who knows what kind of a person he is, who took oath in the name of farmers," says Guha.

Doreswamy says he is as surprised. "I have been in public life for 60 years. We have differences in ideology but I have friends in the BJP and RSS too. I never expected that the BJP as a whole would attack me like this."

Admitting he has been critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the centenarian adds, "I have criticised every govern-

ment. That is a citizen's privilege. During the Emergency, I wrote a letter to then PM Indira Gandhi, saying, 'You are ruling in the name of democracy, but behaving like a dictator... If this continues, I will go house to house telling people you are a dictator.'" Doreswamy was imprisoned for four months consequently and released when a magistrate dismissed the case, saying "he has every right to criticise his prime minister".

A teacher of physics and maths at a school in Bengaluru,

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BEGA BEGUM: THE MUGHAL EMPRESS WHO GAVE DELHI HUMAYUN'S TOMB

A riveting story of the Mughal Empress Bega Begum who held immense power, endured tragedy and dedicated her entire life caring for the poor



VIDEO OF THE DAY WOMEN'S DAY 2020: RATNA PATHAK SHAH

Strong, opinionated and fearless veteran of Indian cinema



FULL COVERAGE CORONAVIRUS INDIA UPDATES MARCH 8

Cases in India jump to 39, Kerala warns those not reporting travel

EXPRESS AUDIO Explaining the Yes Bank crisis NEW EPISODE EVERYDAY

Reporters unpack how the Yes Bank crisis unraveled, how you are affected as an account holder or investor, and why capping withdrawals was a bad move

FROM PAGE ONE

Yes Bank founder arrested, daughter held

Later Sunday, the ED detained Kapoor's daughter Roshini Kapoor from the Mumbai international airport, based on a Lookout Circular, and began questioning her. In court, the ED said that the CBI had already registered an FIR Saturday against Rana Kapoor, DOIT Urban Ventures, which is linked to his family, and DHFL's Kapil Wadhawan under charges of alleged criminal conspiracy and corruption. ED sources said it subsequently registered a separate case under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act against Kapoor, DOIT Urban Ventures and DHFL's Wadhawan. The ED had so far been probing DHFL and Kapoor in connection with alleged scams linked to gangster Iqbal Mirchi and the UP state employees provident fund. ED sources claimed that among the assets being probed are expensive paintings, including one bought from Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. Speaking to reporters, Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi said that an MF Husain painting — a portrait of Rajiv Gandhi — was sold to Rana Kapoor for Rs 2 crore in 2010. "The entire amount was received in cheque and was fully disclosed in the Income Tax return of 2010 by Priyanka Gandhi Vadra," Singhvi said. Responding to the ED's charges on the loan from DHFL, Kapoor's lawyer claimed that the agency was "selectively joining dots" and that the Rs 600-crore loan is a "performing one", whose interest is being paid, and not a Non-Performing Asset (NPA). "This is selective targeting because there is pub-

lic outrage. You put blame and make one man a scapegoat," Kapoor's lawyer, Zain Shroff, told the court. Addressing the court with folded hands, Kapoor claimed he had been "sick and hallucinating" since 2019, "when I lost my baby, Yes Bank", and was undergoing treatment. The RBI had asked him to step down as MD and CEO of Yes Bank in January 2019. According to the ED, the Rs 600-crore loan was given in 2018 by infrastructure company DHFL, whose promoters included Kapil Wadhawan. "During April to June 2018, Yes Bank Limited invested Rs 3,700 crore in the short-term debentures of DHFL. Simultaneously, Kapil Wadhawan paid a kick-back of Rs 600 crore to Rana Kapoor and his family members in the garb of loan given by DHFL to DOIT Urban Ventures (India) Pvt Ltd (a Rana Kapoor Group Company)," the ED alleged in its remand application. The ED claimed that Kapoor entered into a "criminal conspiracy" with Wadhawan for extending financial assistance to DHFL by Yes Bank in lieu of "substantial undue benefit to himself and his family members through the companies held by them." Special public prosecutor, Sunil Gonsalves, told the court that the three daughters of Kapoor, who held 100 per cent shares of DOIT Urban Ventures, had never interacted with DHFL personnel for the loan. The ED claimed that the interaction with DHFL for the loan was done by a secretary of Kapoor in Yes Bank. "It is apparent that behind the facade of... (DOIT), Kapoor was the person on ground interacting with Wadhawan for sanction of loan," the ED claimed, adding that the transactions were "suspicious" due to which searches were conducted at Kapoor's residential premises Friday night. According to the ED, the loan from DHFL was for repayment of an earlier loan of Rs 300 crore and for "general corporate purpose". It claimed that the mortgage for the loan included land in Alibaug and Raigad, shown to have a value of Rs 735 crore. The ED claimed that this value was "highly inflated" as the acquisition cost of the properties was only Rs 39.66 crore. It told the court that the valuation was done by DHFL on the assumption the land would be converted from agricultural to residential and used for construction and an eco-tourism project. But as of now, there was no change in the status of the land, the ED said. The ED told the court that while the principal amount on the loan was to be repaid in 2023, it would probe how Rs 4,300 crore was allegedly laundered in various transactions with DHFL. The ED also alleged other loans by Yes Bank were also under scanner. These included one of Rs 750 crore linked with Kapil Wadhawan and Dheeraj Wadhawan, also named as accused in the Iqbal Mirchi case linked to DHFL. "It is also apprehended that Rana Kapoor has similarly misused his official position in several other transactions and obtained illegal kickbacks directly or indirectly through entities controlled by him or his family members," the ED claimed. In the court, Kapoor said: "My children's company borrowed Rs 600 crore independently and Rs 130.5 crore interest has been paid on that. There is full security. Every iota of interest has been paid over the last two-and-a-half years by my daughters. This is about women entrepreneurship... there is no link I promise." He said that DHFL had an AAA rating at the time of its transactions with Yes Bank. ED sources, meanwhile, said that Lookout Circulars have been opened against all members of Rana Kapoor's family. They claimed members of the family were allegedly linked to a dozen companies that received close to Rs 4,000 crore from firms that received loans from Yes Bank. The companies allegedly linked to the family invested the money in properties in India and abroad, they said. Claiming a "quid pro quo modus operandi", an ED official said: "We are questioning Kapoor's wife and daughter over the companies owned by them and their financial transactions. Rana Kapoor will be questioned in custody on his role in the entire affair." Documents filed by DOIT Ventures with the Registrar of Companies (RoC) show that the company has about 13 wholly owned subsidiaries. All of them have Kapoor's family members as directors but no employees. "We are in the process of identifying properties purchased by the family's companies in India. Two properties in UK have also been identified. All of these will be ascertained as proceeds of crime in due course and attached," the official said.

Bank depositors

Whatever the distance between New Delhi and the people of J&K, our efforts would be to end those." Bukhari said there was no option but to talk to Delhi. "We have to do business with Delhi, whose ever rules Delhi," he said. "We don't look at Delhi from the point of who is ruling in Delhi today. We look at it as the government of India and we have to deal with the government of India. We have no hesitation in dealing with the government of India." A majority of the leaders who are part of the new outfit are seen as close to the security establishment. Bukhari himself is one of the few mainstream leaders who was not detained after August 5. Bukhari said he wanted former CMs Farooq and Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti to be released. "In a democracy, leaders should be freed," he said. In January this year, Bukhari had led a delegation to Lieutenant Governor G C Murmu seeking restoration of statehood and release of all political detainees. Among the over 20 former MLAs in the JKAP are Ghulam Hassan Mir, former PDP leaders Muhammad Dilawar Mir, Ashraf Mir and Rafi Mir, and former Congress leaders Usman Majeed and Shuib Lone. Ghulam Hassan Mir told The Indian Express, "We will not spare anyone if we feel something is wrong, even the BJP. Also, we won't shy away from talking to the government of India, because they have to address the problems of Jammu and Kashmir." A businessman who held the education and finance portfolios in the PDP-BJP coalition government led by Mehbooba, Bukhari had been expelled from the PDP in January 2019 following allegations that he "inspired and led dissent in the party". The Congress said the JKAP was "an offshoot of the BJP". "It is a creation of quarters which have been hell bent on creating chaos and divisions in the political system of J&K," said PCC chief G A Mir. The National Conference accused the Centre of "contriving" to prop up the formation "to serve its interests at the cost of democracy and political probity". "They want to fill the political vacuum in Kashmir with those who parrot what New Delhi wants them to. It's therefore safe to call this new formation as Delhi's Party and nothing else," NC spokesperson Imran Nabi Dar said. At his press conference, Bukhari said, "My voice may not be relevant today, but I think it is relevant. In coming days, it would be relevant." The JKAP resolution said, "The present circumstances warranted formation of a new political party comprising those who have all along identified and related themselves with social needs of multiple strata and factions of our society. A party that can respond to rational aspirations of people without promising them moon or stars. We are not here to sell dreams or fantasy to our people and instead shall always be pragmatic, honest and fair in our approach." The JKAP welcomed the new party, saying people were fed up of dynasty politics and sought change.

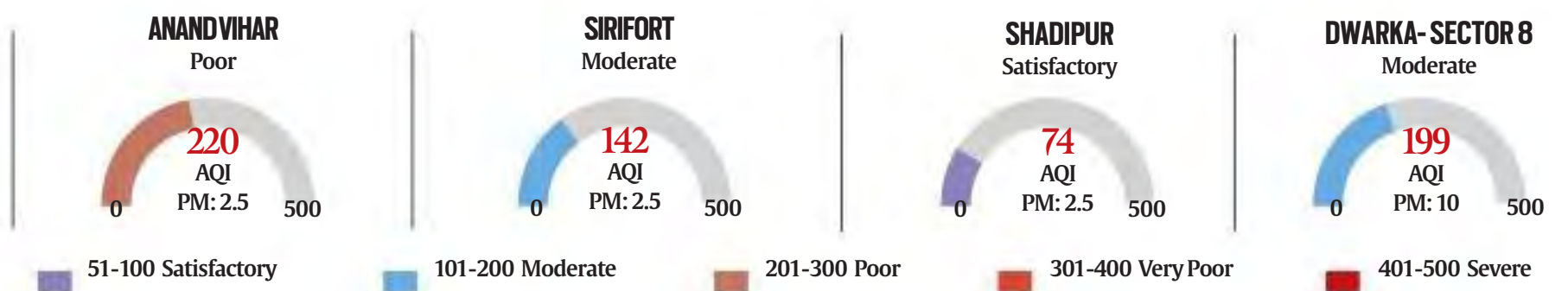
International Airport (CIAL) said all passengers on the Qatar Airways Venice-Doha flight on February 28 and Doha-Kochi flight on February 29 were asked to immediately report at control rooms in their districts. "They did not report at the airport for screening. Even after their relatives developed symptoms of the infection, they were not ready to move to hospital. They have neglected all directions of the health staff, claiming that they had no health issues," the Minister said. The family, however, claimed that they were not informed on arrival about the screening. Kerala Health Department sources told The Indian Express: "The three landed on February 29 and skipped the mandatory health screening at the airport. From the next day, they had been moving about and meeting relatives. The couple's son interacted with his friends, too. They were also at the office of the District SP for processing documents." The sources said it was only on Friday that the family informed health workers about their travel history after the two infected relatives, admitted to a private hospital that morning, informed doctors about the arrival from Italy. With doctors suspecting Covid-19 symptoms, the family was also asked to report at the district hospital. The couple's parents, aged 91 and 89, were also shifted to the hospital Sunday after they developed fever. "Till evening, we have come across 150 primary contacts of the couple. They include relatives, friends, staff at the Ranni taluk hospital and another private hospital. Their two local contacts, now tested positive, are the male member's elder brother and wife. These two relatives had gone to the Ranni taluk hospital. We are also tracing their primary contacts. Secondary contacts, too, will be traced for monitoring," said a health official. Meanwhile, all staff on duty at the Kochi airport on February 29 and the medical team at local hospitals in Pathanamthitta, where the couple's relatives turned up for initial treatment, have been placed under observation.

that their properties would be confiscated otherwise. WITHENS, LUCKNOW Couple 'IS links' couple were allegedly in touch with "for three years". "We started tracking Sami and Beg recently and they were found to be distributing literature, especially online, which instigated anti-CAA crowds," the officer said. Most people in the Jamia Nagar neighbourhood where the couple live, including their landlord, refused to talk. A neighbour, Rashid, said, "They kept to themselves. We saw them come and go but they never stopped to talk. It was when police came that most people realised the couple had rented a house here." Kushwah said they had seized four mobile phones, one laptop, one external hard-disk and other incriminating material from the second-floor rented house the couple had been living in since August 25 last year. The two were produced before a duty magistrate on Sunday and remanded in police custody till March 17. The DCP said, "During interrogation, it was found that the couple had created several anonymous IDs on social media platforms such as Telegram, Facebook, Threema, Surespot, Instagram and Twitter." An officer said, "The couple were in touch with senior ISKP members in Afghanistan, discussing the ongoing protests in the country... They usually chatted with people on Telegram." Freedom fighter Doreswamy joined the freedom struggle in June 1942, on Mahatma Gandhi's call. "We would place small 'time bombs' in post boxes near government offices. They were not meant to kill people. They would burn documents, disrupting government communication. Sometimes, we would tie bombs to tails of rats and throw these into record rooms," he recalls. Barely six months in, Doreswamy was arrested for arson. When he was released in 1943, he plunged into the Independence movement. In decades since, Doreswamy has taken up several causes. "To call a Gandhian figure like him 'Pakistani agent' or accuse him of inciting violence is laughable," says anti-corruption activist S R Hiremath. In 2014, Doreswamy and slain journalist Gauri Lankesh were part of a civil society platform that helped Naxalites who had given up arms return to the mainstream. "We want Naxals to join a democratic system. But these people call me a Naxal!" he says. About Amulya, whose father stood surety for two former Naxals, Doreswamy says, "Five or seven years ago, I had gone to Koppa, where about 500 homes of tribals were about to be demolished. I don't remember but my friends say the family had called us for supper. She was in Class 5-6, a child. Or is it that she was a born Naxal?" Remembering how the RSS used to be a "weak force", with "no freedom fighters among them", Doreswamy believes the failure of successive governments facilitated the BJP's rise. "Gandhi wanted poverty reduced on a priority basis. But other than that, politicians have done everything, gone to the moon, squandered money, melted hills and hillocks." The 102-year-old, who moved close to his daughter's house three months ago after his wife's death, says, he is not worried. "Rules and regulations are there, the Constitution is there to defend us. People are there. They know me through and through. Definitely, people will stand behind me," Doreswamy says. "The poor deserve food, employment, literacy. That is why I am still fighting." FULL REPORTSON www.indianexpress.com

7 women who took over PM's social media

water conservation activist in Hyderabad; Vijaya Pawar, a Banjara traditional crafts expert from Maharashtra; Kalavati Devi, who led efforts to build toilets for women in Kanpur; and, Veena Devi, a home farmer who became village sarpanch. 'Family is inspiration' MALVIKA IYER, 31 In 2002, when she was 13 and living near an ammunition factory in Bikaner, a fire and explosion scattered material all over the area. Six months later, she picked up an unexploded grenade she found in her yard. The grenade exploded, blowing off her hands. Iyer is now a Global Shaper with the World Economic Forum, a disability rights activist and a motivational speaker. "I was bedridden for two years. But no one in my family ever said 'bechari ladki'. My family's attitude was my inspiration and this is the attitude I speak about in my motivational talks," says Iyer, who holds a PhD on how disabled people are perceived. 'Home is my workplace' SNEHA MOHANDOSS, 27 A resident of Chennai, she founded FoodBank-India, an initiative that promotes cooking an extra meal every day for the needy. Today, she coordinates with over 500 volunteers from across the country who are part of 18 chapters of her initiative. Started in 2015, FoodBank-India's Facebook page gained popularity the same year for its relief work in flood-hit Chennai. Driven by social media, with no office or vehicle, her team also maintains a database of orphan

An architect, Kalpana is known in Hyderabad as the "water warrior" for her efforts to conserve water, harness rainwater, encourage recycling, and save lakes and ponds. When she returned to India from Boston eight years ago with her husband, they decided to build an ecologically sustainable home with rainwater harvesting and water treatment. She later extended them projects to the gated community she lived in. "When we came, everyone used to get water through tankers. 'Hope this helps fellow women' VIJAYA PAWAR, 36 A resident of Ambejogai in Maharashtra's Beed, she is the president of Harappani Gorbhanjara Mahila Kala Vikas Mandal which works to preserve and promote the traditional art and culture of the Gorbhanjara community she belongs to. A graduate in Arts, Pawar said she set up the organisation in 2004 along with her husband Dr Shriram Pawar. "The Gorbhanjara culture has made an impact on the ancient cultures of Tarapur, Khargapur, Dharhara and Asarganj. We are proud that Veena has been recognised as an agent of change," he says. 'Persisted when others stopped' VEENA DEVI, 43 In 2013, she was among a dozen women who received training in mushroom cultivation from Sabour Agriculture University, Bhagalpur. Her husband Krishnakant Singh, a farmer, that she persisted while other women of the village could not continue. As Dhouri panchayat sarpanch between 2011 and 2016, she took it as a challenge to show the way. "She has been training mushroom farmers of Tarapur, Khargapur, Dharhara and Asarganj. We are proud that Veena has been recognised as an agent of change," he says. (INPUTS FROM ESHA ROY/DELHI, SREENIVAS JANYALA/HYDERABAD, SANTOSH SINGH/PATNA, ZEESHAN SHAIKH/MUMBAI, ARUN JANARDHANAN/CHENNAI, ASAD RAHMAN/LUCKNOW & ADIL AKHZER/SRINAGAR)



87 retired employees told to vacate govt housing

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

DAYS AFTER it undertook a door-to-door survey in government housing colonies to find out the number of settlements that were being illegally occupied, the Public Works Department (PWD) has issued notices to 87 retired employees and those living in government housing illegally to vacate the premises and clear pending dues.

The dues are close to Rs 4 crore, with the highest – Rs 43 lakh – to be paid by an occupant living in a Type V accommodation in Gulabi Bagh illegally since 2014.

"Non-compliance of the order would attract action under the Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Act, 1971, and the eviction proceedings will be initiated and occupants will be removed or evicted along with their respective belongings," the department's order said.

The report of the door-to-door survey was submitted on February 24 and the orders were issued on February 25.

Among the houses illegally occupied, there are 14 Type IV and V houses, 11 Type III, 49 Type II and 27 Type I houses.

Last month, the Delhi High Court had pulled up the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs for allowing over 500 ineligible officials to continue staying in government accommodation.

The court had asked the ministry to make sure these houses are vacated in two week's time.

IHBAS OFFERS COUNSELLING 'Many injured in riots stressed, traumatised'

ASTHA SAXENA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

AS MANY as two-thirds of those injured in the Northeast Delhi riots, who are admitted to GTB Hospital, are suffering from acute stress disorder. To offer them counselling, doctors from the Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences (IHBAS) have been visiting the hospital's ward over the last one-and-a-half weeks.

The institute too has seen many patients seeking psychological help. Psychologists at IHBAS have offered treatment to over 35 people who were traumatised after they witnessed the clashes last month, which left 53 dead and over 300 injured.

"A woman who sustained injuries told us she still wakes up in the middle of the night, shouting and crying as she remembers the incident. She said she saw groups of men carrying sticks, stones, and guns in their hands... she cannot forget the scenes. We have advised her to take a few medicines and to return for a follow-up," said Dr Nimesh Desai, director, IHBAS.

Doctors also recalled the case of a 30-year-old man, who was on his way to work when he saw people burning houses in Shiv Vihar.

"He was crying when he came to us, and even medication did not seem to help. Psychologists spoke to him in detail and he said he had heard some children crying inside the



The clashes in Northeast Delhi last month left 53 dead and around 300 injured

house. That shattered him completely," added Dr Desai.

On Sunday, the institute held a meeting with NGOs, school officials and other officers to find out ways to provide treatment to such patients.

"The idea is to provide treatment to as many riot-affected patients as possible. Once students start going to school, teachers can counsel them; similarly, we are planning to rope in health professionals to counsel those coming to health centres. It has to be a collaborative effort," he said.

As many as 297 injured persons have visited GTB hospital over the last two weeks. Over 170 people sustained assault and burn injuries, 67 suffered gunshot and firearm injuries and 30 suffered minor injuries. Among the injured are 291 men and six women.

MORE REPORTS, P4

Haryana to get 1 lakh more CCTVs, 4 lakh streetlights

SAKSHI DAYAL
GURGAON, MARCH 8

ALMOST 4 lakh streetlights and an additional 1 lakh CCTV cameras will be installed in Haryana in the coming years to boost provisions for women's safety and security in the state, announced Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar during a state-level programme at the Government Girls College, Gurgaon, on the occasion of International Women's Day Sunday.

Stating that "significant steps" are being taken to empower "daughters and women" in Haryana, Khattar said, "In view of women's safety, 3,90,000 streetlights will be arranged in Haryana. Provisions have also been made to install 1 lakh CCTVs in the next two years, in addition to the 2 lakh CCTV cameras already installed in the state so far."

To encourage education of young girls, he said the state has started providing vehicles for students to reach their educa-



Haryana CM Manohar Lal Khattar at the event, Sunday

tional institutions, and is opening colleges every 20 km.

"So far, 31 new women's colleges have been opened. We plan to open nine new women's colleges in the state next year," said Khattar.

Officials Sunday also announced that a 'Mothers for Sports and Fitness' app will be launched to motivate children to take up sports.

"A mother is the first teacher and instructor in a child's life. She teaches her children the art of living, playing, and jumping,"

said Khattar.

"Keeping this in mind, Haryana will launch a 'Mothers for Sports and Fitness' app, which will provide mothers with information about sports and fitness facilities near their homes, which are options available to their children to keep themselves fit," he added.

At the event, Director General of Police Manoj Yadav shed light on the Durga Shakti app, which was launched to tweak safety measures for women.

He said the app has been downloaded by 1.86 lakh women until February 28 this year. "To create a safer environment for women, 640 new PCR and emergency vehicles will be provided to police, so that they can reach a spot within 10 minutes of receiving information through the app," said Yadav.

"A week ago, on the CM's orders, a campaign was organised across the state to encourage women to use this app. As a result, another 31,874 women downloaded the application," said Yadav.



MINI-CM MEETS CM

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal meets one-year-old Ayaan Tomar, whose photos dressed as the AAP chief went viral on social media during the Delhi Assembly elections, Sunday

Work on two U-turns in Gurgaon to be over by June, says NHA

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
GURGAON, MARCH 8

WORK ON the elevated U-turn near Gurgaon's Shankar Chowk and the U-turn underpass near Ambience Mall will be completed "latest by June", well before its September deadline, National Highways Authority of India (NHA) officials said.

"The elevated U-turn will be completed by mid or end of April, while the underpass will be completed by end May and opened to commuters. Both structures will be completed latest by June," said Saurabh Singhal, team leader and traffic transportation expert at Bloom Companies LLC, the NHA consultant for the structures.

Work on the structures began in March last year, with officials estimating it would be completed in 18 months. The project cost was estimated to be Rs 161.90 crore – Rs 102.94 crore for the underpass, and Rs 58.96

crore for the elevated U-turn. The four-lane underpass, which is 377 metres long, is meant for use by commuters travelling from Gurgaon towards Ambience Mall and the surrounding offices and condominiums on the other side of the highway.

Commuters travelling to these destinations currently cross the border into New Delhi and then travel back into Gurgaon to reach their destinations, adding to not only their travel cost and commute time, but also traffic congestion at the border. The 455-metre-long elevated U-turn will be a three-lane stretch meant for use by those travelling from Phase 3 towards New Delhi and Udyog Vihar.

"Earlier, for over a month, work stopped due to the construction ban. Then there were some delays in shifting utility electric line... It all held up work for some time, but we still expect to complete both structures well before the September deadline," said Singhal.

Police recreate crime scene with Shahrukh, say 702 cases registered

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

INVESTIGATORS ON Sunday recreated the crime scene with accused Shahrukh Pathan at Northeast Delhi's Maujpur, where he allegedly opened fire during the recent riots in the area, police said.

Delhi Police's Crime Branch tried to find empty shells at the spot, officers said. Pathan (23) whose picture showing him pointing a gun at an unarmed policeman during the riots went



Shahrukh Pathan was arrested on March 3 from UP's Shamli district

viral on social media, was arrested from UP's Shamli district on March 3. A court sent him to police remand for four days that ended on Saturday, following which he was sent to three more

days' police custody.

On Saturday, UP Police arrested an alleged drug trafficker from Shamli district, who is suspected to have helped Pathan escape to Haryana after the riots.

Delhi Police Sunday said it has filed 702 cases and nabbed nearly 2,400 people in connection with the riots.

In total, 2,387 people have been either detained or arrested, and 49 of the 702 cases have been registered under the Arms Act, they added.

DELHI POLICE
SHANTI SEWA NYAYA

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Delhi Police
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DO SPREAD COLOURS OF JOY

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- Play colours with unwilling persons
- Harass women
- Throw water balloons at strangers
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- Pick a fight with others

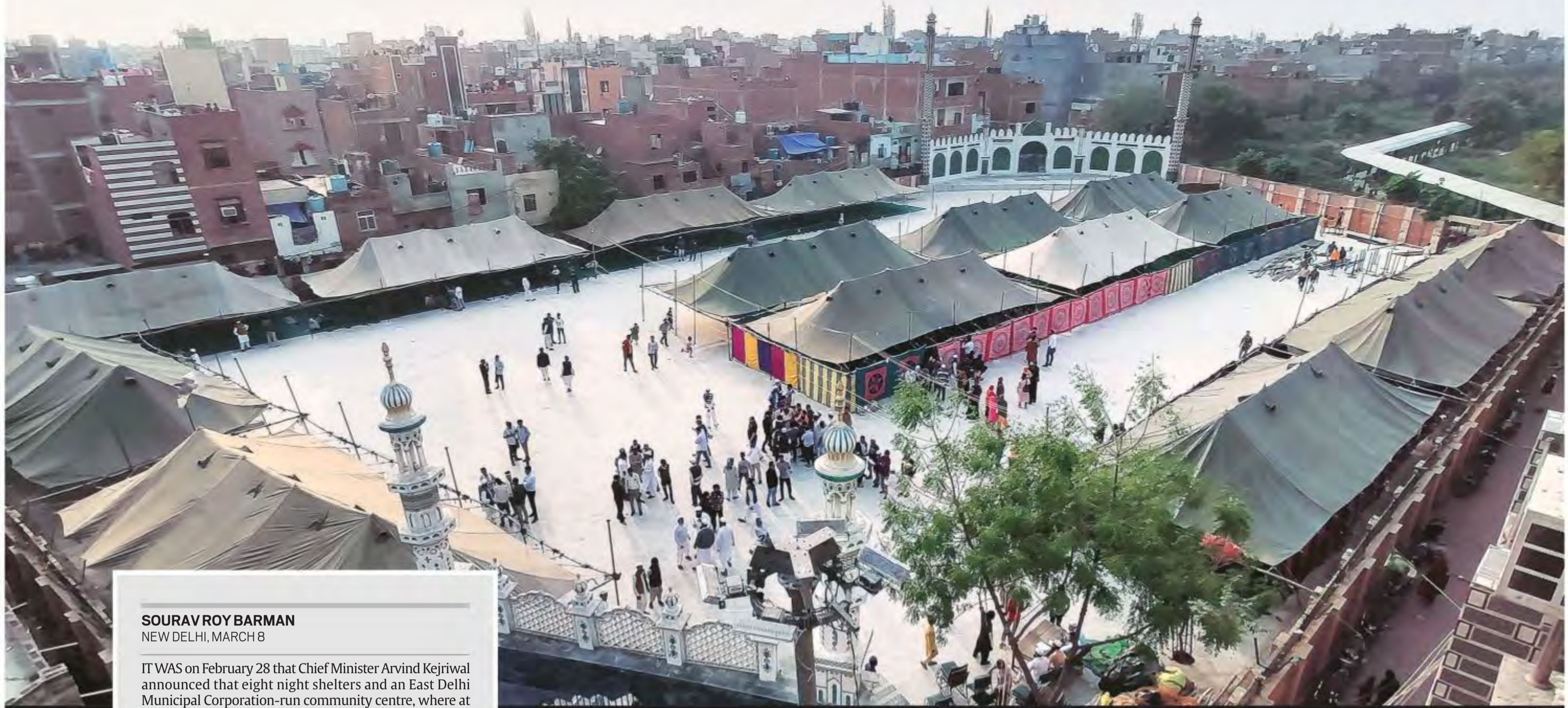
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AWAY FROM HOME

Two weeks after riots ravaged several areas of Northeast Delhi, leaving 53 dead and over 300 injured, a camp at Mustafabad has become ground zero for relief and rehabilitation efforts



Abhinav Saha

SOURAV ROY BARMAN
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

IT WAS on February 28 that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced that eight night shelters and an East Delhi Municipal Corporation-run community centre, where at least 42 displaced families from Garhi Mendu village had already moved, have been notified as relief camps for those whose lives were upended by the riots in Northeast Delhi.

But there was a problem: There were no takers for the night shelters, with the perception around them being hubs of drug addicts and petty thieves, keeping working-class displaced families away. Many families chose to stay with their relatives or even neighbours, while some left for their villages.

"Deeply dismayed that Delhi government (is) refusing to set up large relief camps. Homeless shelters are no substitute; they offer neither the safety nor dignity which people battered and terrorised by communal hate require from a caring state. Citizens' initiatives are trying to fill the gap," bureaucrat-turned-social activist Harsh Mander, whose organisation has also been leading relief efforts, tweeted on February 29.

On March 2, the Delhi government took corrective measures, notifying a large facility as a relief camp, opened by the Delhi Waqf Board and with a capacity to house over 1,000 people, in a Muslim prayer ground in Mustafabad. Within a day, over 1,000 families had moved in, indicating the extent of displacement and loss.

Government functionary Abhinandita Mathur, who is coordinating relief efforts in the district, told *The Indian Express* that authorities are still working out the specific numbers of men, women and children who have taken shelter at the Eidgah camp in Mustafabad, but they estimate that around 800-1,000 people continue to live here.

"Apart from those who stay, around 500 people more, living with their relatives or elsewhere, are also having food here. They are given tea and rusk in the morning, while children are given milk. During lunch and dinner usually *roti, sabzi* and *biryani* are provided. Donations are coming from the Waqf board as well as NGOs and individuals," said Mathur.

Every family seeking shelter is being given a kit comprising a toothbrush, toothpaste, hair oil, soap, shampoo, sanitary pad, shaving kit, clothes including undergarments, footwear, towel, a blanket, and a few other items.

Around 800 folding beds were brought with the help of an NGO after it started raining on the night of March 5, flooding the ground and the nearby area, where sewer lines have not been laid yet.

There are eight toilets in the camp for women and six for men, said Mathur. Three medical camps are being run by Al-Hind Hospital, Holy Family Hospital and GTB Hospital respectively, with doctors catering to a range of ailments from tuberculosis to fungal infections.

Mental health experts, including from IHBAS, are also working at the camp, tending to the needs of those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. A reading camp has been put up by the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights, with its member Ranjana Prasad overseeing the activities.

Legal help desks have been set up by NGOs such as the Muslim Council of India to help people fill damage claim forms distributed by the Delhi government. While people are being urged to return to their homes — an appeal made by Kejriwal on February 29 itself — the camp will not be disbanded anytime soon, especially with Holi around the corner, said officials.

"The situation is still delicate. We are requesting people to at least spend some time in their neighbourhoods during the day. Rehabilitation is a long process. In some cases, people have nowhere to go with their houses completely ravaged. For them, the full compensation amount is paramount. In that respect, we are carrying out a verification drive so as to expedite the release of money. After Holi, we might decentralise the camp and split it into smaller units," said an official.

For now, authorities are also busy cleaning up affected neighbourhoods, which were strewn with reminders of the riots in the form of charred vehicles, shards of glasses, stones, torn down walls.

While police were "initially reluctant" to give permission to such a sprawling facility in the middle of the neighbourhood, it has now deployed personnel and PCR vans to patrol the area at regular intervals, said an official.

RELIEF FOR FAMILIES

■ Forms received
■ Interim relief provided
■ Full relief provided

FULL DAMAGE TO HOUSE
19 18 0

MAJOR DAMAGE TO HOUSE
229 155 0

MINOR DAMAGE TO HOUSE
148 10 0

SHOPS
562

DEATH
39 4 35

SEVERE INJURY
70 60 10

MINOR INJURY
35 35 0

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disbursed as of
March 8, 2020

Two families with little in common share a problem: Burnt homes

SOMYA LAKHANI & SOURAV ROY BARMAN
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

"Maaf kijiye, aapke baithne ke liye koi kursi nahi hai," said an apologetic Naimuddin (45) seated on the remnants of what was once his home in Shiv Vihar. It was as if the earth had rumbled on the night of February 25 and swallowed Naimuddin's belongings of 10 years — a gas stove, a mini-fridge, a TV still in its box and his *par Chun ki dukaan*.

Naimuddin can't fathom how anyone can destroy a house, made of brick and mortar, like this. "The roof is missing, just imagine how long the fire would have raged for," he said, as he sat on the boulders next to his wife Reshma (35) on Saturday afternoon. Before the sun sets, it will be time to return to their four children, who have made the Eidgah relief camp in Mustafabad their home for an indefinite period of time.

Less than a kilometre away at Shiv Vihar Tiraha, Kamlesh Singh Uppal (66) stared at a similar heap of rubble — a wash basin covered in soot, a burnt almirah, the skeleton of a folding bed, and a ceiling fan with missing blades. The 2-BHK house where she stayed with her husband Mahender (71), their son, his wife and their one-year-old child was burnt down and plundered by a mob late evening on February 25.

"Three years ago, we added another floor and refurbished the house when our son got married. It's all gone now... *Jab laut kar ghar pehli baar dekha, rona aa gaya, zindagi ki kamaai khatam ho gayi*," said Kamlesh. The couple spent the first few nights at their daughter's house in Bhajanpura, and the last three nights at their neighbour Sunita Tomar's house in the same lane.

Reshma and Naimuddin said that if they had any relatives in the city, they too would have sought refuge there instead of sleeping on rain-soaked mattresses at the relief camp. "We are wearing second-hand clothes donated by strangers, I haven't taken a shower in 10 days... There is nothing to take back to the camp from here for the kids... their clothes, books... everything is ash," said Naimuddin, as three students from Delhi School of Social Work handed over fresh towels, slippers, undergarments, and sanitary napkins to the family.

Back at the Tomar house, Kamlesh too was dressed in a set of borrowed clothes: "My daughter-in-law borrowed this suit for me... I was feeling cold, so our neighbour Sunita gave me her sweater and shawl. My granddaughter who turned a year old in December is wearing hand-me-downs... *Rona aata hai*."

With homes that have turned to rubble, both families are unsure of the next step and unable to come to terms with the displacement. "We don't know how long we can stay at the camp, people have suggested we take up a room on rent till we receive our compensation to rebuild the house... But our account has just Rs 300-400," said Reshma. She has filled the form for compensation but is yet to receive money. Naimuddin said, "Sometimes



(Top) The Eidgah relief camp in Mustafabad; Naimuddin, Reshma (above), and Mahender whose homes were destroyed in Shiv Vihar. Amit Mehra

someone hands Rs 100-200. It helps. But I won't be able to get back on my feet this way."

Even as Kamlesh recalled walking into the lane for the first time after her house was burnt down, her husband Mahender kept quiet. Uneasy in borrowed clothes, he teared up when his wife recalled how they spent their life's savings on the house. "We received Rs 25,000 compensation... we'll start everything from scratch at this age," he said, dejectedly. Mahender drives a Vikram auto for a living.

On February 23, as it was a Sunday, the couple went to visit their elder son in East Delhi's Krishna Nagar. "We couldn't return home for days after that... my daughter-in-law was stuck at home alone with the child, she would cry on the phone. She sought refuge at the neighbour's and on February 25 at 5 am, police accompanied her husband and rescued her. Hours later, our house was burnt down," said Kamlesh.

For days, Kamlesh and Mahender had little idea about the extent of damage as the neighbours refused to divulge details over the phone. Tomar said, "How could I tell them that nothing was left over the phone?

I didn't have the heart to do that."

Naimuddin and Reshma, however, knew exactly what was lost as neighbours who returned to the lane days after shot videos of their home. "They showed us the videos... On the night we left, we couldn't carry anything with us. We thought we would return when things calmed down and pick up some clothes, money, eatables," said Naimuddin.

On February 25, the couple and their children left home around 9-9.30 pm when sounds of cylinders bursting in a lane nearby reached them. "*Jaan hatheli pe rakh kar nikle, sab jagah andhera tha aur aag thi...* We reached Johripur where some people told us we shouldn't walk in the middle of the road and suggested we bend our knees and walk close to the Johripur puliya... *goli lagne ka darr tha*. 10 feet seemed like 10 kilometres," said Naimuddin.

Once the sun sets, both Reshma and Kamlesh will check on their children and sleep on borrowed beds, in borrowed clothes. "*Neend kahan aati hai... apna ghar toh apna hota hai*," said Reshma, a sentiment that Kamlesh, a stranger to her, echoed.

BRIEFLY

In Faridabad, 2,000 cops to ensure a safe Holi

Faridabad: Around 2,000 police personnel will be deployed in Faridabad Tuesday to ensure law and order is maintained during Holi celebrations. Commissioner of Police K K Rao has issued directions to all SHOs, police post in-charges, crime branches, traffic police, and female police personnel to remain on alert. Officers said "highly sensitive" and "sensitive" areas within each police station will be watched closely by police personnel in plain clothes. Traffic police have been directed to issue challans against those violating the law, and impound their vehicles. "The Commissioner of Police has instructed the staff in the control room to attend every call. They have also been told that if information about any incident is received, the SHO concerned and closest PCR van should be informed immediately so that action can be taken against anti-social elements on the spot," said Sube Singh, PRO of Faridabad Police. **ENS**

Mercury below season normal

New Delhi: It was a pleasant Sunday in Delhi with the maximum temperature settling at 24.8 degrees Celsius, four notches below normal, the Met office said. According to IMD, the minimum temperature was recorded at 11.1 degrees Celsius, three notches below the average. The humidity levels oscillated between 98 and 56 per cent and traces of rainfall was also recorded at some places during the last 24 hours ending at 8.30 am Sunday, IMD said. The weatherman has forecast strong surface winds on Monday with the temperature expected to hover around 27 and 12 degrees Celsius. **PTI**

KEJRIWAL TO MEET HARSH VARDHAN, REQUEST TRAVEL BAN TO AND FROM COUNTRIES WITH HIGH CASES

Buses, Metros to be disinfected daily, sample collection centres raised to 25: Delhi govt

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

WITH THREE confirmed positive cases of novel coronavirus (Covid-19) in the national capital, the Delhi government Sunday announced a host of precautionary measures, including expansion of testing facilities in the city. Currently, samples of suspected coronavirus cases are only tested at Safdarjung and Ram Manohar Lohia hospitals.

Addressing a press conference, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal also said that he would

meet Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Monday and that he would request a ban on travel to and from countries which have recorded a high number of coronavirus cases.

On Sunday, Kejriwal announced that the number of sample collection centres in the capital had been expanded to 25, of which 19 are government hospitals and six are private ones.

"We are also creating separate testing and treatment facilities in these hospitals so that if anyone who is infected visits them, they will not come in contact with other patients,"



CM Arvind Kejriwal and Health Minister Satyendar Jain address the media on Sunday. Prem Nath Pandey

said Kejriwal.

A government official said that this process would take another two-three days.

The government also announced that it has passed an order to disinfect all Delhi Transport Corporation and cluster buses, Metro train coaches and stations, as well as hospitals in the city everyday.

On Friday, a third case in Delhi was confirmed positive for coronavirus from Uttam Nagar.

So far, the government has traced 105 people who came in contact with the first positive case, 168 people who came in

contact with the second case and 64 who came in contact with the third.

"All those who came in contact with the three patients are being quarantined and we are collecting and testing their samples to check if they have been infected," said Kejriwal.

The three coronavirus patients in the capital have a recent history of foreign travel.

The government has also deployed 40 doctors at the Indira Gandhi International Airport and those arriving from abroad are being made to undergo thermal screening to check for the virus.

Officials said that 1,40,603 passengers have been placed under surveillance.

Among these, people residing in Delhi are being placed under surveillance for a period of 14 days and their health status is being monitored.

"The contact details of all those who are arriving are being collected at the airport and these are being forward to the state. We are calling them once in the morning and once in the evening everyday to ask if they are displaying any symptoms," said Dr Nutan Mundeja, Director General of Health Services.

Don't panic, just exercise caution, says Kejriwal

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

ON SUNDAY, Chief Minister Kejriwal appealed to residents of Delhi to take precautions against coronavirus without panicking, and to exercise caution while celebrating Holi.

"The Delhi government is concerned about the situation. However, there is absolutely no need to panic. The government is fully prepared to tackle the crises. We need your support, I request all people of Delhi to cooperate in order to contain the spread of the virus," he said.

Among his appeals were to the employers of people who have been placed in quarantine because of contact with those who have tested positive. "I appeal to employers to give them paid leave for 14 days so that they do not have to go through any trouble during the period," he said.

He also asked people to exercise caution during Holi, which is on March 10.

"Many wishes to all people of Delhi for Holi but I request you all that even on Holi, you should try to protect yourselves from coro-

navirus by avoiding crowded localities and places," he said.

He, along with senior doctors, also cautioned citizens against rushing to buy supplies such as hand sanitisers and masks in a panic.

As a public service announcement, Dr Nutan Mundeja, Director General of Health Services, also discussed the disadvantages of people without any symptoms wearing masks.

"If a healthy person wears masks consistently for hours, they can get uncomfortable. They will adjust their masks and touch their faces with their hands which may have touched some unwanted surfaces. A person who is suffering from respiratory diseases should wear the mask to prevent the spread of the virus but a healthy person is advised to not wear a mask because by doing that, he/she is pre-disposing themselves to chances of infection," she said.



People wait outside a testing centre at RML Hospital. Tashi Tobgyal

ACROSS THE CAPITAL			
	RML	Safdarjung	Total
Passengers from affected countries under observation	104	88	192
Asymptomatic passengers isolated at home	88	62	150
Symptomatic passengers hospitalised	11	24	35
Positive cases (from Delhi)	0	3	3
Total cases (from across India)	0	8	8

1,45,389 Passengers screened at IGI Airport	4,786 Passengers screened on Sunday	2 Passengers hospitalised on Sunday
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HELPLINES
The government has launched three 24x7 state-level control room helpline numbers:

- 011-22307145
- 011-22300012
- 011-22300036

5 medical shops lose licence for hiking rates of masks, sanitisers

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NOIDA, MARCH 8

LICENCES OF five medical shops in Ghaziabad were cancelled for allegedly selling hand sanitisers and pollution masks at inflated prices. While action was taken against two shops on Saturday, licences of three more were suspended the following day, said an official.

The Ghaziabad administration has issued instructions regarding sale of hygiene products after a resident of the city tested positive for coronavirus.

"We received information and inspections were carried out at medical shops along with officials of drug department. We found that some shops had been selling essential items at a higher price than the actual cost. This is a wrongful activity, especially at a time when people have to buy these products. Strict vigilance is taking place and more action will be taken if the activity continues in medical stores," said Ajay Shankar Pandey, district magistrate (DM), Ghaziabad.

According to officials, the shops were identified after local residents complained of items being sold at inflated

rates in several areas.

In one instance, an administrative official himself went to a shop to purchase a hand sanitiser when the shopkeeper quoted a higher price. In some cases, erring shopkeepers were also not providing customers with bills.

Drug inspectors have issued advisories to shopkeepers about selling hand sanitisers and masks at the regular price.

The administration has further urged locals to approach the district magistrate's office if such activities continue. An appeal has also been made to the public to not hoard the same material as supply is sufficient.

A 57-year-old businessman from Ghaziabad, who had travelled to Tehran earlier, was diagnosed with coronavirus on Friday.

The patient is currently being treated in Delhi. Soon after, Ghaziabad administration set up three e-mail IDs and a helpline number for those seeking information about symptoms and causes.

District health officials have also begun work at the Ala Hazrat House in Arthala, which is to be converted into an isolation ward in the event cases rise. The facility will have 500 beds.

On women's day, Aqua Line stations get sanitary pad kiosks

AMIL BHATNAGAR
NOIDA, MARCH 8

A GROUP of people looked curiously at a sanitary pad vending machine installed at the Sector 76 Metro station on the Aqua Line, with some squinting to read the instructions. The machine, available at all 21 stations on the Metro line, was inaugurated Sunday on the occasion of International Women's Day and will dispense sanitary napkins free of cost.

The facility is a part of initiatives undertaken by the Noida Metro Rail Corporation (NMRC) for women travellers, on the eve of Women's Day. "NMRC has given a special gift to all women passengers...by unveiling two stations on the Metro corridor, Sector 76 and Pari Chowk, as 'Pink stations'...The purpose is to ease the commute for women passengers," said an NMRC official.

According to officials, the two 'Pink stations' will have a baby-feeding room, a diaper changing room and make up/changing room and a selfie point. The facilities will be free, said officials.

According to officials, women who wish to avail the sanitary napkin facility will be given a token. This will have to deposited in



Sector 76 Metro station is now a 'pink station'. Gajendra Yadav

the machine following which a napkin will be provided. The machines can store 50 napkins and capacity will be increased as per demand, said officials.

The machines have been installed by NGO Mahamana Aradhak Shri Sewa in collaboration with ACE Group under their CSR campaign, 'Nirmalya - Ek Komal Pahal'.

Examining the vending machine at Sector 76 station, Anushka, a student from Greater Noida, said: "This seems like an interesting move as an emergency can crop up any time. The fact that they are free is great since pads are expensive."

According to officials, about 20-25% of the total workforce in NMRC comprises women.

To maintain exclusivity, RPVVs will no longer offer vocational subjects

SUKRITA BARUAH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

VOCATIONAL SUBJECTS will no longer be offered at Rajkiya Pratibha Vikas Vidyalayas (RPVVs) run by the Delhi government, citing the need for academic excellence in these exclusive schools. The decision was taken at an academic council meeting of the RPVVs in September 2019 and was communicated to teachers last month.

RPVV students will also not be allowed to opt for the easier 'Basic Maths' paper as these schools "should have a Mathematics standard", the academic council has decided.

There are 22 RPVVs in Delhi which are supposed to be model government schools with the best teachers, infrastructure and resources. While other Delhi gov-

ernment schools are "open for all", entrance tests are conducted for admission to these schools in classes VI and IX.

The academic council decided to scrap vocational and 'non-academic' subjects offered by CBSE in all these schools from the coming academic year of 2020-2021.

This means that students of classes IX and X can only opt for 'main subjects' offered by CBSE - Hindi, English, Science, Social Science, Mathematics and a choice of language subject. They will not be allowed to choose optional skill subjects offered by the board, which students can opt for in addition to the main subjects. These include IT; Artificial Intelligence; Media, and Introduction to Financial Markets.

The reason, as recorded in the minutes of the meeting, is: "There should not be any skill subject in RPVVs as RPVVs have been estab-

lished for imparting quality education in main subjects."

As per CBSE guidelines, if students do not pass in one of their main papers, those marks can be substituted with marks obtained in their vocational subject.

Similarly, senior secondary students in RPVVs will not be offered vocational subjects or Music, Fine Arts, Home Science and Physical Education as main subjects. While students opt for these subjects out of interest and affinity, many also opt for vocational subjects or Home Science and Physical Education to have a "high scoring subject" in hand to raise their overall percentage. In fact, in government schools across Delhi, students seen as "low performers" are encouraged to opt for vocational subjects to boost their chances of passing their board exams.

On the decision to not offer

'Basic Maths', the minutes read: "...RPVVs are trendsetters of DoE and are known for their academic excellence; all RPVVs should have Mathematics-Standard."

Earlier this academic session, CBSE had offered students of class X the chance to opt for the easier 'Basic Maths' paper for their board examination, and majority of students in Delhi government schools were encouraged to opt for this to increase their passing chance.

Some teachers, however, have raised apprehensions. "In a bid to increase pass percentages, they've been pushing students to opt for these subjects and now they've decided to completely deny the choice... These are offered by the board, and in the best private schools as well... This decision shouldn't be taken unilaterally," said a teacher at one of the RPVVs.

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Director - BD, Marketing
A. Menarini India Private Limited
Date : 09th March 2020
Place : MUMBAI



EARS TO THE GROUND

ENVIRONMENT MINISTER Prakash Javadekar decided to mark International Women's Day with Swachata Sevikas in Pune. He was quick to point out that even on Diwali, he celebrated the occasion by spending time with waste-pickers "to understand their work and problems". The minister also announced that he had decided to spend his MP Local Area Development Fund for the construction of 50 big and 50 small garbage sheds to be designed by the organisation SWaCH.

FOR THE CAUSE

TO MARK International Women's Day, the National Commission for Women (NCW) on Sunday launched a project to push women's rights through social media by collaborating with a social media platform Helo. With the aim to promote women's empowerment and gender equality, the NCW will be launching several campaigns under #EachforEqual and #Women'sRightsMatter to encourage "millions of young women" to share stories on the platform in 10 regional languages.

TRACING ROOTS

SURINAME'S EMBASSY in India, which is headed by Indian-origin ambassador Aashna Kanhai, celebrated Holi in the traditional style on Friday. According to the 2012 Census of Suriname, 148,443 citizens of that country are of Indian origin. Indo-Surinamese made up 37.6 per cent of the population in the 1972 Census. Indians began migrating to Suriname in 1873 as indentured labourers, mostly from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and surrounding regions. The embassy called the gathering Phagwa — confluence of ethnics. It was attended by the capital's diplomatic community.

MADHYA PRADESH GOVERNMENT CRISIS

Cong MLA returns, says unhappy over not getting ministry berth

MILIND GHATWAI
BHO PAL, MARCH 8

CONGRESS LEGISLATOR Bisahul Singh, one of the three ruling party legislators missing for past five days, returned to Madhya Pradesh on Sunday and admitted that he was unhappy at not finding a berth in the Kamal Nath ministry.

"When juniors are made ministers and you are not accommodated despite being an MLA for many terms, it is natural to get angry. Nothing wrong in getting angry if your interests are not protected," the Anuppur MLA said.

Denying that he was taken hostage by the BJP, a charge leveled by senior Congress leader and former chief minister Digvijaya Singh, Bisahul claimed he was on pilgrimage to temples in southern India. "BJP can't dare to hold me hostage," he said when asked to comment on allegations that he was taken to Bengaluru against his wish.

However, Chief Minister Kamal Nath's media coordinator Narendra Saluja claimed that the legislator had been trapped by the BJP in Bengaluru for three days.

State Narmada Valley Development Minister Surendra Singh Baghel accompanied the legislator from Bengaluru to Indore on a private airline. A state plane was waiting at the Indore airport from where Bisahul was escorted to Bhopal by Baghel and Home Minister Bala Bachchan.

The two ministers took him to the chief minister's residence where he met Nath. He claimed



Congress legislator Bisahul Singh (centre) with Madhya Pradesh Home Minister Bala Bachchan (left) and Narmada Valley Development Minister Surendra Singh Baghel (right) at Indore airport on Sunday. Express

he discussed development of his constituency with the Chief Minister.

A political uncertainty has prevailed in Madhya Pradesh ever since the Congress accused BJP of horse trading and offering between Rs 25 crore and Rs 35 crore to several Congress, Independents, two BSP and one SP legislators. All except two Congress legislators have returned.

In the 230-member Assembly there are two vacancies. The Congress has 114 and BJP 107 members. Four Independents, one SP and two BSP members support the Kamal Nath government.

Bisahul said he has been with the Congress for four decades and won't like to join

the BJP now. When asked if he had been assured a ministerial berth, he parried the question but said he would welcome a chance to become a minister, as and when that happens.

He claimed he was always in touch with his family members. When asked about the "missing person" complaint filed by his son in a police station in Bhopal, he said it was a conspiracy but did not elaborate who was behind getting the complaint filed.

The legislator returned to the state capital a day after Independent MLA Surendra Shera came to Bhopal via Delhi.

Shera had claimed he was in Bengaluru to attend a family emergency while denying reports that BJP held him hostage.

Congress legislators Raghuraj Kansana and Hardip Dang who too are believed to be in Bengaluru are yet to return. Dang has purportedly sent in his resignation on WhatsApp but Assembly Speaker N P Prajapati said he would proceed only when the legislator hands him over the resignation letter personally.

There was no word on kansana and Dang on Sunday although the Congress claimed to be in touch with them.

The BJP said the development was further proof that it had nothing to do with the legislators who had gone missing from the state and that the alleged attempt to topple the Congress government was unsubstantiated.

Cong crisis manager for four decades, H R Bhardwaj dies at 83

MANOJ CG & APURVA VISHWANATH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8



HANS RAJ BHARDWAJ
1937-2020

FROM ONE of Indira Gandhi's trusted lawyers in the post-Emergency days to Rajiv Gandhi's sounding board on legal matters to Sonia Gandhi's first choice as Union Law Minister when the Congress returned to power in 2004, Hans Raj Bhardwaj was a quintessential backroom operator and crisis manager for the grand old party for nearly four decades.

The 83-year-old died on Sunday after a cardiac arrest. His last rites will take place on Monday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Minister for Law and Justice Ravi Shankar Prasad have expressed their condolences.

Bhardwaj wore the label of Nehru-Gandhi family loyalist on his sleeve almost till the last years of his life. He courted many controversies, from the role he allegedly played to shield Rajiv Gandhi from the Bofors scandal to a controversial tenure as Law Minister in UPA-1. Towards the end, however, he had turned bitter to the Congress and nursed a grudge that he was sidelined.

Bhardwaj's public life began in 1977 when Congress leader and former Haryana chief minister Bansi Lal introduced him to Indira Gandhi to handle some cases for her in trial courts during the Janata Party rule. The next five years saw his mercurial rise and he was elected to Rajya Sabha. In December 1984, the first-time MP was named Minister of State for Law and Justice, a post he held again from 1992-1996 when the Supreme Court changed the way judges

are appointed to the higher judiciary by introducing the Collegium system. He was a Rajya Sabha member for the next 27 years till he resigned in 2009 to take over as Governor of Karnataka. He never contested any direct election.

Congress veteran Mani Shankar Aiyar remembered Bhardwaj's role as one of the principal lawyers of Indira Gandhi, especially during the Shah Commission trial set up to probe excesses during the Emergency.

In fact, Bhardwaj accompanied Rajiv to Amethi when he filed his nomination papers in 1982. "He was often consulted by Rajiv," Aiyar said. During P V Narasimha Rao's

tenure as prime minister, the office of the Attorney General became a flashpoint between Rao and Bhardwaj. Though Milon Banerjee, who enjoyed Bhardwaj's confidence, was appointed A-G, senior advocate and former attorney general K Parasaran, who would have been Rao's pick, appeared for the government in virtually every high-stakes case.

In 2004, when Bhardwaj returned as Law Minister in Manmohan Singh's cabinet, Banerjee returned as A-G. Bhardwaj's tenure in the Manmohan Singh government was beset with controversies, including the alleged 'let off' of main accused in the Bofors scam Ottavio Quattrocchi. After the Congress victory in 2009 Lok Sabha elections, Bhardwaj lost the Law Ministry.

In 2007, in the Ram Sethu case, an affidavit filed in Supreme Court that there was no scientific or historical evidence of Ram landed the government in a soup. Although Bhardwaj directed his law officers to withdraw the affidavit and held a press conference to assert the government's belief in Ram, the damage was done.

In 2009, after being dropped from the council of ministers, he was appointed Governor of Karnataka. Controversies followed Bhardwaj to Raj Bhavan where he had a face-off with the then Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa.

He had twice recommended dismissal of the Yediyurappa government.

In fact, he had once said he was "eased out" because he "did not toe the Congress line" on "several matters".

"Bhardwaj was a quintessential old-style politician who relied much less on theory and concept and much more on a wide network of personal relations which stood him in good stead," Congress leader Abhishek Singhvi recalled.

Rajasthan govt sets up economic advisory panel

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
JAIPUR, MARCH 8

THE RAJASTHAN government has constituted an advisory council to advise Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and tackle economic issues faced by the state, especially fiscal management, improving production, finding avenues for creation of jobs, and effectively implementing basic services, officials said Sunday.

The Chief Minister's Economic Transformation Advisory Council (CMETAC), constituted on Saturday, will be headed by Gehlot. Former IAS officer and economist Arvind Mayaram will be its vice president while Dr Govind Sharma, also a former IAS officer, will be its Advisory

Member. The state's chief secretary, additional chief secretary (finance) and the principal secretary to the CM will be ex-officio members of the council.

Members include Ashok Gulati, agriculture economist and Padma Shri recipient; Anil Agarwal, founder and chairman of Vedanta Resources Limited; Lakshmi Niwas Mittal, chairman and CEO of ArcelorMittal and actor Nandita Das.

Officials said that the council will meet at least once in six months. It will constitute a working group — with members from within the Council and without — and these subject experts will be nominated by the CM for two years. The tenure of the Council is till March 2022, with a provision to extend it if needed.

At helm of new J&K outfit, one of Valley's richest politicians; in ranks, leaders with links across parties

BASHAARAT MASOOD, ADIL AKHZER & ARUN SHARMA
SRINAGAR, JAMMU, MARCH 8

ONE OF the richest politicians of Kashmir, Altaf Bukhari's first brush with politics came when he had just left college as an agriculture graduate. At 24, the resident of Ladoora village in Sopore was seen as one of the key players behind a coup orchestrated by the Centre in 1984 to replace then Jammu & Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah with his brother-in-law Ghulam Mohammad Shah, acting as the liaison between Delhi and the rebel National Conference leaders.

In January 2019, Mehbooba cracked down against him again, expelling him from the PDP for continuing his "anti-party activities". Bukhari never hid his eagerness to engage with the Centre, and in October last year, 60-year-old Bukhari and PDP patron Muzaffar Hussain Beig attended a luncheon hosted by NSA Ajit Doval in New Delhi.

Having started out with a pesticide manufacturing unit and since diversifying, Bukhari's name had come up in connection with money laundering. Last year, the National Investigation Agency had summoned his brother, Tariq Bukhari, for questioning in hawala transactions.

Other leaders of Bukhari's party include:

Mehbooba Mufti's dithering over continuing in government with the BJP saw Bukhari lead a rebellion. When Mehbooba finally took over as CM, she punished Bukhari for his dalliance with the BJP by stripping him of his portfolio. However, given Bukhari's deep pockets, he couldn't be kept out for long.

In 2017, he returned as Education Minister, followed it up with the coveted finance portfolio. When the BJP pulled out and the PDP and National Conference (NC) entered talks to form a government, his name was even floated as the consensus CM candidate. However, that was scuttled when Assembly was dissolved.

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Other leaders of Bukhari's party include:



Former PDP minister Altaf Bukhari and other leaders at the launch of Apni Party in Srinagar on Sunday. Shuaib Masoodi

GHULAM HASSAN MIR: A former Gulmarg MLA, the 70-year-old was agriculture minister in Omar Abdullah's government from 2009-14. Mir's name had cropped in an Army inquiry into the functioning of a secret intelligence unit set up by then Army chief General VK Singh.

While Mir had called the charge baseless, VK Singh had called Mira "God, a nationalist and unifying factor in Jammu and Kashmir".

Nicknamed as "manager" in political and security circles for his organisational skills, Mir, who had facilitated interactions of a 2010 all-party delegation, including then home minister P Chidambaram and BJP leader

Arun Jaitley, with people in Tangmarg.

MUHAMMAD DILAWAR MIR: A former PDP minister, the 70-year-old is a relative of Altaf Bukhari. In 2014, he had been awarded three years' jail and fined Rs 3.21 crore by a Delhi court over the wrongful release of Rs 30 lakh and a contract for sale of urea to his firm by the public sector National Fertilizers Limited between 1993-96. However, the court had granted him bail and suspended the sentence till January 2, 2015, to enable him to file an appeal.

USMAN MAJEED: Former Congress general secretary and

MLA, the 60-year-old was once a part of the infamous counter-insurgent Ikhwan in the Valley. After he attended a lunch hosted by NSA Ajit Doval in New Delhi in October last year, the Congress had served him a notice. In February, he resigned from the Congress.

RAFI MIR: A former legislator from Pahalgam in South Kashmir, the 61-year-old was expelled from the PDP after he met a delegation of foreign envoys who visited Srinagar in January. Earlier in the NC, he joined the PDP in 2006. After he lost in the 2014 Assembly elections, he was named vice-chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Development Corporation by the PDP government.

CHOWDHARY ZULFIKAR ALI: A resident of Rajouri, the 51-year-old is the son of prominent NC leader Choudhary Mohammad Hussain. A two-time PDP MLA from Darhal, he was seen as the face of the party in the Pir Panchal region of Jammu and among its senior-most leaders. Made a minister by Mufti Mohammed Sayeed in 2015, he stayed in the Mehbooba Cabinet. Ali's nephew, Srinagar Deputy Commissioner Shahid Choudhary, has played a key role in the administration since the August 5 abrogation of the state's special status.

AJAZ AHMAD KHAN: The brother-in-law of Zulfikar Ali, the three-time Congress MLA from Gool-Arnas constituency in Reasi served as a minister in successive J&K coalition governments between 2002 and 2014, variously headed by Mufti, Ghulam Nabi Azad and Omar Abdullah.

A law graduate from Jammu University, 54-year-old Khan is the son of late Gujjar leader Haji Buland Khan. His brother Mumtaz Ahmed Khan, a first-time Congress MLA from Gulabgarh in Reasi, has also joined the new party. Khan's sister is married to Zulfikar Ali.

SYED ASGAR ALI: A former PDP legislator from Kishtwar, Ali had emerged as the NC's face in the Chenab valley in Jammu. His daughter Sehish Asgar, an IAS officer and Director, Information, has been seen as the administration's face since the August 5 move.

MANJEET SINGH: Samba district president of the Congress, the 56-year-old was earlier in the BSP as well as a part of the Mufti Cabinet. He lost the 2014 Assembly elections on a Congress ticket.

KAMAL ARORA: The 58-year-old was elected for the first time in 2014, winning from Bishnah Assembly seat in Jammu on an NC ticket. He is a registered medical practitioner in Ayurvedic and Unani medicines.

THREE YEARS OF UTTARAKHAND GOVERNMENT

BJP govt to list work in each constituency, compare it to previous regimes

LALMANI VERMA
DEHRADUN, MARCH 8

THE BJP-LED Uttarakhand government is set to organise an exercise that will compare development work under the current government with work carried out since the formation of the state in 2000 and before that. This data will then be put in the public domain to showcase how the Trivendra Singh Rawat-led government has performed as compared to previous governments.

As part of the exercise, the government's representatives will

visit each of the 70 Assembly segments with the slogan "sarkar ke teens saal, baatein kum, kaam jyada" and make presentations before the people about work done in the constituencies. Rawat was sworn in as chief minister on March 18, 2017 after the BJP won 57 seats in the state polls. The Congress won 11 seats in the polls and Independents won two.

In the constituencies held by the BJP, ruling party MLAs will make the presentations. And in the segments where the BJP lost, chairpersons of boards and others with minister rank will make the presentations.



Trivendra Singh Rawat

State government officials have been assigned the task of coordinating with the MLAs and helping them prepare the presentations. "We have asked every MLA to provide information about work done in their constituency on their initiative and with the use of their local area development funds. It has been no-

ted that most MLAs are not aware about the number of people who have benefited from the welfare schemes run by the Centre and the state government. We are collecting these details from district authorities. We will compile the data for every constituency," said an official.

The official said data has been sought in three categories — work done before the state was carved out of Uttar Pradesh, work done from the date of formation of the state to March 17, 2017 and work done after March 18, 2017, when the Rawat-led government took over. Information is being col-

lected about the number and length of sanctioned, built and under construction roads and bridges, and the number of settlements that these roads have connected. Information is also being compiled about settlements provided electricity and irrigation, number of new industrial units set up in the state, amount provided to beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, amount of wheat, paddy and sugarcane procured and the sum paid to the farmers.

Data on the number of beneficiaries and amount paid of them under various schemes like old

age pension, widow pension, Divyang pension and Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, among others, are also being compiled.

On March 18, the Chief Minister will address all 70 Assembly constituencies through video conference and will present the data on infrastructure and welfare schemes run by the state and central governments.

Cabinet minister Madan Kaushik said, "It will be a government event where we will highlight achievements of the past three years and present a roadmap for the next two years."

EXPLAINED Leaving no stone unturned

AGAINST THE backdrop of the BJP's successive defeats in several Assembly elections, the latest one being in Delhi, the Trivendra Singh Rawat government is leaving no stone unturned to reach the people with a report on the work it has done in the past three years. Asked if the move was partly influenced by the Delhi election results, Cabinet minister and government spokesperson Madan Kaushik said "Such events have been held in the past too, but we are going to organise it on a grand scale this time."

7 EXPRESS NETWORK

CORONA WATCH

PUNJAB



A visitor being examined for coronavirus symptoms at Golden Temple in Amritsar on Sunday. *Rana Simranjit Singh*

MAHARASHTRA

258 discharged, 15 kept under observation

Mumbai: The samples of 258 people admitted in hospitals for suspected exposure to novel coronavirus in Maharashtra have returned negative and they have been discharged, state Health Minister Rajesh Tope said on Sunday. He said 15 people are still under observation in Mumbai and Pune. Maharashtra has not reported any positive case of coronavirus so far, Tope said. Of the people still under observation, 13 are admitted in Mumbai and two in Pune, the minister informed. A state government statement said 1,09,118 passengers from 904 flights have been screened at Mumbai and Pune airports since January 18. Till now, 560 persons have returned to the state from the coronavirus-affected regions, the statement said. **PTI**

NAGALAND



Passengers undergo thermal screening at Dimapur airport in Nagaland on Sunday. *PTI*

MADHYA PRADESH

Three quarantined in Indore, 19 test negative

Bhopal: Three people who returned from coronavirus-affected regions in the past nine days were on Sunday quarantined for suspected exposure in Indore in Madhya Pradesh, a senior health official said on Sunday. Indore District Chief Medical and Health Officer Dr Praveen Jadia said the three, including a 34-year-old woman, had returned from the US and Malaysia. The samples of 19 people kept in isolation wards for suspected exposure to the virus returned negative, while reports of two others are awaited, Additional Director, Health, Dr Vina Sinha said. No positive novel coronavirus case has been reported from Madhya Pradesh so far. She said 218 of the 600 people who returned to the state from coronavirus-affected countries have been kept in home isolation. **PTI**

TELANGANA

Health Minister inspects arrangements in Hyderabad

Hyderabad: Telangana Health Minister E Rajender on Sunday asked the state machinery to be on alert in the backdrop of fresh coronavirus cases reported in Kerala as he inspected measures at the government TB and Chest Hospital here to deal with the infection. Only one positive case of COVID-19 has been reported from Telangana so far and the condition of the 24-year-old man was stated to be stable, sources said. Rajender, who has been inspecting different government hospitals as part of measures to deal with the virus, visited the isolation wards in the TB and Chest Hospital. He said the state machinery should be on alert in view of fresh cases reported from Kerala. **PTI**

COMBATING CORONAVIRUS



Tourists being screened at a hotel in Bikaner on Sunday. 39 cases of Covid-19 infection have been reported in India so far. *PTI*

No one at airport told us about screening, says Kerala family

SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
MARCH 8

RESPONDING TO the Kerala government's charge that they "did not report for screening" at the Kochi airport on arrival from Italy via Doha on February 29, one member of the family of three detected with coronavirus claimed that they were not told about the preventive measure.

"At the Kochi airport, I told the immigration official that we are from Italy and returning home after four years. The official did not tell us that we should undergo screening for coronavirus. Hence, we came out. Will anyone deliberately skip such

screening? When we left Italy, Covid-19 cases had just started being reported," claimed the 25-year-old man, who has been detected with the virus along with his parents. Two of their relatives in Kerala have since been infected. The 25-year-old, who works as a paramedic, said that his family — his father (55), who works for a private company, and mother (53) — have been based in Italy for close to 20 years. They were visiting home after four years, he said.

"We arrived in Kochi on February 29 and my sister and her husband came to take us home in Ranni taluk (in Pathanamthitta district)," he said.

Detailing their activities from March 1 to March 6, he

said, "We reached home on Saturday noon and did not go out. But we had a few guests from the locality. On Sunday, we did not go to the local church as we were tired. It was on that day that the two relatives, who have now tested positive, visited us. On Monday, we moved to my mother's house at Punalur in Kollam... there were three persons there, we returned the same day. On Tuesday, we did not go out."

He said the family stepped out on Wednesday for "local shopping". "On Thursday, we went to the office of the district SP. My parents sat in the car and I went inside alone to get a police clearance certificate. At the office, I met only one officer," he said.

On Thursday, the youth said, his mother "developed health problems, including shooting up of blood pressure, and we went to a private hospital at Ranni". "At the casualty wing, nobody asked us about travel history. There was only one other patient at the casualty and we came out after half-an-hour," he said.

It was on Friday morning that his father's elder brother and wife went to hospital with fever. "They told health staff about our travel history. Then, we got a call from the health staff," he said.

The youth said when the health workers alerted them, all the three moved to the district hospital in Pathanamthitta where they have been in isolation since Friday evening.

One more suspected case in Agra, says UP Health dept

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
LUCKNOW, MARCH 8

ONE MORE suspected case of coronavirus has emerged from Agra, the Uttar Pradesh Health department said on Sunday. The latest case is a contact of the Delhi resident, who tested positive for the infection earlier, the Directorate of Health Services said in its latest bulletin.

So far, seven people from the state have tested positive for the coronavirus infection — six of them are from Agra and are related to the Delhi resident who had travelled to Italy and one is from Ghaziabad with a recent travel history to Iran.

The government had earlier confirmed "some cases of community transmission", which makes India a part of a small group of countries, including China, Japan, Italy and South Korea, where community transmission of the virus has taken place.

"All the 330 contacts of various positive cases at Delhi, Ghaziabad and Agra are in fine health. Six of them are admitted at Safdarjung Hospital, two at Agra district hospital, and the rest, 322, under home quarantine. The seven contacts of a Ghaziabad traveller are under home quarantine," the health department said. With the latest suspected case



Taj Mahal was engulfed in fog on Sunday. Infrared thermometers have been set up to screen tourists. *PTI*

also from Agra, State Surveillance Officer Vikasendu Agarwal said the state health department has deployed a team of 40 officers to manage the situation in addition to a three-member team of Epidemic Intelligence Services officers from Delhi deployed at the control room at Agra Chief Medical Officer's office.

Infrared thermometers have been made available to teams deployed at Taj Mahal and sensitisation drive in the area where the positive cases were reported is expected to be completed by Monday, the bulletin said.

Agarwal said that other than King George Medical University in Lucknow, testing for coronavirus started at Banaras Hindu University from Sunday.

According to the government, 3,014 travellers from coronavirus-affected countries have been identified, tracked and placed under surveillance. A total of 666 travellers are being tracked, of which 657 are under home isolation, six are symptomatic at present and are at hospitals — four at Siddharthnagar, one in Hathras and one at Safdarjung Hospital in Delhi. The condition of all of them is reported to be stable, it added.

"Moreover, 1,796 travellers have completed 28 days of observation after coming back from China. The UP government has cross-notified 552 travellers to other states and details of 26 travellers have been shared with concerned authorities for international cross-notification," it added.

Suspected patient dies in Bengal, test results awaited

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MARCH 8

A YOUTH from West Bengal's Murshidabad district, who returned from Saudi Arabia on Saturday, died at Murshidabad Medical College and Hospital on Sunday evening, sources said.

Doctors said he was a suspected coronavirus patient and was in the isolation ward.

The youth fell sick on Saturday during a bus ride back home after he flew to Kolkata from Saudi Arabia, where he worked as a cleaner. On Saturday night, his family members took him to the hospital in Berhampore where doctors admitted him after a preliminary check-up. His throat swab sample was collected and he was kept in the isolation ward.

His samples have been sent to National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases in Kolkata and the report is awaited by Monday evening.

One of his family members said that he was suffering from respiratory problems and had a high blood sugar level. "He had a high blood sugar level and came home after falling ill there. After landing here, he took a bus to Murshidabad. On the way, he fell sick and his blood sugar level rose," said the family member.

PULWAMA ATTACK CASE

Dead suspect's phone helped NIA join the dots

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

AFTER MONTHS of tardy progress in the investigation into the 2019 Pulwama terror attack that killed 40 CRPF personnel, the NIA got a major breakthrough due to the recovery of the phone of a dead suspect. The memory of the phone had not been cleared. Not only did it have several numbers crucial to the probe, it also had pictures related to preparation for the attack. It was this breakthrough that paved the way for five arrests in the past few days.

In November 2019, J&K police raided the residence of a suspected Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) over-ground worker in south Kashmir. Among the recovered items was a mobile phone that police shared with NIA. It belonged to Pakistani terrorist Mohammed Umar Farooq. According to the NIA, Farooq was the key man behind the blast, from planning to execution. In fact, he was sent to India in May 2018 by JeM bosses in Pakistan with the sole task of carrying out a massive attack, NIA sources said.

According to the sources, Farooq entered India through a tunnel on the International Border in Jammu and one Mohammed Abbas Rather in Pulwama gave him shelter. Rather introduced Farooq to another family in Pulwama which sheltered him several times in the next six months and also helped in the planning for the blasts, the sources said.

Rather has been arrested. So have two members of the family that allegedly sheltered Farooq — Tariq Ahmed Shah (50), and his daughter Insha Jan (23). The NIA has also arrested Shakir Bashir Magrey, a saw mill owner. Magrey

allegedly conducted reconnaissance for the attack and drove the IED-laden vehicle till 500 m of the attack spot before handing it over to Adil Ahmed Dar, the suicide bomber who exploded the car near the CRPF convoy. A 19-year-old from Srinagar, Waiz-ul-Islam, who allegedly used his Amazon account to order bomb-making material, has also been nabbed.

However, until November 2019, the NIA did not know any of this. It had only identified a bunch of JeM operatives who played a role in the attack. However, all of them, including Farooq, had been killed in encounters within a month of the attack. "The case had almost hit a dead end even though we had identified the vehicle and tracked down the owners. All our suspects were dead and there were no leads. And then we got this phone," an NIA officer said.

The phone had numbers of the people in Kashmir Farooq was in touch with and the investigators used the information to track down more suspects, said the sources. Based on the numbers found in the phone, the NIA put multiple people on surveillance and zeroed in on Magrey, Shah and Jan, the sources added. "The phone had all the pictures related to preparation for the attack. It had pictures of the IED used in the attack, of the car was fitted into, of suicide bomber Dar before he committed the act and several other logistics. It appears these pictures were clicked to be sent to the JeM bosses in Pakistan, but those behind the attack forgot to delete them later," an officer said.

The investigators are now looking for more overground workers who they suspect provided logistic support to the bombers, sources said.

Meerut to put up photos of protesters, send damage notices

AMIT SHARMA
MEERUT, MARCH 8

THE MEERUT district administration has served notices to 51 people for the recovery of Rs 28.27 lakh for damage to public properties during the December 20 anti-CAA protest and is planning to put up posters and billboards carrying the names and photos to whom notices have been served.

The plan comes at a time when the Allahabad High Court reserved its order on the state government's move to put up similar posters in Lucknow.

"We have served notices to 51 people for the recovery of 28.27 lakh for the loss of government property, and each of these individuals will have to pay around Rs 55,431 within a week. They will be subjected to further legal action such as attachment of their properties if they fail to deposit the due amount," Additional District Magistrate (Meerut city) Ajay Kumar Tiwari said. "The names and photos of these (51) people will be pasted at police stations concerned," District Magistrate Anil Dhingra added.

Meerut is the fourth district in Uttar Pradesh after Lucknow, Muzaffarnagar and Kanpur where

the recovery process has been initiated.

According to ADM (Finance) of Meerut city, Subhash Chand Prajapati, the 51 people were "identified through CCTV footages and mobile phone photos and videos". "The fiscal assessment of the damage to government properties was carried out by the Meerut Development Authority (MDA) and Meerut Nagar Nigam (MNN). It has come out to Rs 28.27 lakh, out of which Rs 10 lakh have to be recovered from identified people for the damage to Islamabad police post that was set ablaze, Rs 11.70 lakh for the damage to MDA properties, Rs 6.80 lakh to MNN properties and Rs 35,000 to the damage to the RAF and the CRPF vehicles during the vandalism," Prajapati added.

On December 20, Meerut witnessed violence during protests against the new citizenship law and NRC. The violence left six people dead and dozens injured, including security personnel.

Police formed an SIT to probe the violence and identify those involved in the vandalism. A total of 24 cases were lodged at four police stations in which 180 people were named as accused. Police have arrested 34 people in connection with the incident so far.

TMC nominates 4 candidates for Rajya Sabha polls

Kolkata: TMC chief and West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee on Sunday announced the names of Arpita Ghosh, Mausam Noor, Dinesh Trivedi and Subrata Bakshi as the party candidates for the upcoming Rajya Sabha polls.

In a tweet, she said in keeping with her "constant endeavour" towards women's empowerment, she was proud that half of the TMC nominees were women.

Noor lost from Malda Uttar seat in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. Ghosh and Trivedi had unsuccessfully contested from Balurghat and Barrackpore, respectively. Bakshi did not contest the general election. **PTI**

Young women consuming drugs, doing indecent acts in videos: Bengal BJP chief

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MARCH 8

WEST BENGAL BJP president Dilip Ghosh on Sunday said it is unfortunate that a section of women are indulging in "indecent" acts like making videos with distorted lyrics of Tagore songs and chanting "provocative" slogans at street protests "after consuming drugs".

Ghosh, who was attending a *cha chakra* (tea session) with local people in Golf Green area, said, "It is a matter of deep concern how some of the young women are becoming unaware of self-respect, dignity, culture, ethos and committing indecent acts on video. I



Bengal BJP chief Dilip Ghosh

where the society is heading."

The BJP leader went on to say that these women may also become "victims of violence in the streets" if they continued to behave like that.

The Midnapore MP said, "All of us — guardians, authorities in colleges, schools and the education minister — should think about this decadence in society." Urban Development minister Firhad Hakim described Ghosh's comments as "uncivilised and barbaric". He said Ghosh has "insulted" women of the state on International Women's Day.

"He has picked a stray incident to show disrespect to all the women of Bengal," Hakim said.

Azam Khan named in fresh land grabbing FIR

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
LUCKNOW, MARCH 8

POLICE HAVE lodged a fresh FIR against jailed Samajwadi Party leader and Rampur MP Azam Khan for alleged embezzlement of land classified as Enemy Property.

The latest case takes the total count of FIRs against him to 87. The FIR was lodged at Azim Nagar police station on Saturday under IPC Section 447 (criminal trespass) and relevant sections of the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act.

SHO, Azim Nagar, Amresh Kumar, said the FIR was registered on a complaint by the Revenue

Department. "The allegation is that a four-bigha land in Seengankheda belonging to the Revenue Department has been grabbed by Azam Khan for expansion of his (Mohammad Ali Jauhar) university," said the SHO. The MP is Chancellor of the university.

The complaint stated, "The 0.286-hectare land is classified as 'evacuated' in revenue records. On this piece of land, the Jauhar Trust or Maulana Jauhar University has no ownership rights. The university's chancellor Azam Khan has made the land part of the university premises and has encroached on it." The complaint was lodged by Sadar tehsil Revenue Inspector Manoj Kumar.

12 injured as accident sets off communal violence

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MEERUT, MARCH 8

ABOUT 12 people were injured in a clash between members of two communities at Meerut in Uttar Pradesh on Sunday evening.

The altercation started after two motorcycles collided in the Lisadi Gate area. The incident took a communal turn after members of the motorcyclists' communities arrived, and started throwing bricks at each other.

The police intervened quickly to stop the situation from escalating. Both sides have

lodged complaints at the Lisadi Gate station, but the police are yet to arrest anyone. The injured have been admitted to a government hospital.

"With the festival of colours round the corner, the police at sensitive pockets in Meerut are on high alert and that is why a major clash at Lisadi Gate could be averted," police officer Prashant Kapil, who is in charge of the Lisadi Gate station, told *The Indian Express* over the phone. "Both factions have lodged complaints and FIRs have been filed. We will take action against both groups. The police will not let the atmosphere get vitiated before Holi."

GAURI LANKESH, KALBURGI MURDERS Police await forensic report of gun recovered from Arabian Sea creek

JOHNSONTA BENGALURU, MARCH 8

A KARNATAKA Special Investigation Team (SIT), which investigated murders of journalist Gauri Lankesh in 2017 and Kannada scholar M M Kalburgi in 2015, is awaiting forensic reports on a gun recovered from Arabian Sea to ascertain if it was used in the two murders, according to sources.



Gauri Lankesh

M M Kalburgi

Karnataka police officers confirmed the finding of material in the seabed. On whether the gun was used in the murders carried out by the right-wing group, a source in the SIT said, "We need to get more details from the CBI. A forensic report will settle the issue."

A gun is reported to have been found in the seabed in a creek off the Mumbai-Nashik highway. The gun was recovered by a dredging agency roped in by the CBI, Maharashtra police and Karnataka police after Sharad Kalaskar (26), a key suspect in the Dabholkar murder case, said that four guns used since 2013 in a series of murders by a right-wing extremist group were dismantled and dumped in the creek.

Four in car set on fire in Bikaner, two critical

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE JAIPUR, MARCH 8

TWO PEOPLE were injured critically after the car in which they were traveling along with two others was doused with petrol and set on fire in Rajasthan's Bikaner district on Sunday.

personal enmity among themselves. The other side doused the car with petrol and set fire to it. Two people who were travelling in the car, Ajeet Singh and Shanti Lal, sustained serious injuries and have been referred to Bikaner. Their condition is critical," said Nokha circle officer Nem Singh.

According to Kalaskar's statement, he identified four guns, dismantled them and dumped them in a creek on the Mumbai-Nashik highway. Following his arrest, the CBI and other agencies started efforts to search the creek to find the guns.

NARI SHAKTI PURASKAR Activists, fighter pilots, 103-yr-old sportswoman among 15 awardees

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

105-YEAR-OLD BHAGEERATHI Amma and 98-year-old Karthyayini Amma from Kollam in Kerala became the oldest learners under the Kerala State Literacy Mission, having passed their Class IV literacy equivalent examinations earlier this year.

In Chandigarh, Mann Kaur started her career in athletics at the age of 93. Kaur, who is now aged 103, has won four golds (track and field) at the World Masters Athletic Championship in Poland. She became the world's fastest centenarian at the American Masters Games, 2016, and won more than 20 medals in World Masters Games and America Masters Games, among other championships.

On Sunday, all three women were among the recipients of the Nari Shakti Puraskar. While Kaur was present at the ceremony held in Rashtrapati Bhavan, Bhageerathi Amma and Karthyayini Amma could not attend the ceremony in person due to their age.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the Nari Shakti Awardees in New Delhi on Sunday. ANI

society".

The 15 awardees spanned different walks of life. Padala Bhudevi from Andhra Pradesh has been working for the development of tribal women, widows, Podu lands through a community-based organisation — CAVS (Chinnai Adhivasi Vikas Society). Kalavati Devi from Kanpur is a mason who has been the driving force towards reducing open defecation in the district. She is responsible for building over 4,000 in villages in and around Kanpur.

Mallik who has scaled Mount Everest and Rashmi Urdhwardeshe, Director of the Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI) and Charmi Murmu from Jharkhand — an environmentalist responsible for planting over 25 lakh trees and mobilizing 3,000 women in the region. Others conferred the award include Arifa Jan, who is credited with reviving Numdha handicrafts and training more than 100 women in Kashmir; Nilza Wangmo from Leh who runs Alchi Kitchen Restaurant, the first restaurant to serve traditional Ladakhi cuisine and Indian classical vocalist Kaushiki Chakaraborty from West Bengal.

Sanitary napkin makers must give biodegradable disposal bags from 2021, says Javadekar

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

ON THE occasion of International Women's Day, Union Minister for Environment, Forests and Climate Change Prakash Javadekar on Sunday announced that all sanitary napkins manufacturers will be mandated to provide biodegradable bags to dispose the napkins from 2021.

"We have observed that production and usage of sanitary napkins and diapers has greatly increased in the country. However, they are still being discarded in a way which is harmful to waste-pickers. We will implement the rule that January 2021 onwards, all sanitary pad manufacturers will have to compulsorily give biodegradable bags for disposal of each sanitary napkin. This rule is already in existence but is not being followed by manufacturers," he said while addressing Swachhata Sevikas in Pune.

"We have to ensure a decentralised model wherein garbage by educational institutes and housing societies should be disposed at the premises itself. There is a rule for compulsory picking of garbage and disposal for municipal towns, this rule will be made compulsory for all habitations with a population of over 3,000. With steps like these, the Prime Minister's dream of Swachh Bharat will be realised."

In New Delhi, Minister for Science and Technology, Earth Science and Health and Family Welfare, Dr Harsh Vardhan, launched a helpline — 011-26565285 — for women students, researchers, entrepreneurs and scientists to get their queries related to programmes of the Ministry of Science and Technology resolved.

FIRST-EVER WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION IN BASTAR Villagers gather at memorial of girl who killed herself over harassment

GARGI VERMA SAMELI, MARCH 8

AMIDST PREDOMINANTLY green foliage stands a blue three-tier structure in a clearing three kilometres from Sameli village of Dantewada district. The structure is a memorial built for a 16-year-old girl who allegedly committed suicide in 2018 after she accused two men of security forces deployed in the region of raping her earlier that year.

On Sunday, it was the setting for the first International Women's Day celebration in Bastar region. Bhime Kuri walked for three days from Bedma village in Narayanpur district to reach the memorial. "We were told by the activists that it was for women's rights — a day meant for us women," she says.

Villagers from across the Bailadila hills trekked for more than two days to attend the event, organised by the Bandi Rihai committee and Sarwa Adiwasi Samaj, to commemorate the day and to remember the girl, who allegedly committed suicide in December 2018.

According to her parents, on September 14 that year, the girl had gone to the jungles to graze cattle when she went missing. "We found her sickle first, on the night of September 15. She carried that sickle since she was old enough to step out and we immediately knew something was wrong with her," her father said. She was found by relatives on the night of September 16, in an unconscious and injured state and taken to a hospital in Dantewada. Her mother told *The Indian Express*, "In the hospital, we were not allowed to see her, although police officials could go in and out of her room. They kept telling her that she had brought misfortune and shame to her family, her community and the police force."

Months later, the girl went missing again. This time she hung herself from a tree in the jungle close to her house, allegedly traumatised. At her memorial now, her parents were both wary and sad. "The police have threatened us that they will not let the memorial stay. This is all that we have left of her," her father says.

Local police officials refused to comment. As the day's events drew to a close, drummers of Gond tribe, dressed in traditional headgear, played a solemn beat. They were joined by men and women, who linked arms and danced around the memorial, as friends of the girl performed rituals, tears in eyes.

Three kilometres away, in Sameli village, another Women's Day celebration was on. Organised by district authorities and security forces, this celebration — also the first of its kind — was held in a primary school. "We are celebrating the beginning of Suposhan week and Women's Day," an official said even as women security personnel, dressed in costumes, danced to the tune of a local song.

Lawyer shoots two businessmen he owed money, kills self: police

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE LUCKNOW, MARCH 8

AFTER KILLING two businessmen within 16 hours, a 45-year-old lawyer in Aligarh shot himself dead on Saturday after being trapped in the home of his second victim. Police suspect Saleem Barni killed the two as he owed them money.

Barni killed Mohammad Akram, a 45-year-old businessman who used to deal with shoes and ready-made garments, on Friday afternoon. He had reportedly taken Rs 5.5 lakh from Akram.

"On Friday, he shot dead Akram in around 3.30 pm on the road in Johrabad in Civil Lines police station area," said City Circle Officer Pankaj Srivastava. "We found that earlier in the day Saleem took Akram to different places, promising that he will return his money. We have CCTV videos of the area showing Akram and Saleem going somewhere on bike. After killing [Akram], Saleem escaped. We had registered an FIR against him for murder."

Around 7 am on Saturday, while the police were trying to trace him, the lawyer visited jeweller Swapnil Varshneya at his home in Gandhipark Park police station area's Bank Colony. Barni owed him Rs 15 lakh, according to the police. "Swapnil's father Vinod opened the door and asked him to sit in the guest room and called his son," said the police officer. "After Vinod left the room, Saleem shot Swapnil, who died on the spot. Vinod used a remote control to lock the automatic door of his house, trapping Saleem inside. Luckily, Saleem did not decide to attack others in the house, and instead shot himself in the head. The police were then informed."

Sources in the police confirmed that Barni used to work as a lab assistant in Aligarh Muslim University before completing his law course. He is survived by two daughters and a son. The police said the lawyer used his licensed gun to shoot the two men. Two separate FIRs have been registered against him. All three bodies have been sent for autopsy.

दक्षिणांचल विद्युत वितरण निगम लि., कार्यालय अधीक्षण अभियन्ता विद्युत वितरण मण्डल, हमीरपुर, पत्रांक सं.- 1271/ वि.वि.म.ह./ पी-1 (प्रकाशन)/ निविदा/ 2019-20, दिनांक- 07/03/2020, अल्पकालीन (ई-निविदा) निविदा खुलने की तिथि एवं निविदा से सम्बन्धित अन्य सभी विवरण ई-प्रोक्चोरमेंट पोर्टल https://etender.up.nic.in एवं निगम की वेबसाइट https://dvvnl.org पर उपलब्ध है। 1. ई-निविदा संख्या- 151/ SE/ EDCH/ 2019-20: कार्य का विवरण: विद्युत वितरण खण्ड हमीरपुर की सीमान्तर्गत 33/11 के.वी. विद्युत उपकेंद्र सिसोलर से पोषित 11 के.वी. टिकरी फीडर के अन्तर्गत बुंदेलखण्ड एक्सप्रेस वे की लाइनों की शिफ्टिंग का कार्य। 2. ई-निविदा संख्या- 152/ SE/ EDCH/ 2019-20: कार्य का विवरण: विद्युत वितरण खण्ड हमीरपुर की सीमान्तर्गत 33/11 के.वी. विद्युत उपकेंद्र इचौली से पोषित 11 के.वी. इचौली फीडर के अन्तर्गत बुंदेलखण्ड एक्सप्रेस वे की लाइनों की शिफ्टिंग का कार्य। 3. ई-निविदा संख्या- 153/ SE/ EDCH/ 2019-20: कार्य का विवरण: विद्युत वितरण खण्ड हमीरपुर की सीमान्तर्गत 33/11 के.वी. विद्युत उपकेंद्र इचौली से पोषित 11 के.वी. इचौली फीडर के अन्तर्गत बुंदेलखण्ड एक्सप्रेस वे की लाइनों की शिफ्टिंग का कार्य। 4. ई-निविदा संख्या- 154/ SE/ EDCH/ 2019-20: कार्य का विवरण: विद्युत वितरण खण्ड राठ की सीमान्तर्गत मुस्करा राठ, गोहाण्डा एवं सरौला के अन्तर्गत बुंदेलखण्ड एक्सप्रेस वे की लाइनों की शिफ्टिंग का कार्य। "राष्ट्रीय हित में बिजली बचाये" हस्ता.- (सुमित व्यास), अधीक्षण अभियन्ता।

HYDERABAD Man accused of killing son-in-law commits suicide

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE HYDERABAD MARCH 8

A MAN accused of killing his son-in-law in 2018 committed suicide at a guesthouse in Hyderabad on Saturday night.

T Maruti Rao had been arrested for allegedly paying for the murder of his son-in-law Pranay Kumar in 2018 reportedly over caste issues. Kumar belonged to the Scheduled Caste community. The murder took place on September 14, 2018 when Kumar had taken his pregnant wife, Amruta, to a hospital in Miryalguda for a checkup. Outside the hospital, Kumar was attacked by a group of people, allegedly hired by Rao. The couple had married in March that year against the wishes of Rao. After the attack, Rao and four others were arrested. He was currently out on bail. On Saturday night, his body was found in the Aryavysa guesthouse in the city. Police said he had consumed pesticide.

According to the police, Rao had promised to pay a gang led by Asghar Ali, who was acquitted in the Haren Pandya murder case, Rs 1 crore to kill Kumar.

Home of Adivasi revolt, Talasari's loyalty to the Left deepens

KAVITHAIYER TALASARI (PALGHAR), MARCH 8

THERE IS no memorial at the banyan tree around which the Warli Adivasi Revolt of 1945 began in Talasari taluka's Zari village. Nearly 5,000 indentured tribals who gathered here from Thane, Vikramgad, Dahanu and Palghar had refused to work on landlords' fields until they received 12 annas a day in wages, their resistance sowing the first seeds of rights-based movements among the region's indigenous communities.

Today, the younger generation in Zari, 150 km from Mumbai, has no more than a faint acquaintanceship with their ancestors' historic struggle but a blend of that history and contemporary circumstances keeps Talasari's adivasis loyal to those who led that revolt, the Communist Party and the All India Kisan Sabha. "More than a lifeless memorial, our tribute to those who gave us freedom from bonded labour is that Talasari is the solitary taluka in Maharashtra to have a CPI(M) administration for an unbroken 58 years," says Shankar Gowari, Zari

resident and former president of the Talasari Panchayat Samiti.

In mid-February, candidates of the CPI (M) were once again elected president and vice-president of this key panchayat samiti in Palghar district. The party won eight of the 10 panchayat samiti seats and four of the five zilla parishad seats in Talasari. While the CPI(M) continues to have small pockets of influence in tribal-dominated regions across the state, Talasari is a rare pocket borough, its panchayat samiti chaired continuously by CPI(M) representatives since 1962. The only other Maharashtra taluka with a semblance of continuing Left dominance is Surgana in Nashik, where the panchayat samiti has been with the CPI(M) for nearly three decades.

Newly elected panchayat samiti president Nandkumar Hadal says one reason for the party's success in Talasari is simply its track record. "Even neighbouring Dahanu does not have Talasari's well-maintained roads and 100 per cent electricity coverage. Also, most of us are third or fourth generation CPI(M) workers, so there is a deep level of trust in our commitment," he says. "There

are comrades on every street in every village." In Talasari's 41 villages and 214 hamlets, thousands of villagers across generations are affiliated to party units — factory employees are members of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU); student activists work with the Students Federation of India (SFI) and the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI); women are busy preparing for an International Women's Day event under the aegis of the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA); and tribal cultivators are enthusiastic All India Kisan Sabha members. "A perfect cadre-based system," says senior party member Barkya Mangat, "with 20-25 activists in charge of every unit that corresponds to a polling centre's voters." Talasari, one of Palghar district's eight talukas, sits right by the state border. Ninety per cent of its residents are tribals, mainly Warlis, Katkaris, Dhodias and Kokanas. Jobs are not easy to come by for educated young tribals, and many pile into Maruti Eecos and Tata Tiagos to cross over everyday into Gujarat, heading to the manufacturing units of the Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation zone in Umargam or Umbergaon, just 16 km from the Mumbai-Ahmedabad NH-08 that cuts through the taluka. Hundreds belong to families that will lose tracts of land to the coming Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project. "Land, and any claim on it, is central to adivasi life," says Smita Walvi, chairperson of the Talasari Nagar Panchayat. "Whether it is the bullet train now, or the Mumbai-Vadodara Expressway earlier, so many dam projects or the gas pipeline, tribal lands were affected each time. And every adivasi here knows that CPI(M) workers do no indulge in the cut practice common among other politicians who offer to help resolve land disputes or negotiate for compensation on their behalf," says Laxman Dongre, party secretary for Talasari taluka. "It is one of the things that has kept voters faithful to the party." About 4,500 families in Talasari's villages also occupy forest land for cultivation and party activists' intervention has helped 70 per cent receive land titles as guaranteed by the Forest Rights Act, 2006, says Walvi. "Marxवाद", or Marxism, is discussed in an annual party-organised lecture in Talasari, but most tribal families' ties to the Left here are more intuitive, almost an automatic choice handed down through generations. "For over a hundred years, practically every tribal in Talasari and nearby worked as bonded labourers, almost owned by upper caste Maharashtrians or Parsi landlords — this was then Umbergaon taluka, in present day Gujarat. It was Godavari Parulekar's call for rebellion in May 1945 that changed their lives. The oral history of that oppression and the Warsi Adivasi Revolt is told in every tribal household," says 81-year-old L S Kom, former Lok Sabha member and former Member of the Legislative Assembly from Dahanu.



Godavari Parulekar addresses the rebellion in Talasari; (left) the banyan tree and the stone on which she stood

of the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA); and tribal cultivators are enthusiastic All India Kisan Sabha members. "A perfect cadre-based system," says senior party member Barkya Mangat, "with 20-25 activists in charge of every unit that corresponds to a polling centre's voters." Talasari, one of Palghar district's eight talukas, sits right by the state border. Ninety per cent of its residents are tribals, mainly Warlis, Katkaris, Dhodias and Kokanas. Jobs



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CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED DAILY

Can pets or stray animals spread coronavirus infection?

ABANTIKA GHOSH

THERE IS no evidence, either from the history of COVID-19 cases around the world or from the genetic evolution history of the virus itself, that there is any scope of pets (or even stray animals) contracting or transmitting the virus to humans. Here's what the World Health Organization says on this: "At present, there is no evidence that companion animals/pets such as dogs or cats can be infected with the new coronavirus. However, it is always a good idea to wash your hands with soap and water after contact with pets. This protects you against various common bacteria such as *E. coli* and *Salmonella* that can pass between pets and humans."

There was a lone case in Hong Kong where a pet dog tested positive. Experts think the dog's "weak positive" was actually a case of human-to-animal transmission, and say dogs should be kept away from those suffering from COVID-19. Following this case, the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) came out with a statement: "The current spread of COVID-19 is a result of human-to-human transmission. To date, there is no evidence that companion animals can spread the disease. Therefore, there is no justification in taking measures against companion animals which may compromise their welfare. The National Veterinary Services of Hong Kong reported to OIE



In Hong Kong last week. AP

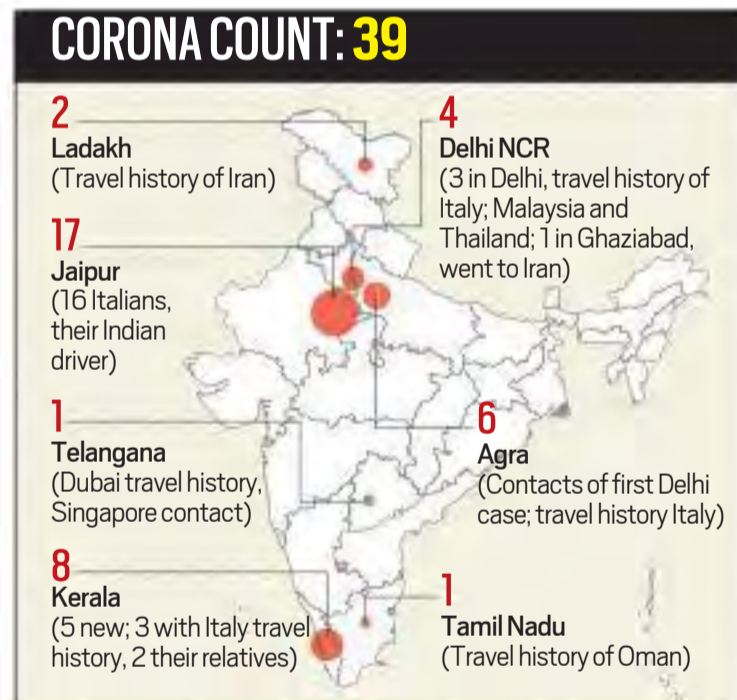
evidence that a dog had tested positive to the COVID-19 virus following close exposure to its owners who were sick with COVID-19," the statement said. "... The dog was not showing any clinical signs of the disease. There is no evidence that dogs play a role in the spread of this human disease or that they become sick. Further studies are needed to understand if and how different animals could be affected by COVID-19 virus," it said.

"What we know for certain now is that it is a zoonotic infection, that is it came from animals to humans. It seems that the intermediate source is the bat but our knowledge about the virus is evolving so this might change tomorrow. That is why what we are saying is that do not go near wild animals. There is no problem with pets and we are not advising staying away from them," said Dr S Chatterjee, consultant, department of medicine, Indraprastha Apollo Hospital.

For how long is the virus alive and active on an infected surface?

NORMALLY FOR coronaviruses, at a temperature that is conducive for their survival, they can stay active/alive on an infected surface for up to nine hours, said top scientists at the National Centre for Disease Control. However in case of COVID-2019, the "novelty" of the virus means that we actually know very little about it. "See, generally for coronavirus on a hard surface, it stays alive for about nine hours; on a soft sur-

face it may survive even longer. It also depends on the heat, temperature and humidity. But the longevity of viruses is very variable, some can live up to nine days. That is why whenever we suspect contamination we disinfect with sodium hypochlorite and close the place down for four to six hours. We do not 'fumigate', we disinfect," said a senior official in the country's apex disease control institute.



Five new cases from Kerala on Sunday. They included three members of a family who had travelled from Italy; the other two are relatives of theirs. Previously, three other persons in Kerala had been discharged after testing positive and completing their quarantine.

Have a question on the COVID-19 outbreak and what you should/should not do? Write to explained@indianexpress.com

SIMPLY PUT

Reading the criticism from Iran

Iran has criticised India on the Delhi riots. It had also reacted to the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition and the 2002 riots, but its strong words now have caught notice. A look at the bilateral history and global context

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

LAST WEEK, Iran criticised India twice on the Delhi riots. On March 2, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, highly respected in international diplomatic circles and known for his calibrated choice of words, tweeted about "the wave of organized violence against Indian Muslims" and urged India to "not let senseless thuggery prevail".

The next day, India summoned the Iranian Ambassador in New Delhi, Ali Chegeni, and lodged a "strong protest". Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Raveesh Kumar said it was conveyed to the Ambassador that "selective and tendentious characterisation of recent events in Delhi are not acceptable".

On March 5, it was Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei who criticised India. "The hearts of Muslims all over the world are grieving over the massacre of Muslims in India. The govt of India should confront extremist Hindus & their parties & stop the massacre of Muslims in order to prevent India's isolation from the world of Islam," he tweeted, with the hashtag #IndianMuslimsInDanger.

There has been no official response from the Indian government to this tweet. However, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Saturday, "We are getting to know who our friends really are."

There were two other occasions — in 1992 and 2002 — when Iran's response to events in India is worth recalling.

1992 demolition and after

On December 7, 1992, the day after the Babri Masjid was demolished, the Iranian government summoned then Indian Ambassador Hamid Ansari, later India's Vice President. The Iranian Foreign Ministry issued a démarche, made a public statement, and conveyed the concerns of Supreme Leader Khamenei to Ansari "behind closed doors". Outside the Indian embassy in Tehran, there were protests including reports of stones being pelted, said Prof A K Pasha who teaches West Asia in JNU, although an Indian diplomat who had served in Tehran in 1992 didn't corroborate this.

Tehran radio quoted Khamenei as saying the destruction of the mosque was "not just a local issue". He said: "It is the duty of the Muslims of India not to tolerate such attitudes of the enemy." Tehran radio said he asked Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati to convey to New Delhi that Muslims around the world "expected the rights of Muslims in India to be respected".



PM Modi with visiting Iranian President Rouhani in 2018. Tashi Tobgyal/File Photo

Hamid Ansari gave an interview to Iranian TV where he articulated the Indian government's position that the "wrong will be corrected" and the "mosque will be rebuilt", to which the Iranian side had "expressed satisfaction", a former diplomat recalled.

Despite this, Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao visited Iran in September 1993 — the first Indian PM to do so since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. In March 1994, Iran came to India's rescue at the UN Human Rights Commission by blocking a consensus on Kashmir. But months later, Iran accused India of reneging on its promise to let a delegation of Organisation of Islamic Conference ambassadors into Kashmir.

In August 1994, Hassan Rouhani — then secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (effectively National Security Advisor) and deputy Speaker, and now President — visited India, and poured water on a year-long process of strengthening ties. He spoke of the treatment of minorities — some accounts say he talked about "persecution" — in the wake of the mosque demolition. He also recognised the importance of the Hurriyat Conference as "true representatives" of the people of Kashmir.

His comments were followed by the cancellation of a visit by Iran President Ali Akbar Hashmi Rafsanjani in October 1994. The official reason given was the Surat plague.

In less than a year, relations improved again, possibly prompted by the Pakistan ISI's power play in Afghanistan, where Taliban became the dominant force. In April 1995, Rafsanjani finally arrived in New Delhi, welcomed by Prime Minister Rao himself at the airport. In the first visit by an Iranian head of state since the Islamic Revolution, Rafsanjani made amends for Rouhani's comments. His address to the joint session of Parliament received an ovation, described as "unprecedented" by then MP and former Foreign Minister I K Gujral.

Rafsanjani gave an endorsement to India's secularism at the Imambara in Lucknow. At his press conference in the capital, he put down a Pakistani journalist who raised questions about the Babri Masjid. He went ahead to praise India's "serious will" on Kashmir while dismissing Pakistan's call for American mediation. In his one-on-one talks with Rao, he was at pains to stress Iran's virtual neutrality on the Kashmir issue, said one account.

2002 Gujarat riots

The next test of the relationship came when the Gujarat riots took place during February–March 2002. The Iranian government conveyed its concerns to the Indian government, recalled Prof Pasha. Then Indian Ambassador, Paripurn Singh Haer, was the recipient of the message in Tehran. Old-timers, however, recalled that the message was "very, very subdued". "This was the Mohd Khatami era, and they were very well-disposed towards India. While they did convey their concerns, they also told us that they do not wish to get into India's internal affairs," said an Indian diplomat who has served in Iran.

Khatami visited India as the Chief Guest at the Republic Day Parade in 2003, but did not once raise Gujarat with PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Khatami faced criticism back home.

Why 2020 is different

What possibly sets apart Iran's reaction now from that on previous occasions is the intensity of Khamenei's words. Iran-watchers say that the tough language, that too after India had summoned the Iranian envoy, was Khamenei's way of "underlining" the importance Iran attaches to the issue.

While Khamenei has spoken out about Indian Muslims on the said occasions, he has often raised the issue of Kashmir, most recently after the revocation of Kashmir's special

TELLING NUMBERS

Bias against women: widespread among women too

What UNDP's Gender Social Norms Index, covering 80% of the world population in 75 countries, tells us about gender in equality worldwide and in India

86% & 90%

Of women and men, respectively, held some sort of bias against women (2018), according to UNDP's Gender Social Norms Index; in India (2014-15), this bias showed an 97% of women and 99% of men.

ABOUT HALF the world's population feel men make better political leaders.

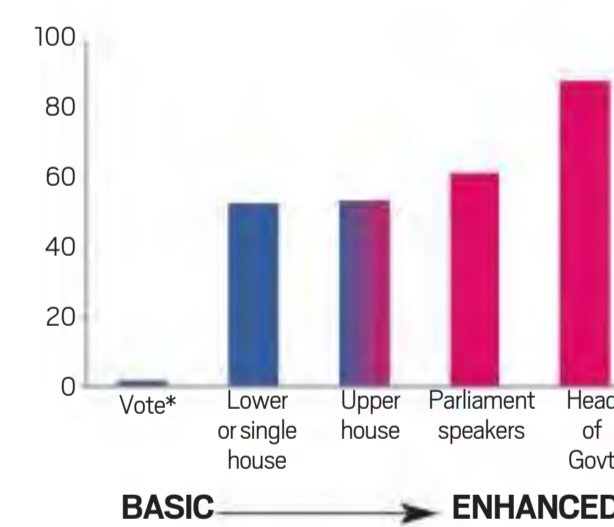
OVER 40% feel that men make better business executives and that men have more right to a job when jobs are scarce.

24% OF PARLIAMENTARY seats worldwide are held by women, and there are only 10 female heads of government out of a possible 193.

LESS THAN 6% of CEOs in S&P 500 companies are women; while women work more hours than men, this work is more likely to be unpaid care work.

GLOBAL GENDER GAP IN POLITICS

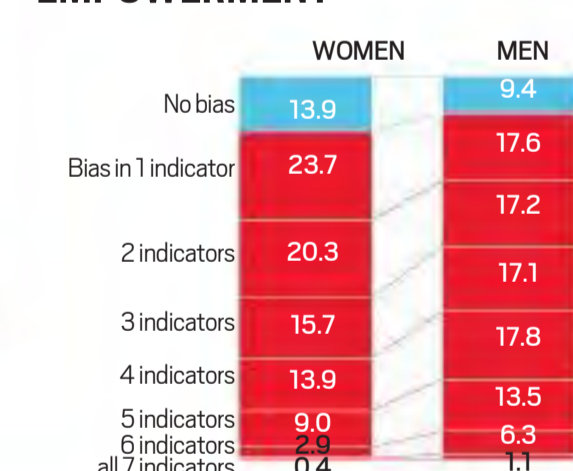
(gap with respect to parity, percent)



*Assumes an equal proportion of men and women in the voting population

Source: Human Development Report Office calculations based on data from the World Values Survey, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, ILO (2019b) and Forbes (2019).

BIASES TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT



Note: Based on 75 countries and territories with data from wave 5 or 6 of the World Values Survey, accounting for 81 percent of the global population.

Source: Mukhopadhyay, Rivera and Tapia (2019), based on data from the World Values Survey.

28% globally feel it's justified for a man to beat his wife

BIAS AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA

	AT LEAST ONE BIAS	NO BIAS
Overall (2010-14)	98.28%	1.72%
By women	97.09%	2.9%
By men	99.21%	0.79%

INDIA INDICATORS

Gender inequality rank (2018)	122
Maternal mortality ratio (2015)	174/lakh live births
Seats in Parliament (2018)	11.7%
Secondary education (age 25+), female	39%
Secondary education (age 25+), male	63.5%
Labour force participation, female	23.6%
Labour force participation, male	78.6%

Source: UNDP

War heroes who resisted Portuguese: the mega film Kerala is talking about

VISHNU VARMA
KOCHI, MARCH 8

ON MARCH 26, the big-budget film Marakkal: Arabikadalinte Simham (Marakkal: The Lion of the Arabian Sea) will release in Kerala and elsewhere. Directed by Priyadarshan, it features the popular actor Mohanlal and was reportedly made on a budget of Rs 100 crore, making it the most expensive Malayalam film ever.

Last month, a petition was filed in the Kerala High Court against the film, alleging 'distortion of history' and demanding a stay on the release. The court declined.

What is the film about?

It is a war film depicting the heroics of the Marakkal clan, whose leaders were naval chieftains of the Zamorin of Calicut during the 16th and 17th centuries. The Zamorin, Samoothiri in Malayalam, was the title given

to rulers of the Calicut kingdom on the Malabar coast. The Marakkals fought against Portuguese invaders for nearly a century.

Who were the Marakkals?

By some accounts, they were of Arab origin and had migrated from Tunisia to Panthalayani near Koyilandy in present-day Kozhikode, and later moved to the region around present-day Kottakkal and Thikkotti near Payyoli. By other accounts, the Marakkals were descendants of affluent businessman from the Cochin kingdom who migrated later to Calicut.

Historian M G S Narayanan said the name 'Marakkal' could have originated from maram or marakkalam, meaning ship, as these families lived along the coast and used ships. Alternatively, it could have originated from the Arabic word markaba, meaning those who migrated via ships. "The Marakkals were mostly Muslims, but in some parts, they have been found to be

Hindus as well," Narayanan said.

What was the war against the Portuguese about?

Faced with invading Portuguese ships, the Zamorin reached out to the Marakkals to defend the coast. They were led in succession by four Marakkals, chief admirals who were appointed by the Zamorin with the title of Kunjali. Related by bloodline, they were Kuttaly Marakkal (Kunjali Marakkal I, appointed in 1507), Kutty Pokker (Kunjali Marakkal II), Pattu Marakkal (Kunjali Marakkal III) and Muhammad Ali Marakkal (Kunjali Marakkal IV, appointed in 1595).

"Their strategy was similar to guerrilla warfare. The Portuguese had massive ships which could not make easy manoeuvres in the sea. The Marakkals used small ships which could easily surround the Portuguese ships, enabling the fighters to attack at will," Narayanan said.



Still from the film, releasing March 26.

In the span of 100 years, the exploits of the Kunjali Marakkals are said to have improved the naval fleet of Calicut as well as other kingdoms, stretching from Saurashtra to Ceylon along the Indian coast. War technologies and ammunition greatly improved as well.

Who is the 'Lion of the Arabian Sea' depicted in the film?

Mohanlal plays Kunjali Marakkal IV, who earned his reputation with his fierce onslaught on Portuguese ships, the favours he gave those who fought against the Portuguese, and his efforts to strengthen the fort at Kottakkal.

When he took charge in 1595, relations between the Zamorin and the Marakkals were deteriorating. The Zamorin was feeling threatened by Kunjali Marakkal IV's popularity, and by reports (said to be spread by the Portuguese) that he was planning to create a Muslim empire.

In 1597, the Zamorin signed a peace treaty with the Portuguese and attacked Kottakkal fort. For months, the Marakkals resisted the attack by the Zamorin's Nair soldiers and the Portuguese fleet. Eventually, as Portugal sent more forces and the Zamorin mounted his effort, Marakkal surrendered to the Zamorin on the assur-

ance that their lives would be spared. But the Portuguese violated the terms, arrested him, took him to Goa and beheaded him.

Why was a petition filed against the film in the High Court?

Mufeeda Arafath Marakkal of Koyilandy, who identified herself as a descendant of the Marakkal clan, argued that the film's version of events could mislead students and researchers. Among the contentions is that Kunjali Marakkal IV is shown to have romantic interests when there is no such evidence in history. He is shown sporting a picture of Lord Ganesha on his turban; the petition contends that he was actually a pious Muslim who did not display Hindu imagery.

The High Court declined to impose a stay and asked the film certification Board if it had handed over the complaint to the Centre. The Board conveyed that the subject deals with art and that it cannot interfere in the freedom of expression of the filmmakers.



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

More power to her

Because 'stree shakti' is an integral part of our
'rashtra shakti'

RAJNATH SINGH

EXTERNAL CHALLENGE

India has strong allies in the Muslim world but violence in
Delhi and the government's response may tip the scales

THE CALL OF the supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, for the NDA government to "confront the extremist Hindus" and stop the "massacre of Muslims" could well mark an important turning point in the unfolding backlash in the Islamic world to the recent communal rioting in Delhi. Khamenei's warning that India is in danger of "isolation from the world of Islam" underlines the damage the Delhi violence has done to India's relations with the Muslim world. It was only a few weeks ago, in December, that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was flaunting the wide political support for him in the Muslim world as he reacted to the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act. Delhi cannot dismiss the Iranian reaction like it brushed aside the criticisms from Pakistan and its closest partners in the Muslim world — Turkey and Malaysia. Tehran is not looking at India through the prism of Islamabad, nor is Jakarta, which recently summoned the Indian ambassador to express concern at the communal violence in Delhi. Meanwhile, there is deepening anxiety in Bangladesh and Maldives, two of India's closest partners in the Subcontinent.

PM Modi is right to claim he developed special relationships in the Muslim world during his first term. He secured the parliamentary ratification of the boundary agreement with Bangladesh, despite considerable opposition from the BJP's Bengal and Assam units. The UPA government that had unveiled the accord had failed to do so. Modi also succeeded in elevating the partnerships with two key nations in the Gulf — Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — and reviving traditional ties with Egypt and Oman. Reflecting the new positive sentiments in the Muslim world, the UAE had invited then external affairs minister, Sushma Swaraj, to address the OIC meeting in Abu Dhabi in March 2019. Most of India's friends in the Muslim world avoided being dragged into the controversies over the changes in the constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir or the CAA and the NRC. But the violence in Delhi and the Modi government's apparent lack of empathy for the victims have begun to tip the scales in the Muslim world.

In expressing concern over the Delhi riots, both Tehran and Jakarta have sought to save India's face. Khamenei has distinguished between the government and the "extremist Hindus" and the foreign office in Indonesia has expressed "complete confidence" in India's ability to restore religious harmony. Dhaka and Male have held their peace for now. But the NDA government's continuing reluctance to acknowledge, let alone address, the problem will make India's setback vis a vis the Muslim nations that much harder to overcome. Asked about the criticism, Foreign Minister S Jaishankar remarked that this will help India figure out who its friends are. That may be a smart rhetorical quip but certainly rubbing your time-tested friends the wrong way isn't a wise way to test their friendship especially when your economic heft is in doubt. Nearly four decades after the anti-Sikh violence that rocked Delhi in 1984, Indian diplomacy is still struggling to cope with its international consequences. The impact of the fallout in the much larger Muslim world is likely to be far more consequential and lasting if the NDA government remains unwilling or unable to get its act together.

HUSH, MONEY

Supreme Court has rightly freed virtual currencies, and
regulation would make it a strong element of Digital India

IN 2018, THE Reserve Bank of India prohibited banks from dealing with entities, including exchanges and individuals, using virtual currencies (VCs). These entities had protested that the move was arbitrary because the government did not have a cogent position, and unreasonable because it was actuated by moral concerns. Now, the Supreme Court has found that the RBI order failed the proportionality test. Neither had it tracked VCs in the wild, nor had it proved damage done to parties or institutions by their use. As alleged, it had been actuated by a moral panic about currencies which are beyond its pale only because they are not fiat.

It's a familiar story, except the ban. Even the biggest cryptocurrency markets have suffered such panics. The US government has developed ulcers pondering the misuse of anonymity for criminal activities on the once glamorous but now derelict Dark Web. During a downturn, Beijing became irritable about Bitcoin being used to offshore value and hedge. Besides, the apparent anonymity of VC transactions raises regulatory concerns but in reality, the blockchain in which they are recorded is the most transparently true ledger imaginable. But always, as in India, the main concern has been that these currencies are non-fiat, are not within the purview of a central bank, and their volatility cannot be controlled by standard interventions. However, the stability of fiat currencies is not absolute either, because money is finally validated not by the signature of a central bank's governor on banknotes, but by market consensus. An extreme example: Towards the end of World War II, markets agreed that the Deutsche Mark was worthless, and households used banknotes to paper over damaged walls and keep kitchen fires burning.

Now, essentially, the SC has found that no harm was suffered by the use of VCs. It has cracked open the door, but it has also found that both the RBI and the legislature have held conflicting positions on the subject. In fact, while putting cryptocurrencies on ice, the government had considered launching one of its own. More clarity on the part of the concerned parties would pave the way to legislation enabling meaningful regulation. And while they're about it, could they please leave off trying to define VCs — as the court says, it is like the blind men trying to describe an elephant — and focus on implications for the profit and loss account of Digital India?

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY is celebrated across the globe on March 8 every year to recognise the achievements of women, across divides, national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic or political. It provides an opportunity to reflect on the progress made, to call for change and celebrate acts of courage and determination by those women who have played an extraordinary role in the history of their countries and with regard to communities. The theme of International Women's Day 2020 is, "I am Generation Equality: Realising Women's Rights".

We are a nation in which women's empowerment has been imbibed in our culture for centuries. In the modern day context, it demands strengthening women's positions in the social, economic, political and security architectures. The targeted outcome of such empowerment is the creation of an atmosphere where women feel safe and secure to pursue a profession or vocation of their choice. Women should play decisive roles in the family and society equally, so that any question of discrimination or deprivation does not arise.

When it comes to women, security is typically conceived of in terms of physical safety and security — and not beyond. However, our government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has added many new dimensions. For our government, women's empowerment is a comprehensive programme that deals with five components of security: Health security of mother and child, social security, financial security, security of the future through educational and financial programmes in growing-up years, and last but not least, the physical safety of women.

Security and defence have been considered as male bastions but our government is committed to changing this perception.

During my tenure as Union home minister, I made special efforts to increase the number of women in our police and paramilitary forces. The MHA had issued an advisory to all state governments to reserve 33 per cent posts in their respective police forces. The ministry of defence has taken initiatives to increase women's participation in various departments and field operations.

Many people may wonder what role the "weaker" section can play in the armed forces. A resounding response was given by thousands of women officers by their unique contribution in various services and arms of our forces. Empowerment of women in the armed forces has been a major focus area of

Empowerment of women in the armed forces has been a major focus area of our government over the past five years and many interventions are first-time initiatives. In 2019, 3.89 per cent of the Army personnel comprised women, while 6.7 per cent of the Navy and 13.28 per cent of the Air Force personnel respectively were women. Before 2016, women made up just 2.5 per cent of India's armed forces. The proposal for induction of women in the corps of military police in the Indian Army as soldiers was approved last year to recruit a total of 1,700 women military personnel. Steps like increasing the tenure of women officers in SSC from 10 to 14 years and improving their promotional prospects in the Army have been taken.

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International Women's Day gives us an opportunity to celebrate the shining examples of individual officers who have proved that women officers are second to none.

Squadron Leader Minty Agarwal was the eyes behind the Balakot airstrikes as fighter controller. She was conferred with the Yudh Seva Medal for her stellar performance during the operation that taught an unforgettable lesson to the enemy. In May 2019, Flight Lieutenant Bhawana Kanth became the first woman pilot of the Indian Air Force to qualify to undertake combat missions on a fighter jet. She completed her operational syllabus for carrying out combat missions on Mig-21 Bison aircraft during day time. She is from the first batch of women fighter pilots of the IAF. This year, Army Officer Tania Shergill led an all-male contingent of the Corps of Signals in the 71st Republic Day Parade. She also led all-men contingents during the Army Day function for the first time, creating history.

Our government has thrown open the doors of Sainik Schools for girls. Admission of girl students started in Sainik School, Chhingchhip (Mizoram) in academic year 2018-19 as a pilot project. The admission process for another five Sainik Schools — Kalikiri (Andhra Pradesh), Kodagu and Bijapur (Karnataka), Ghorakhal (Uttarakhand), Chandrapur (Maharashtra) — has already started. All the Sainik schools will extend admission to girl students from the academic session 2021-22 onwards.

There has been a substantial increase in enrolment and representation of girl cadets in NCC to 33.72 per cent in 2019 from 25.4 per cent in 2014. The total enrolment of girl cadets in the NCC is around 4.54 lakh (2019). An additional 33,000 girl cadets are to be enrolled in the senior wing under self-financing schemes from 2020. Nearly 650 additional

posts for Girl Cadet Instructors (GCI) have been sanctioned for recruitment over the next five years against the present strength of 255 GCIs. For the first time ever, around 10,000 girl cadets will be sent for attachment with the three services from 2020 onwards.

A large number of women officers were commissioned in the AFMS over the last four years. The percentage of women medical and dental officers is around 23 per cent. And there is 100 per cent representation of women in the military nursing services (MNS). Never before in the history of independent India have women officers been given the opportunity to serve as defence attaches. Now two women officers, Wg Cdr Anjali Singh, (IAF) and Lt Cdr Karabi Gogoi (Indian Navy) have been posted as Asst Attache in the Defence Wing of Embassy of India in Moscow, Russia.

The DRDO has been according equal opportunities for enhancement of women's skills and fulfilment of their potential. Some of the leading missile scientists today are women. The year 2018 saw the first-ever Indian circumnavigation of the globe, Navika Sagar Parikrama, by an all-women crew. The *INSV Tarini* success was the completion of the first Indian all-women circumnavigation of the globe, depicting "nari shakti" on the world platform.

Women in our armed forces are marching ahead to conquer new frontiers and my best wishes to them. The economic and social empowerment of women is another significant step which our government has taken in the past 70 months.

The Mudra Yojana is one of schemes which has laid the foundation of economic empowerment of Indian women. Women entrepreneurs have cornered about 75 per cent of the total disbursements under the Yojana.

The government is moving in the right direction, but I do believe what's really required is far more awareness and creation of new opportunities. Programmes like "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" have not only helped improve the sex ratio but also created awareness among the people. We need to keep reminding ourselves about the contributions of women, about their strengths. India has come a long way in empowering women but many milestones are yet to be crossed.

"Stree Shakti" is an integral part of our "Rashtra Shakti" and without strengthening our "Shakti" we cannot aspire to be "Shaktishali Bharat".

The writer is the Union Defence Minister

CITY OF HOPE

How after an accident, Delhi-ites showed compassion, and the system worked



SIDHARTH LUTHRA

IN A CITY going through a rough patch, there are moments when the innate decency and goodness of Delhi's residents bring hope. Last month, we saw the goodness of Delhi's denizens when a family member travelling in a taxi early morning survived a life-threatening accident. A large dumper truck on Lodhi Road smashing into the taxi at a high speed.

In the early hours of the morning, traffic signals have yellow blinking lights which means you are to look first and then drive, but the dumper truck driver chose to speed, neither looking nor caring for the taxi mid-way through the crossing and failed apply his brakes in time. Though the taxi was completely crushed on the left side, the driver and passenger escaped miraculously with some injuries.

The sound and sight of this crash and accident alerted two passing vehicles, which stopped. Two young men on the way home and the third young man in transit first extricated the driver of the taxi, stopped the truck driver's sly attempt to escape from the spot, immediately called the police and then split forces to take both driver and passenger to nearby hospitals. Two lives were saved that morning by these three good souls taking their duties as citizens responsibly.

IN GOOD FAITH

Two young men on the way home and the third young man in transit first extricated the driver of the taxi, stopped the truck driver's sly attempt to escape from the spot, immediately called the police and then split forces to take both driver and passenger to nearby hospitals. Two lives were saved that morning by these three good souls, taking their duties as citizens responsibly.

In *Save Life Foundation* (2016), the Supreme Court had issued binding guidelines for protecting good samaritans and providing legal protection for those bystanders who help victims of traffic accidents by reporting accidents and rushing the injured to hospitals. Most police forces including the Delhi Police have willingly accepted and are implementing these norms, as have most hospitals. As a lawyer, one tends to be cynical and cautious. Though I was involved in the *Save Life* petition at the start, I have often wondered how effective it has been. But that morning, I was taught once again that "Dilli dilwalon ki hai".

That stressful morning held yet another wonderful revelation. Rushed to the emergency ward of Moolchand Hospital in South Delhi in no time, our patient was looked at, treated for his bruises, injected with pain killers even before we reached. A top-class team of doctors and paramedics rushed him for a CT Scan and X-ray as there were suspected internal injuries in the body, chest and head.

Once the tests were done and an efficient team of doctors and specialists on duty had the patient stabilised, we thought of shifting elsewhere as the advice was to keep him admitted for observation for a few days. As we approached the cashier at the emergency for the

bill, we were told, "Don't worry sir, this is a DAK case". Perplexed at this early morning reference to traditional DAK (postal services), the penny dropped when he clarified that he was referring to the Delhi Arogya Kosh (DAK) scheme of the Delhi administration. It provides free medical care to patients of accidents and trauma, including immediate high-end diagnostic techniques such as CT Scans and medication provided you are a resident of Delhi.

For hundreds of road accidents victims in Delhi, the DAK scheme is a life saver for those with serious injuries. Quality medical aid in the golden hour is often the difference between life and death.

The Supreme Court in 1989 in Pt. Parmanand Katara's case had directed that emergency medical care is a fundamental right. Yet rights are only as good as governments make them. The effective implementation of universal and free of cost emergency healthcare secures this valuable right. The DAK scheme is the new game changer in trauma care and healthcare and has finally implemented the 1989 Supreme Court verdict.

The writer is a senior advocate and visiting professor at Northumbria University and former Additional Solicitor General of India

MARCH 9, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

AASU SOFTENS STAND THE UNION GOVERNMENT appears to have succeeded in convincing the Assam students that it would be futile for them to continue their agitation indefinitely. At the end of their talks with Home Minister Zail Singh the leaders of the All Assam Students Union suggested that the Gana Sangram Parishad, an apex body of three regional parties, be included in the discussions. Zail Singh said he had no objections and the students are inviting Parishad leaders to Delhi to join in the resumed discussions with the home minister.

LOK DAL IN POLLS THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE of the Lok Dal

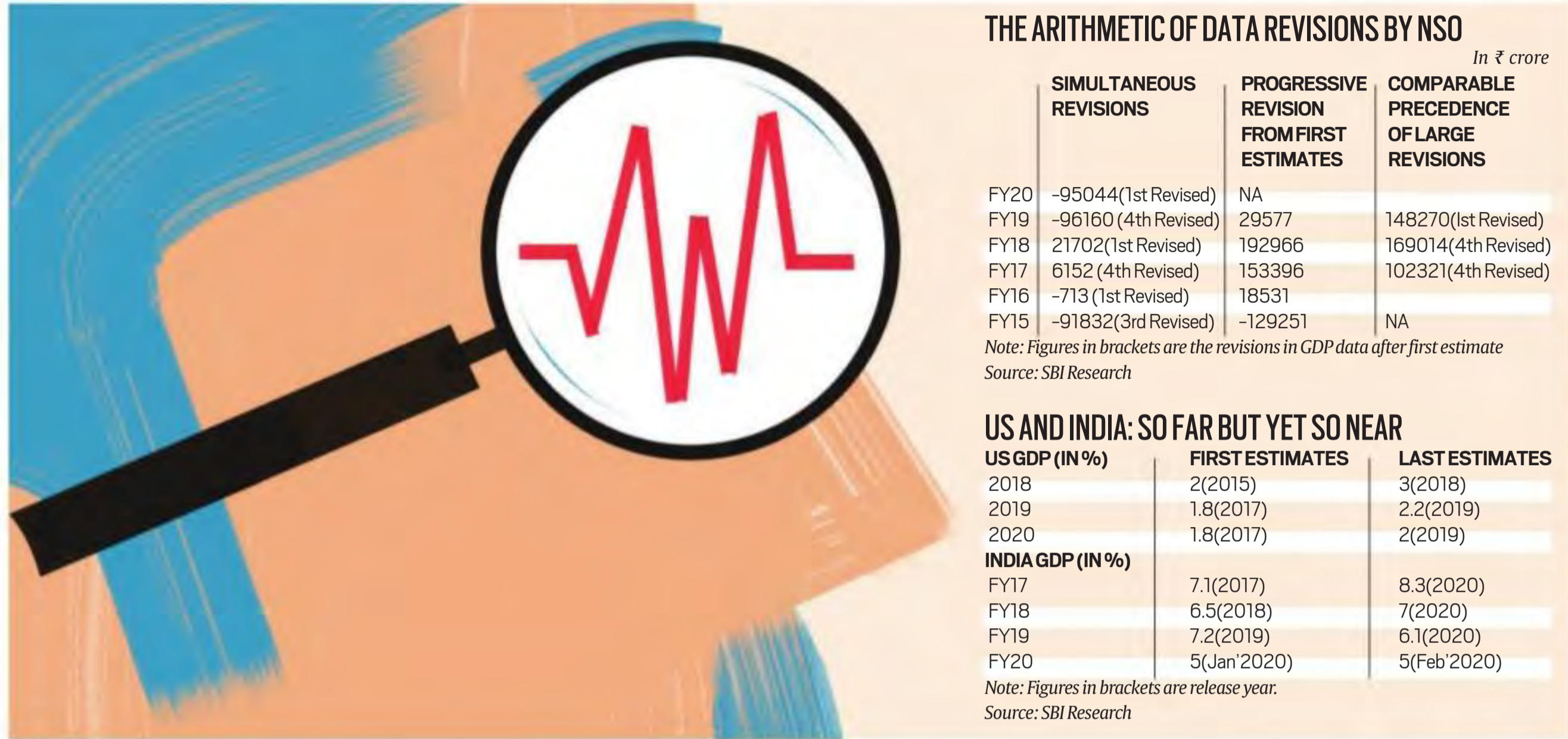
resolved to preserve the identity of the party but enter into local seat adjustments with like-minded parties in the coming assembly elections. After day-long deliberations, the executive felt that the party would contest all those assembly seats where it had reasonable chances of winning. For the remaining seats, the local units would be authorised to negotiate adjustments with other parties. Briefing journalists after the meeting, the party general secretary, Madhu Limaye, said that the executive ruled out having any truck with a party having any truck with "RSS elements". He replied in the affirmative when asked if his statement covered the Janata Party.

EXPRESS BUILDING THE NEW BUILDING of the Indian Express in New Delhi was subjected to a detailed two-hour inspection by the three-member committee headed by the chief secretary of the Delhi Administration, W Shaiza. The committee, whose other two members are N C Kochhar, judicial secretary, and P Chakravorty, another officer of Delhi Administration, was assisted by technical experts from the Delhi Development Authority, the Delhi Municipal Corporation and the Ministry of Works and Housing. Officials admitted that this was the first time a building was inspected by a person with a rank as high as chief secretary.

11 THE IDEAS PAGE

Don't blame it on NSO

Volatility of oil prices and structural changes in economy make forecasting of inflation and GDP a difficult job. Let's focus on broadening scope of data collection to make statistical system more comprehensive



US GDP (IN %)	FIRST ESTIMATES	LAST ESTIMATES
2018	2(2015)	3(2018)
2019	1.8(2017)	2.2(2019)
2020	1.8(2017)	2(2019)

INDIA GDP (IN %)	FIRST ESTIMATES	LAST ESTIMATES
FY17	7.1(2017)	8.3(2020)
FY18	6.5(2018)	7(2020)
FY19	7.2(2019)	6.1(2020)
FY20	5(Jan 2020)	5(Feb 2020)

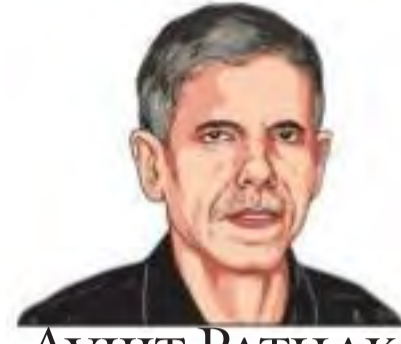
Note: Figures in brackets are release year.
Source: SBI Research

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"How the epidemic will develop in Europe will largely determine the consequences caused by the epidemic and will reshape people's understanding of many issues."
— Global Times, China

Nation and its cheerleaders

Deshbhakti need not be free from criticality or art of resistance



AVIJIT PATHAK

THERE IS NO doubt that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has done remarkably significant work in the domain of school education, be it infrastructure development or pedagogic innovation. And we have already been told that this time the AAP government will introduce the deshbhakti curriculum in the government schools in Delhi. Well, I would like to believe that a government that takes education seriously, and even thinks of the happiness of children in an otherwise oppressive schooled society is possibly attaching a positive and life-affirming meaning to the spirit of deshbhakti. However, as a teacher, I wish to make a point of caution, and raise a set of critical issues relating to this urge to inculcate deshbhakti among school children.

young to sharpen their socio-historical imagination to know and understand the liberating spirit of decolonisation, or the quest for swaraj. It is equally important to be aware of the flow of Indic civilisation — its splendid diversity and rhythmic unity, its ups and downs, or its achievements and possibilities. And I believe that if we have immensely sensitive and dialogic teachers driven by creative pedagogy (not exam-centric rote learning), it is possible for school children to transform their history/civics classes into an enchanting experience. Yes, they would be able to appreciate the land surrounded by the Himalayas and the Indian Ocean. They would love to walk with Gandhi and Bhagat Singh. They would begin to appreciate the core constitutional values. And they would experience the rhythm of Kabir and Nizamuddin Auliya, or Ghalib and Tagore. This, I believe, is enough. There is no need for sermonising, or continually bombarding the minds of children with the moral lessons of deshbhakti.

In fact, what is important is to create a leaning environment that encourages critical inquiry and the ethics of care. I have no hesitation in saying that blind bhakti for the nation is not necessarily always positive. After all, history has taught us an important lesson: The narcissism of modern nation-states has caused war, genocide and colonial invasion. Furthermore, nationalism as an orthodox religion often obstructs the elasticity of consciousness; it kills our ability to see beyond limiting identities, experience our shared humanity, and embrace the world as a whole. Hence, to take a simple illustration, if a young learner feels that the happiness of the people in the Kashmir valley is more important than the militaristic claim over their land, her wisdom, far from being silenced, has to be understood by the teacher. Likewise, I would like a social science teacher to urge her students to realise that the dadis of Shaheen Bagh are not conspirators; instead, their non-violent satyagraha aims at creating a truly humane/inclusive India. In other words, deshbhakti need not be free from criticality or art of resistance.

At times, I fear that we have become neurotically obsessed with the discourse of nationalism and patriotism. See its devastating consequences. First, the phenomenon called toxic/stimulant nationalism has reduced patriotism into a negative emotion — hatred for the enemy. No wonder, hyper-masculine aggression or violence is its necessary sub-text. It cannot exist without demonising the enemy it constructs perpetually. Second, it has lost its naturalness, and become a compulsive/ritualistic performance. It has to be proved and demonstrated time and again. While the obedient children of the reified Bharat Mata show their patriotism through the cacophony of Jai Shri Ram, we stand up in a cinema hall and show our affinity with the national anthem. I wonder whether Rabindranath Tagore ever thought his sublime poetic prayer would be trivialised in this fashion. This urge to prove our deshbhakti has become so powerful that these days even the protesters — Marxists, Ambedkarites, Gandhians and feminists — are compelled to use the national flag almost like a totem. And third, this chronic deshbhakti syndrome often deprives us of the much required faculty of self-reflection, and the courage or honesty to question even our own shortcomings. In other words, this heavy dose of nationalism or patriotism has not helped us to become truly awakened citizens. Instead, we have learned either to romanticise our past, or to erect the walls of separation: India vs. Pakistan, Hindus vs. Muslims, and nationalists vs tukde tukde gang.

Furthermore, a liberating pedagogy ought to cultivate the ethics of care. Quite often, militarism and militant nationalism destroy this spirit. For example, is it wrong if a teacher encourages her students to see cricket not through the lens of nationalism, and appreciate even when, say, Pakistan plays good cricket, and defeats India? Or for that matter, is it unethical if a Sanskrit teacher also asks her students to take active interest in Urdu or Persian literature? Or is it wrong if the students are encouraged to interrogate the politics of war? Imagine what it would mean if instead of glorifying the much-hyped "surgical strike", and "sacrifice" for the nation, they begin to appreciate John Lennon's musical utopia. Yes, this will sow the seeds of true religiosity and universalism: A mind that sees beyond borders.

Well, it is possible to say that Arvind Kejriwal and his team do not agree with the politics of toxic nationalism, and they see deshbhakti as a positive feeling — a socio-existential articulation of engaged responsibility. Yes, it is good to hear that for them deshbhakti means honest work for the nation. Yet, I insist that that the goal of education ought to transcend the parameters of even what Kejriwal regards as true patriotism.

Of course, I admit it is important for the

The writer is professor of Sociology at JNU

PULAK GHOSH, SOUMYA KANTI GHOSH AND SUMIT AGARWAL

LAST WEEK WAS not kind to global markets as fears of the coronavirus turning into a world-wide pandemic affected markets adversely, India included (it was also impacted by news of Yes Bank). During all this, the latest GDP data witnessed significant revisions that have gone largely unnoticed. In the last few years there has been a lot of noise regarding the data revisions. While part of it requires closer examination, we must be fair to our statistical system as such revisions are, in large part, due diligence and happen globally.

Let us first look at the history of GDP data revisions. The first table shows the extent of GDP data revisions since FY15, when the new series was introduced. The first column in the table explains the simultaneous revisions that have taken place over the years. The NSO releases the first estimates of any fiscal year in January, revises it in February and then again in May.

19 have been so swift that it has been virtually impossible to predict the outcome initially. While in 2017-18, the final estimates were progressively higher, in 2018-19, while the interim estimates were higher, they were drastically scaled down later as the impact of the NBFC crisis began to unfold.

We would like to point out here the example of US Fed that had also missed the possibility of the US economy bouncing back in 2018 on the back of tax cuts when in 2015 it had projected the economy to expand by only 2 per cent, only to change it to 3 per cent in 2018 (almost at par with scale of revisions in India).

It is common for such unconditional bias to arise due to the fact that the statistical reporting agency produces releases according to an asymmetric loss function. For example, there may be a preference for an optimistic/pessimistic release in the first stage, followed by a more pessimistic/optimistic one in the later stage. Intuitively, one might argue that the cost of a downward readjustment of the preliminary data is higher than the cost of an upward adjustment. This asymmetric loss function is not so relevant at the reporting stage, but at the forecasting stage. A statistical reporting agency like the NSO simply does not have all the data at hand and has to forecast the values of the yet to be collected data. It is at that moment that the asymmetric loss function comes into play. So, we must be careful about interpreting data revisions by the NSO by attributing ulterior motives as we more often tend to do.

However, we must also add that unlike countries across the world, India is still significantly lagging in its use of data analysis. Some of the current methodology of data collection is based mostly on thin surveys and is not supported by data available in the public domain that are more comprehensive, less biased and real-time in nature, based on digital footprints. The end result is that we end up publishing survey results that are misleading.

Thus, we must develop an ecosystem that is high quality, timely and accessible. Big data and artificial intelligence are key elements in such a process. Big data helps acquire real-time information at a granular level and makes data more accessible, scalable and fine-tuned.

For example, a US inflation report released in April 2019 offered an interesting take on how the use of big data was revolutionising data collection. Instead of sending people out to stores to check prices, as it has

done for decades (and also practised in India), the US Bureau of Labour Statistics gathered data for the price of apparels directly from a big department store. With the switch, the largest monthly drop in apparel prices on record was witnessed. In similar vein, for India, the inclusion of items available for online sale could even further compress the headline consumer price index.

The use of payments data can also help track economic activity, as is being done in Italy. Different aggregates of the payment system in Italy, jointly with other indicators, are usually adopted in GDP forecasting, and can provide additional information content. Using a similar corollary for India, proper use of GST data will reveal the sectors that are giving maximum revenue, that are showing month-on-month increase, and can help make predictions of net revenue growth, while also helping in fraud detection. Further, as India is a consumption-oriented economy, we must explore measuring GDP using the GST data.

In India, currently survey results are giving contrasting results. For example, the weighting pattern of food items in CPI at 45.86 per cent is based on the 2011-12 consumer expenditure survey (CES). This is significantly different from the share of food and beverages (27.6 per cent) in the private final consumption expenditure (PFCE) published by the national account statistics (NAS). If we approximate the CPI with the NAS food weights, the headline CPI drops to 7.6 per cent from 5.5 per cent in the latest inflation print.

Recent independent research also shows significant divergence between the consumer price index for industrial workers and the consumer price index (urban) in recent times, when in terms of the composition of the basket and the target population, the two are quite similar.

But to be fair to both the RBI and the NSO, the volatility of oil prices and structural changes in the economy make the forecasting of inflation and GDP a difficult job indeed. However, we should supplement our existing measurement practices with "big data" to make our statistical system more comprehensive and robust.

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Pulak Ghosh is professor IIM Bangalore, Soumya Kanti Ghosh is group chief economic advisor, State Bank of India, and Agarwal is professor, National University of Singapore. Views are personal

C R Sasikumar

VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



A weekly look at the public conversations shaping ideas beyond borders — in the Subcontinent. Curated by Aakash Joshi

DIVIDED WE STAND

FOR OVER SIX months now, beginning with the abrogation of Article 370 and most recently in the aftermath of the violence in Delhi, the media in Pakistan has had a near-continuous lament: The "Muslim world", mired in national self-interest and "realpolitik", has been remiss in holding New Delhi to account. In its editorial on March 4, though, Dawn takes this argument further, supplementing moral outrage with an analysis of geopolitical reality.

Yemen and Syria for example, Iran, the Saudis and Turkey are in conflict. The conclusion? "Clearly, statesmanship and vision are required from the Muslim world to sort out internal rifts, and speak up for Muslim communities persecuted in non-Muslim states. A recent effort in Kuala Lumpur was scuttled by some Muslim 'brothers' as they felt their leadership of the ummah was at stake. In such circumstances, how will the Muslim voice be heard?"

GLOATING AGAIN

Last week, an editorial in The Island took particular pleasure in pointing out the hypocrisy of the US in not taking India to task over the treatment of minorities, and of India lecturing Sri Lanka on the Tamil issue. Continuing in that vein on March 7, the newspaper shuns the sombre tone that newspaper editorials usually employ and begins thus: "The International Criminal Court (ICC) has given Uncle Sam a right royal wedgie. It has ruled that alleged war crimes by the US and others, in Afghanistan, be probed."

Despite the somewhat gleeful tone, the editorial does make an important point — one that has been somewhat ignored since the days when the Non-Aligned Movement

was a vocal moral voice: "If a country like Iran or Cuba had been at the receiving end of the ICC ruling, all major international human rights groups would have promptly welcomed it and even called for sanctions to ensure compliance. Curiously, they have chosen to remain silent on the war crimes probe ordered by the ICC. Is it that they are wary of antagonising the US government?"

The US, "the self-proclaimed defender of human rights" across the world, will likely not face a war crimes trial. The editorial hints at but shies away from making a larger point. Given that the UN and other international bodies seem to have teeth only against certain countries, it is difficult to take their criticisms on board at face value. When it comes to the violation of human rights, there have always been double standards.

UNFREE PRESS

Across South Asia, governments seem to have something in common. Despite widespread differences in ideology, they all seem to agree on the need to muzzle the media. Pakistan's Citizens Protection (Against Online Harm) Rules, 2020 oblige social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Google to block or remove posts that are considered objectionable by the govern-

ment. In Nepal, the Information Technology Bill could open the door to curbing press and digital freedom. In India, too, the spectre of TV taken off air seemingly because they criticised the RSS and Delhi Police's role in the violence in the capital loomed large on Saturday.

In Bangladesh, even the usually sedate Dhaka Tribune has an editorial on March 6 exhorting the government to respect the media's rights to free speech. Taking off from a recent seminar on press freedom, the editorial remarks that "for Bangladesh, this rather important tenet of democracy (press freedom) has not always been upheld with the most aplomb". The country's Digital Security Act "has been worded so vaguely that it can allow the police to abuse and misuse their power to suppress the press and create a culture of impunity". On the other hand, the editorial acknowledges that "with the advent of social media", fake news and rumours have become an issue to the point where they have caused mass hysteria and led to riots.

However, the editorial is unequivocal on the matter of press freedom: "As Bangladesh progresses, its democracy needs to be protected. In this regard, a free press — one which does not fear to express or criticise — will remain essential."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

VIRUS AND ECONOMY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Bracing for the virus' (IE, March 6). The coronavirus epidemic is taking a toll not only on human life but also on economic growth. The Indian economy is no exception. The measures taken by policymakers to lower interest rates will no longer offset the short-run supply-side disruptions and fear-induced lower household discretionary spending, as pointed out in the article. The government must contain the virus.

Makrand N Kulkarni, Aurangabad

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Bracing for the virus' (IE, March 6). The trade-related impact of the COVID-19 epidemic for India is estimated to be about \$348 million and the country figures among the top 15 economies most affected as slowdown in manufacturing in China disrupts world trade. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) estimates that the outbreak could result in a \$50 billion decrease in exports across global value chains.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

CALL OF DUTY

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Over house ruckus, speaker Om Birla skips Lok Sabha proceedings again' (IE, March 6). It's the constitutional duty of the Speaker to ensure the smooth function-

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301.

ing of the Lok Sabha. To refuse to chair the House because members don't pay attention to his request is absurd.

Suchak D Patel, Ahmedabad

FAIRNESS TEST

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'In the dock' (IE, March 6). The Supreme Court has not covered itself with glory by taking exception to Harsh Mander's public statement expressing an erosion of faith in the highest court. Should the highest court take such a childish stand? The media in particular and the intelligentsia as a whole must react. Or, the streets will be the only space left to seek justice.

NS Khaira, via email

12 THE GOVERNANCE PAGE

MINORITY WELFARE

Bihar govt-run coaching centres help minority students clear exams, get jobs

Since 2010, 867 candidates, including 96 girls, have joined the police; 46, including 12 girls, cleared BPSC

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA, MARCH 8

EVEN THOUGH Muslims account for 17 per cent of Bihar's population, according to a senior official, they make up only 2.5 per cent of the state's police and less than 4 per cent of the other services. A decade ago, these numbers were even lower. And it was to remedy this lack of representation that Bihar's Minority Welfare Department started a pilot programme to train Muslim students and help them clear different types of public services examinations.

Amir Subhani, Additional Secretary of the Minority Welfare Department, said "As Haj Bhawan had been lying largely unused after pilgrimage season, we came up with the idea of utilising the vast space with a devoted coaching centre for minority boys and girls who needed some kind of motivation to do well in life. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar promptly approved the idea. It is very good to see girls not just coming out of their homes but also showing their increasing preferences for uniformed services. It is a success story under construction. We are trying to replicate it in maximum possible places".

Since 2010, the Haj Bhawan Coaching and Guidance Cell has been providing almost free coaching to Muslim boys and girls in preparing for prelims, mains and interview stages of competitive examinations in Bihar.

For the first four years, until 2013, it provided coaching only for police services test. Later, it included coaching for BPSC examinations as well. Haj Bhawan Guidance and Coaching Cell, under the nodal agency of Maulana Mazharul Haque Arabic and Persian University, selects Muslims students for training and coaching them in two different ways. One, it screens students that seek its help. Two, it calls deserving students that have cleared one stage or the other in an examination and helps them realise their dream.

Over the past decade, the Haj Bhawan experiment has gone from strength to strength (see box). What's more, over the last couple of years, the Minority Welfare Department has been replicating the Haj



Trainers and successful students at Haj Bhawan coaching centre in Patna Express

HOW THE HAJ BHAWAN EXPERIMENT GREW STRONG

■ In 2010, the very first batch, 105 out of 151 candidates qualified for Bihar police jobs of inspectors, drivers and constables

■ The second batch, also in 2010, saw 85 out of 143 candidates qualifying for police services final examinations

■ In 2012, 95 out of 272 candidates succeeded

■ In 2015, 101 out of 207 students qualified in Bihar police services examinations

■ In 2017, 159 out of 395 enrolled candidates succeeded

■ In 2018, 117 out of 153 candidates succeeded in driver police

examinations

■ In all, 867 Haj Bhawan students, including 96 girls, have got jobs and some of them have returned to the coaching institute to train the new batch of students

THE SUCCESS WAS NOT LIMITED TO HAJ BHAWAN ALONE

■ CM College in Darbhanga has produced 140 successful candidates.

■ Al Hafeez College, Sara, has trained 53 successful candidates

■ 85 Muslim candidates trained at M M College, Bhagalpur, have several government service related examinations

Bhawan coaching model in other districts such as Darbhanga, Bhagalpur and Ara. Further, it plans to expand this initiative to at least 10 more districts in the coming 3-4 years to attract Muslims girls and boys from rural areas.

"While a candidate coming for physical training is given free residential, fully centralised air-conditioner set-up, a student coming for mains coaching, has to pay Rs 3,500 per month. The centre has a rich library, two big classrooms and separate

EXPLAINED

Why was special training needed

Muslims, who account for 17% of Bihar's population, are grossly under-represented in police and administrative services. Since 2010, the state government has been trying to remedy this by providing coaching facilities to the poor yet deserving students and helping them achieve their dream of serving in the government

prayer halls for boys and girls," said Mohammed Rashid Hussain, coordinator of Haj Bhawan Coaching and Guidance Cell. He said that Bihar's Minority Welfare Minister Mohammed Khurshid (also known as Firoz Ahmad) contributes in his personal capacity as well by organising a lunch for students on special occasions.

The public area of the entire Haj Bhawan centre is under CCTV surveillance. Estimated per capita government cost on a student in one season is about Rs 20,000. But there is no fixed cap on the expenditure as it is a demand-driven scheme.

Most of the students in Haj Bhawan come from economically weak backgrounds. Boys and girls coming to study here have similar tales of poverty, struggle and lack of opportunities. Take, for instance, Akbar Ali who hails from Ara where his father runs a small bicycle repair shop. "I am the first boy from my village to come to Patna," said Ali.

Students who have benefitted describe the initiative as a slow but silent revolution. Shabana Aazmi from East Champaran, who qualified as a constable in 2016 after receiving coaching, said that since becoming the first policewoman from her village, she is regarded as a role model and, in the last four years, many more girls have started preparing for competitive examinations.

'110 railway stations are being redeveloped and modernised, will be similar to airports'

SANJEEV KUMAR Lohia, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of the Indian Railway Station Development Corporation (IRSDC), talked to IRAM SIDDIQUE on the planned redevelopment of 110 railway stations across India.

What does the redevelopment of a railway station entail and how does it help commuters?

Redevelopment of stations does not mean improving its façade and lighting, rather it entails complete transformation with well-planned entry and exit points, improved road accessibility and segregated passenger movement — similar to airports. The stations will be transformed into seamlessly connected hubs with adequate waiting rooms for all classes of passengers and no one will have to sleep on platforms. The new waiting rooms will be built at a concourse above the platform which will have retail outlets, and passengers will have to come on the platform only 5-10 minutes prior to their journey. The stations will become much safer, unlike the present scenario where stations have multiple exit and entry points. They will be completely equipped with CCTV cameras.

How many stations are being redeveloped?

In all, there are about 110 stations across India on which a detailed project report is being prepared. Of these, 60 stations are being taken up by IRSDC while another 50 stations are being done by Railway Land Redevelopment Authority (RLDA).

The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) had studied about 398 stations which fall under the A and A1 category — based on passenger footfall, land availability and commercial potential, and prioritised a few stations; we are working on those priorities.

We have at present called for a Request for Quotation (RFQ) for Amritsar, Nagpur, Gwalior and Sabarmati. While the proposal for Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT) has been sent for approval to the Mantralaya, Surat and Udhna are also in quite advanced stages and we are hoping to call for their RFQ very soon. Work at Habibganj has been completed 80 per cent and it will be ready by April. Similarly, in Gandhinagar, the station redevelopment work will end in the next few months.

Given that there is zero investment from railways, what is the funding model?

It has been decided that the first 50 stations will be bid out on Public-Private



THE POLICY INTERVIEW

SANJEEV KUMAR LOHIA

MD & CEO of IRSDC

Partnership (PPP) model with funding through land monetisation along with user charges. The user charges will be a nominal fixed amount. It will give the developers a reasonable degree of revenue surety. The user charge will be a part of the ticket price and would be applicable only if one is boarding/deboarding at the redeveloped station.

With the current economic slowdown, do you see any hurdles in the redevelopment plan taking off?

We have to be always conscious of ground realities, market conditions and state of developers. Instead of just relying on infrastructure developers, we have also opened it to various investment funds who can also participate. The pre-bid meeting had a tremendous response — it saw participation from nine funds, 17 developers and at least 40 consultants. The lease period of land where we are doing residential development has also been increased to 99 years as against only 15 years.

Earlier, the lease for commercial development was given for only 45 years; now it is being given for 60 years. To further ease out the process, there is a single-window clearance. We will be approving the plans in consultation with the urban local bodies and statutory bodies so that the development in railway properties is in harmony with the surrounding development.

FROM STATES REFORMS TRACKER

PUNJAB

More job opportunities for the youth

The Punjab government on Monday scrapped the policy of granting extension in service to its employees after retirement. A press release said the decision was in line with the Budget announcement of reverting to the earlier retirement age of 58 from 60. "The Punjab government has decided to do away with the policy of optional extension in service period after retirement/superannuation in order to generate employment for the state's youth," the statement said after a meeting of the state cabinet under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Amarinder Singh here. The state government had earlier allowed extension in service to all categories of employees up to the age of 60 or 62 on the submission of an option in this regard. This had enabled the government to fill vacancies and tackle a shortage of staff in various departments.

TELANGANA

Aiming to be Blockchain capital

The Telangana government has reportedly set up the first Blockchain incubator in a bid to become the Blockchain capital of the world. The project is called the T-Block Accelerator and the government has set it up in partnership with academic institutions such as the International Institute of Information Technology (IIIT)-Hyderabad and the Indian School of Business (ISB) as well as companies like Microsoft and Tech Mahindra.

UTTAR PRADESH

Policy changes to end alcohol adulteration

Under the new excise policy of the Uttar Pradesh government, Indian made foreign liquor will now also be sold in aluminium cans, making UP the first state in the country to do so. The aluminium cans will curb adulteration of alcohol.

Free parking, zero garbage collection fee: In Shimla, adopting a stray dog has its rewards

GAGANDEEP SINGH DHILLON
SHIMLA, MARCH 8

15-YEAR-old Omun Sood was cycling near Oakover in Shimla one morning in December when a month-old stray puppy started following him. "He brought it home and decided to raise it. Just then, we learnt that the Municipal Corporation was offering free vaccination for adopted stray dogs, so we got it registered," said Geeta Sood, Omun's mother.

In November, the Shimla MC decided to try a new strategy to reduce the rising number of stray dogs in the city. It launched a "Street Dog Adoption and Management Programme", offering incentives such as garbage collection fee exemption to those who would adopt a dog from the street. It also introduced a provision to penalise those who failed to adequately feed and care for these adopted dogs.

"The response so far has been encouraging. Till date, 155 dogs have been adopted in the city — 83 by individuals and 72 by communities such as Beopar Mandals/ NGOs/ Resident Welfare Associations etc. It's mostly



Shimla's innovative solution Express

animal lovers who have come forward to adopt the dogs," said Dr Neeraj Mohan, Veterinary Public Health Officer, whose office implements the programme.

According to MC estimates, there are around 2,000-2,500 stray dogs within the municipal limits of Shimla, and approximately 60 cases of dog bites are reported every month.

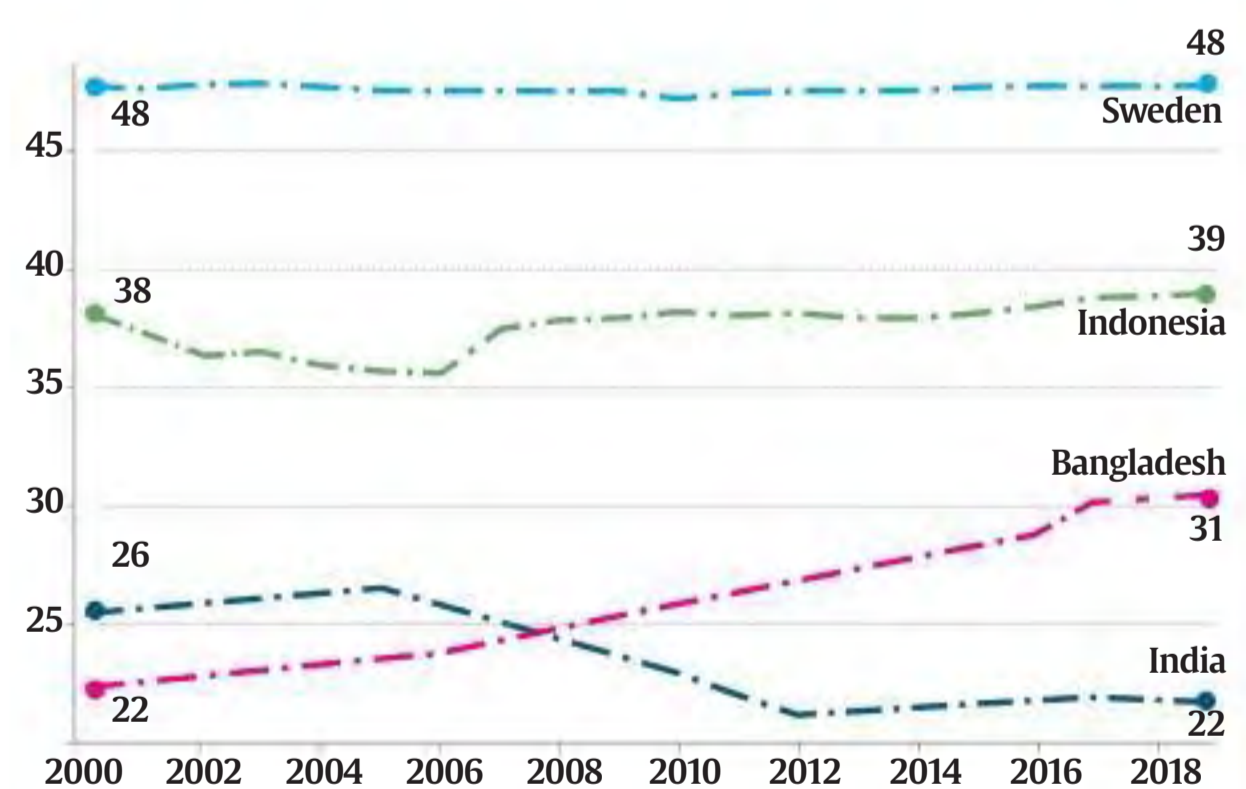
Dogs breed twice a year with an average litter size of 5-8 each season, said officials. Though the MC runs a sterilisation programme, it has failed to keep pace with the rising dog population, as is the case with many other cities across India.

During a visit to the United States last year, MC Commissioner Pankaj Rai came across the activities of Michigan Humane Society, which offers dogs, cats, rabbits and other animals for adoption as pets in the city of Detroit, while also offering veterinary and other animal welfare services.

Rai brought the idea home, and the MC now offers free sterilisation and anti-rabies vaccination of adopted dogs, besides exempting their owners from the domestic garbage collection fee (Shimla has a door-to-door collection mechanism). The scheme also has a provision for offering a free parking slot to owners of adopted dogs in their respective wards though it's yet to be implemented.

IN NUMBERS

PROPORTION OF WOMEN IN THE TOTAL LABOUR FORCE; INDIA LAGS FAR BEHIND THE WORLD AVERAGE OF 39 PERCENT



Source: World Bank

ODISHA/PROMOTION ADALATS

Unfairly ignored for promotion? Here's where you appeal

SAMPAD PATNAIK
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 8

LESS THAN a kilometre from the Raj Bhawan in Bhubaneswar, a sprawling government office is decorated with a pale green paper gate that signposts it as the site of the state's "Promotion Adalat"; Adalat means court. The location is not a courtroom, rather it happens to be the Chief Minister's Grievance Cell in Bhubaneswar. The only difference is that on this occasion, it is not the members of the public but the employees of the state government pleading their case on a special forum.

Promotion Adalat has been set up by the Odisha government to reexamine cases where government employees feel they have been unjustly overlooked for a promotion. The Adalat is presided over by Odisha Chief Secretary Asit Mishra.

Inside, a small table has been set up for tea and coffee. A group of long-serving government officers are waiting patiently. Some



The entry gate of Promotion Adalat in Bhubaneswar. Sampad Patnaik

of them are exchanging stories about misplaced "character certificates", smudged service papers, rules governing government service and various other details that have kept their promotions pending. Another

group is already packed into the visitors' room. Bunch of documents in hand, men and women wait for their turn as they are taken in one by one to plead their case.

Y Srinivas Rao is a senior revenue assis-

tant at the office of the Koraput Collector. While waiting for his turn, Rao shares his grievance — someone junior to him by nearly 10 years was promoted over him, while he has been running from pillar to post.

Rao, who has a hearing aid strapped to his right ear, says he has papers to prove the alleged discrimination. He shares a copy of the "Consolidated Instructions regarding reservation for the persons with disabilities in various posts, services under state governments and public sector undertakings".

The document states that for persons with disabilities not less than three per cent for direct recruitment into Group A, B, C, D posts shall be reserved for — blindness or low vision, hearing impairment and locomotor disability. Rao's complaint is that a person who has a locomotor disability has been promoted as per his years of service, while he has not been promoted after putting in more years.

According to an officer from the Chief Minister's Office, who was present at the

Adalat, the forum is the first in the country where the state government is actively trying to boost the morale among its employees by seeking and solving their grievances.

"This is an effort to activate our human resources by removing service-related frustrations that can affect their performance. The state government is trying to remedy promotions pending for mundane reasons ranging from documentation to the apathy of the local collector", she says, requesting anonymity.

Bidya Rashmi Sahu has worked for the government for six years. She says she was selected through the Odisha Public Service Commission, after which she worked for four years before shifting to the Revenue Service cadre. She is worried that four years of her service may not count though she has worked continuously for the government.

"Each side gets to present its argument", Sahu says of the Adalat proceedings in front of the Chief Secretary. "Sometimes (he) issues on-the-spot orders," she says.



BRITAIN
HARRY, MEGHAN ON FINAL ROYAL DUTY

Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, will fulfil their final royal commitment when they appear Monday at the annual Commonwealth Service at Westminster Abbey in London. It's the last time they will be seen at work with the entire royal Windsor clan before they fly off into self-imposed exile in North America.

TOP OF THE WORLD



Abdullah Hussain with Sheikh Hamdan

UAE
Indian boy's wish to meet Dubai Crown Prince comes true

Dubai: The wish of a seven-year-old cancer-stricken Indian boy came true when Dubai Crown Prince Sheikh Hamdan met him and posted their picture on social media. Abdullah Hussain from Hyderabad, suffering from third stage cancer, had expressed his wish on social media to meet Sheikh Hamdan, following which he was featured in a TV news report. *Gulf News* reported, "Shaikh Hamdan is so cool, adventurous and so kind. I want to meet his pets and I want to see his dresses," Abdullah said in a video. After the family's meeting with Sheikh Hamdan on Friday, Abdullah's mother Nausheen Fatima said the boy and their family was full of joy and gratitude.

AFGHANISTAN
Gunmen kill three including provincial official in Kabul

Kabul: Unknown gunmen shot and killed three people in Kabul on Sunday, including a member of eastern Logar province's provincial council, underscoring the ongoing risk of violence despite U.S.-led efforts to negotiate peace with the insurgent Taliban. "Logar provincial council member, Naser Ghairat and two of his bodyguards were killed and another wounded," Kabul police spokesman Ferdaus Faramarz said. No group has claimed responsibility for the killing in the capital, which has already had a violent few days.

USA
1 killed, 17 injured in party shooting

Cleveland: At least one person was killed and 17 people were injured when gunfire erupted following a fight at a party in Cleveland, Ohio, attended by multiple motorcycle clubs, police said. A 48-year-old man was found dead with multiple gunshot wounds when Cleveland police officers responded to an address in a neighbourhood on the city's east side at about 11.30 pm on Saturday. Police said many other victims left the scene in private vehicles and began to arrive at various hospitals.

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK: ITALY DEATH TOLL RISES TO 366

Quarter of Italy's population under lockdown, triggering travel chaos

Movement restricted for 16 million people in the country's north until April 3

PAOLO SANTALUCIA & YURI KAGEYAMA
ROME, MARCH 8

ITALY ANNOUNCED a sweeping quarantine early Sunday for its northern regions, igniting travel chaos as it restricted the movements of a quarter of its people in a bid to halt the new coronavirus' relentless march across Europe. Shortly after midnight, Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte signed a decree affecting 16 million people in the country's prosperous north, including the Lombardy region and at least 14 provinces in neighboring regions. The extraordinary measures will be in place until April 3. "For Lombardy and for the other northern provinces that I have listed, there will be a ban for everybody to move in and out of these territories and also within the same territory," Conte said. "Exceptions will be allowed only for proven professional needs, exceptional cases and health issues."



The usually lively Duomo square in Milan wears a deserted look on Sunday. Reuters

THE LOCKDOWN

AFFECTED AREAS
The region of Lombardy and the provinces of Modena, Parma, Piacenza, Reggio Emilia, Rimini, Pesaro, Urbino, Alessandria, Asti, Novara, Verbano-Cusio-Ossola, Vercelli, Padua, Treviso and Venice.

CURBS ON MOVEMENT
The decree says people should "avoid any movement in and out" of these territories and also any trips within this area.

GATHERINGS BANNED
All events from culture to sport, religious activities and fairs are suspended. Cinemas, museums, pubs, and discos must all close. Ceremonies, including funerals are also suspended. Schools and universities remain shut.

Attendee at event featuring Trump has coronavirus

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON, MARCH 8

A PERSON who attended a gathering of top US political conservatives including President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence has tested positive for the new coronavirus, officials said.



Trump at the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta

The Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) is one of the country's largest annual gatherings of political conservatives, and in addition to Trump and Pence the February 26-29 event near Washington also featured several Cabinet members. "The exposure occurred previous to the conference. A New Jersey hospital tested the person, and CDC confirmed the positive result," the event's organiser American Conservative Union tweeted on Saturday, referring

to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The individual is quarantined in New Jersey. "This attendee had no interaction with the President or the Vice President and never attended the events in the main hall," the statement added.

ACU chairman Matt Schlapp, however, said he interacted with the person at the event — and while the timeline is unclear, Schlapp shook Trump's hand on the last day of the conference.

Kamala Harris endorses Biden's White House bid



TREVOR HUNNICUTT
JACKSON, MARCH 8

US SENATOR Kamala Harris, a former 2020 Democratic presidential candidate, on Sunday said she would endorse her one-time rival Joe Biden's bid for the White House.

"I have decided that I am, with great enthusiasm, going to endorse Joe Biden for president of the United States," she said in a recorded message on Twitter. "I really believe in him and I have known him for a long time."

Biden has been eager to capitalise on a string of wins in South Carolina and a set of states that voted last Tuesday, where he was helped by the endorsements of one-time rivals Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar.

On Saturday in St. Louis, Biden thanked them and supporters of Harris, fueling speculation that the former Democratic presidential candidate may be about to endorse him.

"We're going to unite this party and unite this country," Biden said.

Biden has to win a primary against Bernie Sanders in order to be the Democratic nominee to face Donald Trump in the November presidential election. Democrats in Michigan, Missouri and four other places



EXPLAINED
Harris a potential V-P pick for Biden

DESPITE CLASHING on the debate stage when Harris was still in the running for the Democratic nomination, there has been weeks of speculation that she could be picked by Biden as his running mate. The 55-year-old Harris, who has Indian and Jamaican roots and is famous for her sharp rebukes of Republican policy in the Senate and on Congressional panels, has been seen as an ideal partner for the 77-year-old Biden, who has faced growing criticism for regular gaffes on the campaign trail. Biden has also praised Harris's record as attorney general of California, during which time she worked closely with his late son Beau, who was then the A-G of Delaware.

hold nominating contests on Tuesday. REUTERS

ON WOMEN'S DAY



Kyrgyz law enforcement officers detain an activist at a rally in Bishkek on Sunday. Reuters

Women's rights activists attacked, then detained in Kyrgyzstan's capital

REUTERS
BISHKEK, MARCH 8

POLICE IN Kyrgyzstan detained dozens of women's rights activists on Sunday shortly after journalists witnessed the protesters being attacked by masked men.

The activists gathered in one of the squares of capital Bishkek in the Central Asian country, to stage a march of solidarity against violence on International Women's Day.

But masked men, some of whom wore traditional Kyrgyz

white felt hats, attacked the protesters, grabbing and tearing apart their banners, in the presence of multiple journalists including a Reuters reporter.

The attackers left as soon as police arrived on the scene and proceeded to detain about 50 activists, mostly women.

It was unclear what charges they could face. The Bishkek police department could not be immediately reached for comment.

Activists say women's rights are deteriorating in the country of 6 million amid a resurgence of right-wing ideology.

UN chief says gender inequality is biggest human rights challenge

EDITH M LEDERER
UNITED NATIONS, MARCH 8

CALLING HIMSELF "a proud feminist," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres lashed out at men who abuse power and declared before Sunday's observances of International Women's Day that the fight for gender equality is "the biggest human rights challenge we face".

Twenty-five years after 189 countries adopted a 150-page road map for achieving equality for women, a new report by UN Women says the reality is that millions of women still face poverty, discrimination and violence. It notes over 70% of lawmakers and parliamentarians and managers are men and nearly 500,000 women and girls over the age of 15 are illiterate.

Guterres told the UN's International Women's Day observance Friday that "gender inequality is the overwhelming injustice of our day."

"Deep-rooted patriarchy and



Deep-rooted patriarchy and misogyny have created a yawning gender power gap in our economies, our political systems, our corporations, our societies and our culture.

— ANTONIO GUTERRES
UN SECRETARY-GENERAL

misogyny have created a yawning gender power gap in our economies, our political systems, our corporations, our societies and our culture," he said. "Women are still very frequently denied a voice; their opinions are ignored and their experience discounted." AP

Migrant crisis: Open your gates, Turkey President urges Greece

EZGI ERKOYUN
ISTANBUL, MARCH 8

TURKISH PRESIDENT Tayyip Erdogan urged Greece on Sunday to "open your gates" to refugees trying to enter the European Union from Turkey and said he hoped to win more support on migration from the EU at talks on Monday.

Tens of thousands of migrants have been trying to get into Greece, an EU member state, since Turkey said on Feb. 28 it would no longer try to keep them on its territory as agreed in 2016 with the EU in return for billions of euros in aid.

Turkey hosts about 3.6 million war refugees from Syria, where its troops and allied rebel forces are battling Russian-backed government forces, and says the EU has failed to honour promises made to Ankara. "We were hoping to get much more support from the international community when it comes to refugees. I have a meeting with European Union officials tomorrow in Belgium. We will discuss these issues," Erdogan said. REUTERS



Rows of empty chairs, lined up by family members of victims of the MH17 crash line for each seat on the plane, during a protest outside the Russian Embassy in The Hague. Reuters

Empty chairs for MH17 victims outside Russian embassy on eve of trial

TOBY STERLING
THE HAGUE, MARCH 8

ROWS OF white chairs were placed in front of Russia's embassy in The Hague on Sunday in a quiet protest by families of those who were shot down with Malaysia Airlines Flight 17, on the eve of the trial — in absentia — of four men accused of murder for their involvement.

MH17 was downed over rebel-held territory in eastern Ukraine in July 2014, by what international investigators say was a Russian missile sent to help Moscow-backed rebels fight Ukrainian government forces. All 298 people aboard died, including 196 Dutch citizens.

Russia, which has been held politically responsible by the Netherlands and Australia, denies any involvement.

"This is for me a very beautiful symbol for 298 people who perished. They are gone. My brother never returned," said Piet Ploeg, whose older brother Alex died in the crash.

"The idea of the action is to make perfectly clear to the Russian state that they have to cooperate with the investigation".

Embassy officials did not comment. Last week a spokesman for President Vladimir Putin said the Kremlin would wait for the outcome of the trial, but that it doubted the objectivity of the Dutch-led investigation. REUTERS

'I WOULD NOT FEEL COMFORTABLE FACING A JUDGE WEARING A HEADSCARF HERE... I WOULD WORRY ABOUT THEIR NEUTRALITY'

A Quebec ban on religious symbols upends lives and careers

DAN BILEFSKY
MONTREAL, MARCH 8

A MUSLIM lawyer who wears a headscarf put aside her aspiration to become a public prosecutor.

A Sikh teacher with a turban moved about 2,800 miles from Quebec to Vancouver, calling herself a "refugee in her own country."

And an Orthodox Jewish teacher who wears a head kerchief is worried that she could be blocked from a promotion.

teachers, police officers, prosecutors and other public sector employees from wearing religious symbols while at work, people like these three women have been grappling with the consequences.

Francois Legault, the right-leaning Quebec premier, says the law — which applies to Muslim headscarves, Sikh turbans, Jewish skullcaps, Catholic crosses and other religious symbols — upholds the separation between religion and state, and maintains the neutrality of public sector workers. The government has stressed

that the vast majority of Quebecers support the ban.

"I would not feel comfortable being faced with a judge or lawyer in court wearing a headscarf here, because I would worry about their neutrality," said Radhia Ben Amor, a research coordinator at the University of Montreal, who is Muslim and said she moved from Tunisia to live in a more secular country.

But the law has prompted vocal protests and legal challenges, as well as condemnation by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Critics say it flouts freedom of



Muslim, Sikh and Jewish women who wear religious headgear have had their careers affected by the law banning religious symbols at places of work. NYT

religion, breaches constitutional protections and excludes minorities who choose to wear symbols of faith from vital professions. They also say implementing the law will be fraught because it can be hard to discern a religious symbol from a fashion accessory or nonreligious garb.

The English Montreal School Board said the law was forcing it to turn away qualified teachers. It said at least one teacher had removed her headscarf while at work to keep her job.

The Coalition Inclusion Québec — a group that includes

Roman Catholics, Jews, Sikhs and Muslims — is challenging the law in court, along with three teachers, including two Muslims and a Roman Catholic.

Perri Ravon, a lawyer who has worked on two of the lawsuits against the ban, said that at least for now, "the law is disproportionately affecting Muslim women because the hijab is an outwardly visible religious symbol." She noted that a Catholic cross was less conspicuous since it could be concealed in a blouse or a shirt while at work. Nonetheless, the Catholic

teacher named in one of the suits, Andréa Lauzon, who wears a visible cross and medallion of the Virgin Mary, said in court papers that her faith and identity were inextricably bound, and that her constitutional right to freedom of religion was being breached.

The ban has its roots in Quebec's historic evolution into an abidingly secular society with a visceral distrust of religion, stemming from the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s, when Quebecers revolted against dominance of the Roman Catholic Church. NYT

CORPORATE WATCH CENTRE TO RESTRUCTURE SFIO New Delhi: The government is set to more than double the manpower at the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) to nearly 350 as it continues efforts to curb corporate wrongdoings, Corporate Affairs Secretary Injeti Srinivas said. PTI

LENDING RATE FOR OLD BORROWERS REMAINS UNCHANGED IN 12 MONTHS

Private banks lag in cutting lending rates, but slash deposit rates faster than PSBs

SANDEEP SINGH & SUNNY VERMA NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

EVEN AS the RBI cut repo rate by 135 bps from 6.5 per cent to 5.15 per cent in calendar year 2019, data released by the central bank shows that the weighted average loan rate (WALR) on outstanding loans for private sector banks has seen no decline between January 2019 and January 2020.

By comparison, the same for state-owned banks declined by 21 bps from 9.8 per cent to 9.59 per cent.

However, when it comes to cut in deposit rates, private banks seem to have taken the lead. Data from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) shows that in the 12-month period, while public sector banks (PSBs) cut the weighted average domestic term deposit rates on monthly term deposit by 29 basis points (bps), that for private banks came down by 51 bps.

As for the lending rates, when it comes to fresh loans, private banks have been largely in sync with the state-owned counterparts, albeit a little slower, in the quantum of transmission of rate cuts. While the WALR on fresh loans for private banks came down by 50 bps in the 12-month period, that for PSBs came down by 62 bps.

Banking industry executives said transmission is relatively faster on fresh loans, but that on

Table with columns: LENDING & DEPOSIT RATE TRENDS, WEIGHTED AVERAGE LENDING RATE ON OUTSTANDING LOANS, WEIGHTED AVERAGE TERM DEPOSIT RATES. Rows: Month-End (Jan '19 to Jan '20), Public Sector Banks, Private Sector Banks.

Source: Reserve Bank of India

outstanding portfolio takes times to adjust to new regime. "When we grant loans, our interest cost is tied up immediately. For example, for home loan given 5 years ago, the bank treasury would have locked in rates prevalent at that time even for the bank," an executive with a private bank said.

However, not many customers are aware of this facility, leading to rigidity in downward movement in loan rates. It is, however, interesting to see that WALR on outstanding loans for private banks did not see even a single basis point decline between January 2019 and January 2020.

Banks typically charge conversion fee from customers to move them to a lower rate to partially account for the rate differ-

ential. In order to improve rate transmission, the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee, on February 7, announced several measures to

E. Some rate cuts transmitted to fresh loans

ON SEVERAL occasions, RBI has pointed out the delay in transmission of cut in lending rates by scheduled commercial banks. While there has been some transmission in case of fresh loans by private banks, the fact that there has been no decline in WALR on outstanding loans by private lenders is something that RBI needs to look into.

At the same time, private banks seem far more aggressive than PSBs when it comes to cutting deposit rates.

boost credit flow and liquidity in the markets. To put downward pressure on rates, RBI announced a cash reserve ratio (CRR) exemption on incremental retail loans in the automobile, housing and MSME sectors till July 31, 2020. It also decided to introduce

long-term repo operations which enabled banks to raise funds at lower rates from the central bank. At present, banks are supposed to keep 4 per cent of deposits with the RBI as CRR which doesn't carry any interest.

The CRR exemption in certain incremental loans followed a deceleration in credit growth to the retail sector.

The transmission of rate cuts has been "steadily improving" and is expected to improve further in the coming months, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das had said on February 16 after the central board meeting, where Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman addressed the board after the Budget.

"With regard to the impact of rate cut plateauing out, I would not entirely agree with that because transmission of rate cut has been steadily improving. If you recall, in December MPC when we met, the transmission to fresh rupee loans was in the order of about 49 basis points. In this monetary policy, we have said that it has improved to 69 basis points. It is the consequence of the rate cut, surplus liquidity that we ensure in the system and third, and very important, the external benchmarking which was brought into operation from October 1 onwards. Transmission is slowly and steadily improving and it should improve even more in the coming months," Das said.

AIMED AT DECLOGGING NCLTs TO SPEED UP CASES

Panel proposes raising default threshold of cos to ₹50 lakh to initiate insolvency proceedings

KARUNJIT SINGH NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

A HIGH-LEVEL government panel has recommended that the default threshold for initiation for insolvency proceedings against companies under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) be increased to Rs 50 lakh from Rs 1 lakh, government officials said. The report of the Insolvency Law Committee, which is set to be submitted to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, has also recommended a lower threshold of Rs 5 lakh for initiation of insolvency against micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

Officials said one of the main intentions behind the recommendation is to declog the National Company Law Tribunals (NCLTs), which adjudicate insolvency proceedings under the IBC, to speed up cases.

One of the major criticisms of the insolvency legislation, brought into force in 2016, has been that most cases have taken longer than the 330-day time limit for resolution notified by the government. "The committee has recommended that the threshold be increased to Rs 50 lakh and Rs 5 lakh in the case of MSMEs," said an official aware of developments.

Another official noted that this would also help in preventing frivolous insolvency cases.

₹5 LAKH THRESHOLD FOR MSMEs

The report of the Insolvency Law Committee, which is set to be submitted to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, has also recommended a lower threshold of Rs 5 lakh for initiation of insolvency against micro, small and medium enterprises

An official also said that the panel had made recommendations that the 'fresh start' process for personal insolvency, which is intended to discharge the liabilities of individuals with low incomes and assets, be resolved outside of the judicial system

Experts said that the move would help reduce the case load on NCLTs going forward.

"Any increase in the threshold limit to a more material level is a welcome move that will help reduce the flow of fresh cases and burden on the judicial system and participants," said Uday Bhansali, president-financial advisory at Deloitte India.

The government official quoted above also said that the panel had made recommendations that the 'fresh start' process for personal insolvency, which is intended to discharge the liabilities of individuals with low incomes and assets, be resolved outside of the judicial system.

Provisions under the IBC allow for individual debtors with a maximum annual income of Rs 60,000, total assets below Rs 20,000 and total debts under Rs 25,000 to be discharged of their debts.

The fresh start process, how-

ever, only applies to unsecured debt. Insolvency provisions for individuals are expected to be brought into effect within 2020.

"The panel has recommended that the process not include insolvency professionals which may make the process costly, but that such debtors be able to file applications that are handled by administrative officers instead of going through to court," said the official.

Another official told The Indian Express that the report noted that operational creditors should not be provided voting rights in the committee of creditors (CoC) of a company undergoing insolvency, but that this may be considered in the future if it does not undermine the insolvency process.

Operational creditors including suppliers of goods and services currently do not have a voting right in the CoC, which constitutes of financial creditors.

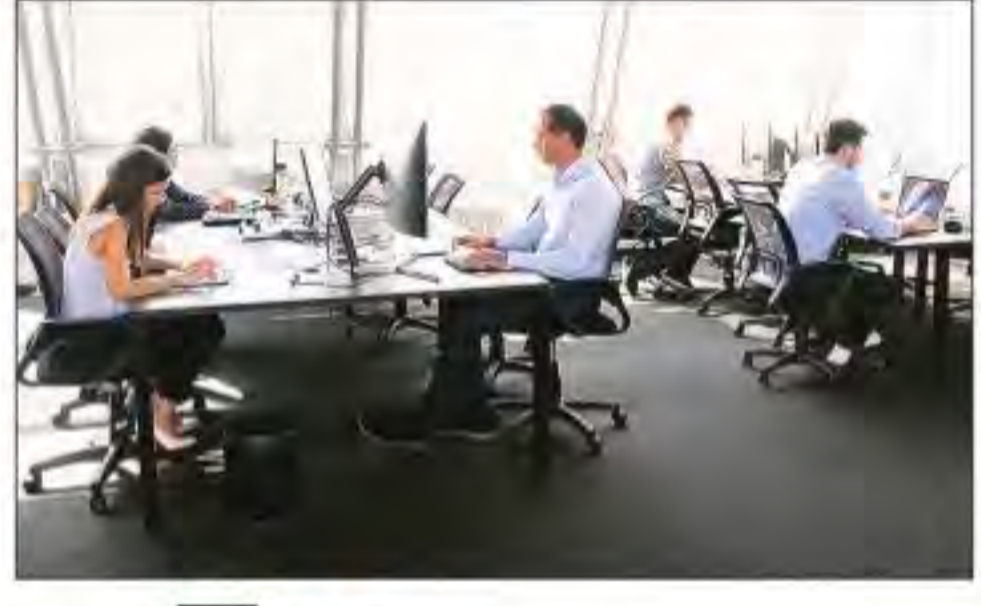
BRIEFLY

Indian banks well capitalised, assures CEA

New Delhi: Allaying concerns over banking sector health in the wake of Yes Bank fiasco, Chief Economic Adviser Krishnamurthy Subramanian on Sunday said Indian banks are well capitalised and there is no reason to worry. He further said that it is a wrong method to assess a lender's health based on the ratio of deposit to m-cap (market capitalisation). "What I want to emphatically state that the m-cap ratio is a totally incorrect metric for assessing the safety of the banks. No banking sector expert or banking regulator uses this measure," Subramanian said while speaking to select media-persons at his office here.

'Net office space leasing may fall up to 14% in 2020'

Net leasing of office space could decline by up to 14 per cent this year across seven major cities on estimated fall in supply, property consultant JLL India said



35 million sq ft: Annual average office space absorption during last five years

40% RISE IN NET OFFICE SPACE LEASING IN 2019, FROM 33.2 MILLION SQ FT IN 2018 TO 46.5 MILLION SQUARE FEET

45% RISE IN NEW OFFICE SPACE SUPPLY LAST YEAR, FROM 35.7 MILLION SQ FT DURING 2018 TO 51.6 MILLION SQ FT

>40 MILLION SQ FT ESTIMATED NET OFFICE SPACE LEASING IN 2020

47.5 million sq ft: Estimated new office space supply this year

Forex reserves hit new high as Brent crude price sees steep fall

SANDEEP SINGH NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

INDIA'S FOREIGN exchange reserves jumped \$5.4 billion in the week ended February 28 to hit a new all-time high of \$481.5 billion, following a sharp decline in Brent crude prices and decrease in trade from China and other countries in the wake of fear of spread of coronavirus.

Since September 20, 2019, when Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a cut in corporate tax rates, the reserves have been rising week-on-week — this was the 23rd consecutive week of rise.

The country's forex reserves have grown by \$53 billion since September 20, when they stood at \$428.5 billion. The coronavirus outbreak, which poses threat to global economic growth, has resulted in a sharp decline in Brent crude oil prices — currently trading at around \$45.2 per barrel, the lowest since June 2017.

Many feel that the decline in crude prices following the virus outbreak will help India as it will reduce India's annual import bill.

In a tweet on Sunday, Uday Kotak, CEO, Kotak Mahindra Bank, said, "Amidst turbulence and the virus, some good news-oil at \$45/ barrel. Recent \$20 drop saves India \$30 billion per annum. Also global interest rates have collapsed making money

Table titled RISING FOREX RESERVES with columns: WEEK ENDED, FOREX (\$ BN). Rows: Sept 20 to Feb 28.

Source: RBI

cheap. Let's leverage these for policy to boost growth." The fall in global crude prices has played an important role in keeping India's import bill under check and the coronavirus impact on world economy is likely to keep the prices lower.

While inflow from foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) only stood strong till February, March has seen a sharp outflow in FPI money following concerns over global growth on account of the spread of virus.

While FPIs invested net of Rs 8,970 crore into Indian capital markets, they have pulled out a net of Rs 13,138 crore in the first week of March itself. This may have an impact on the forex reserves in the next week and ahead.

According to data released by the Reserve Bank of India, while the forex reserves rose by \$5.4 billion in the reporting week ended February 28, the rise in reserves was mainly on account of an increase in foreign currency assets that rose \$4.36 billion to \$445.8 billion.

It is important to note that while there was a sudden spike in global crude prices in January following geopolitical tensions between the United States and Iran and it hit an 8-month high of \$70.25 per barrel on January 6, it fell sharply following de-escalation of the tensions and then the coronavirus outbreak in China. While Brent crude was trading at around \$56 per barrel two weeks back, it fell sharply to \$45 per barrel on Friday.

Discussion on S&DT at WTO meeting

New Delhi: Special and differential treatment (S&DT) for developing countries like India will figure prominently in the World Trade Organization's (WTO) 12th Ministerial Conference meet in June in Kazakhstan, an official said. The Ministerial Conference is the highest decision-making body of the 164-member WTO. Trade ministers of all the member countries participate in the deliberations. The 12th Ministerial Conference will take place from June 8-11 this year at Nur-Sultan in Kazakhstan. "This time, besides fishery subsidies, special and differential treatment and investment facilitation will figure in the meeting," the official said.

Tata Steel placing orders outside China

Kolkata: Tata Steel, which has been sourcing consumables from China, has started placing orders for materials in alternative markets in the wake of coronavirus outbreak in the neighbouring country, managing director and CEO TV Narendran said, adding that the company has already undertaken a risk assessment. PTI

Concern on deposits based on flawed analysis: RBI

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU MUMBAI, MARCH 8

THE RESERVE Bank of India (RBI) on Sunday assured bank depositors that their money is safe in any bank.

"The RBI closely monitors all the banks and hereby assures all depositors that there is no such concern of safety of their deposits in any bank," the central bank tweeted on Sunday, amid

The RBI tweeted that solvency of banks is internationally based on Capital to Risk Weighted Assets and not on market cap

reports about the safety of deposits in some banks. "Concern has been raised in

certain sections of media about safety of deposits of certain banks. This concern is based on analysis which is flawed," the RBI tweeted. "Solvency of banks is internationally based on Capital to Risk Weighted Assets (CRAR) and not on market cap," it added.

"Let me assure you that our banking sector continues to be sound and safe. We stand committed to maintaining stability of financial and banking sector," RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das

had said on the sidelines of an event organised by Assocham on Friday.

Last week, the RBI superseded the board of troubled Yes Bank and appointed an administrator. It had assured Yes Bank customers of "swift" action and a scheme "very shortly", in less than 30 days, even as thousands of customers rushed to withdraw funds and queued up at overcrowded branches across the country.

AFTER OPEC-RUSSIA SUPPLY CUT DEAL COLLAPSES

'Saudi Arabia to hike oil output above 10 million bpd in April'

RANIA ELGAMAL DUBAI, MARCH 8

SAUDI ARABIA, the world's top oil exporter, plans to raise its crude oil production significantly above 10 million barrels per day (bpd) in April, after the collapse of OPEC's supply cut agreement with Russia, two sources told Reuters Sunday.

State oil giant Aramco will boost its crude output after the current deal to curb production between OPEC and Russia — together known as OPEC+ — expires at March end, the sources with knowledge of the matter said. The collapse of talks to extend the deal on Friday sent oil prices plunging on speculation Saudi Arabia is scrapping a strategy of supporting prices in favour of a



Aramco should maximise its output and sell more crude to protect its market share, sources said. Reuters

grab for market share, reminiscent of a drive in 2014 that caused crude prices to slump around two thirds in value. On Saturday, Aramco slashed its official selling price (OSP) for April for all its crude

grades to all destinations. Sources said April's output would be significantly higher than 10 million bpd, possibly closer to 11 million bpd. In the past couple of months, Saudi Arabia has been pumping 9.7 million bpd. Aramco should maximise its output and sell more crude to protect its market share, the sources said, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter. Saudi has an oil output capacity of 12 million bpd, giving it the ability to swiftly increase production. A three-year pact between OPEC and Russia ended in acrimony on Friday after Moscow refused to support deeper production cuts to support prices hit by the coronavirus outbreak. OPEC responded by removing all limits on its own output. REUTERS

Vivad se Vishwas: Govt tries to fix liability, PSUs worry about fund stress

KHUSHBOO NARAYAN MUMBAI, MARCH 8

IN AN attempt to resolve direct tax disputes worth Rs 2.4 lakh crore pertaining to central public sector undertakings (CPSUs), under the newly launched amnesty scheme Vivad se Vishwas, the Income-Tax Department has made the financial heads of the units sign a document that fixes the tax liability of these firms, sources told The Indian Express.

This document, called 'Joint Certification of Amount Payable', is being signed between principal-I-T commissioners and executives of the rank of chief financial officers at CPSUs. The move has raised concerns among CPSUs, which fear that settlement under the scheme will affect their capital

reserves and weaken their balance sheets. Public sector banks, which have been reeling under the bur-

den of huge non-performing assets, have already expressed their reluctance over settlement under the scheme. Sources said public sector oil marketing companies top the list of firms with the highest amount of tax disputes with the government. If the tax department is able to persuade the CPSUs to come on board, it may be able to unlock at least Rs 1 lakh crore or 50 per cent of the total collection target of Rs 2 lakh crore set by the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) under the amnesty scheme by March 31. At a recent meeting of top-I-T officers chaired by the Revenue Secretary, it was decided that starting March 9, the Cabinet Secretary will hold talks with the managing directors of these CPSUs, based on the tax liability document, and ask them to pay up and settle the cases under the

amnesty scheme, said sources. The Vivad se Vishwas scheme seeks to reduce about 4.8 lakh tax disputes involving an amount of Rs 9.32 lakh crore (up to November 30, 2019) by giving taxpayers the chance to escape interest on the disputed tax amount and any penalty. Meanwhile, the Income Tax Employees Federation and the Income Tax Gazetted Officers' Association, which together constitute 97 per cent of the workforce in the department, have threatened a series of protests against the CBDT's move to bring all disputed cases under the Vivad se Vishwas scheme and linking its success to the performance of officials in collecting money under the scheme to their future postings.

AFTER SUPER TUESDAY

Look at Joe go

Joe Biden has pulled off one of the great political comebacks

ONLY A few days ago the Democratic primary looked like a re-run of the 2016 Republican contest that launched Donald Trump. The field was crowded and had no clear establishment favourite. The chief contenders for that role—Joe Biden, Mike Bloomberg, Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar—were ripping into one another while cannibalising the moderate vote. This had created an opportunity for Bernie Sanders, a left-winger with a small but loyal base, to follow the Trump tactics: by turning a series of modest pluralities into an insurmountable delegate lead. Mr Sanders had won or tied the first three states and was predicted to win many more on Super Tuesday, March 3rd. The primary has instead been turned on its head.

A thumping win for Mr Biden in South Carolina on February 29th persuaded Mr Buttigieg and Ms Klobuchar to bow out and endorse him. Three days after bagging his first ever state—during his third presidential campaign—the 77-year-old former vice-president then went on a stunning tear through the Super Tuesday states. He won ten in all, from Maine in the north to mighty Texas in the south. He won states where he had not campaigned or even advertised: including Massachusetts, where he had spent a mere \$11,000, assuming it would pick Mr Sanders or another leftist, Elizabeth Warren, the local senator. Mr Sanders won only three states, including his own tiny Vermont. And though *The Economist* went to press, he was also leading in California, the biggest prize of all. Mr Biden was running him close enough to be assured of a big chunk of its 415 delegates.

Neither Ms Warren nor Mr Bloomberg, the only other serious candidates remaining, won a state. The contest no longer resembles the Republican primary in 2016 but rather the Democratic one of that year. Mr Biden and Mr Sanders are locked in a two-man race, to bag states and collect delegates, that the left-winger's smaller faction means he may struggle to win.

The obvious reason for Mr Biden's unpredicted success is that a huge number of late deciders broke for him. Exit polls from ten states suggest he won more than 40% of them everywhere apart from Vermont; Mr Sanders won far fewer. But why did this happen? Mr Sanders and his supporters detect an establishment plot. They always do. Though, to be fair to them, the sudden way Mr Buttigieg, Ms Klobuchar and other elected Democrats folded behind Mr Biden, despite justified doubts about his age, speed of thought and ability to enthuse voters, does suggest a degree of co-ordination. Yet that would be only a partial explanation for Mr Biden's amazing turnaround.

The main reason was black voters: the biggest, most moderate and active part of the Democratic coalition. Hardly present in the early states, they predominate in South Carolina, where they took a deep breath and backed Mr Biden by a huge margin. Exit polls suggest that 56% of black voters followed suit on Super Tuesday. Asked why she had voted for Mr Biden, a black woman emerging from a polling station in Houston, offered a familiar explanation: "He was vice-president with Barack Obama and they did a good job." Whether in reward for his loyalty to the first black president, or by simple process of elimination, black voters thus swept away the taint of failure that had hitherto clung to Mr Biden.

His endorsement by Mr Buttigieg and Ms Klobuchar, who have seen him up close, also helped—especially in Ms Klobuchar's state of Minnesota, where he thereby pulled off another surprise victory. And Mr Biden also enjoyed a few breaks, including the woeful recent debate performances of his



Democratic US presidential candidate and former Vice President Joe Biden at his Super Tuesday night rally in Los Angeles, California, on March 3. Reuters

main rival, Mr Bloomberg, who entered the primary on Super Tuesday and quit it the following day. Mr Sanders entered the multi-state contest rather tarnished, too—his brief spell as the front-runner having drawn unprecedented attention to his history of praising some of the achievements of Fidel Castro's Cuba. The Democratic establishment had no say in most of that. It was merely one among the several factors that made Mr Biden, a widely discounted former front-runner, seem suddenly more plausible as a third of Democratic voters were about to have their say.

According to our analysis of states that have reported, as well as estimates for California, Mr Biden now has roughly 671 of the 1,991 delegates he would need for the nomination. Mr Sanders has 589. (Ms Warren, with only 89, dropped out of the race on Thursday). That leaves plenty of room for doubt about which septuagenarian will prevail. Yet Mr Biden has demonstrated his advantage. While Mr Sanders mainly won votes from his usual fanbase—made up of white lefties, young voters and Hispanics—the former veep drew support from across the party. For example, he also did well in the sorts of affluent, mostly white suburbs that gave Democrats their House majority in 2018 and where they would need to win again to

defeat Mr Trump in November. In Virginia, for example, where he beat Mr Sanders by 30 points, he ran up sizeable margins in both the heavily black Tidewater region and in the diverse, highly educated suburbs of Washington, DC.

Even more tantalising for hopeful Democrats, the former vice-president also notched up some unexpected wins in places that used to back them but have recently shifted towards the Republicans. Maine and Minnesota provided examples of that; there were even reports of Republican voters in Alabama requesting Democratic ballots in order to back Mr Biden. Exit polls showed him doing best with older and more moderate voters. Mr Sanders did far better with younger voters, which looks like a long-term problem for Mr Biden, if not necessarily a crippling one, given how few of them vote.

That the diverse Democratic starting-field has been winnowed down to two white-haired white men is depressing to

some Democrats. Yet politically, at least, Mr Biden and Mr Sanders are miles apart. The former vice-president, who is also a veteran of 36 years in the Senate, is a devoted institutionalist. Mr Sanders is calling for a political revolution that would up-end many aspects of American life.

The senator from Vermont wants to ban private health insurance and create a single-payer system free at the point of service. Mr Biden would prefer to preserve the Affordable Care Act, better known as Obamacare, and augment it by creating a public option for health insurance.

Mr Sanders would spend an incredible \$16trn on his Green New Deal, including, among other things, a federal jobs-guarantee. Mr Biden also has a bold climate plan, requiring \$1.7trn in new federal spending. But its entire size is less than what Mr Sanders would spend replacing petrol- and diesel-powered cars with electric vehicles.

Rather than decriminalise illegal border

crossings, as Mr Sanders wants to, Mr Biden would try to create a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants already in America. Both agree on the necessity of undoing much of President Donald Trump's legacy, particularly his immigration restrictions and deconstruction of health care and environmental provisions. Both would re-subscribe to the Paris agreement and the nuclear deal with Iran.

Mr Biden's critics on the left have dismissed his platform as Hillary Clinton's warmed up. In fact, he is running to the left of her and Mr Obama. He supports a \$15-an-hour minimum wage, and, channelling Mr Sanders a bit, talks of launching a "clean-energy revolution". He has pledged to "impose carbon-adjustment fees or quotas on carbon-intensive goods from countries that are failing to meet their climate and environmental obligations", and is more comfortable with renewable-energy standards than with carbon pricing, to help achieve emissions reductions. On foreign policy, he is less of a liberal interventionist abroad than Ms Clinton was—though he is not quite as inclined to isolationism as is Mr Sanders.

How much of either candidate's platform could be enacted is doubtful, given how hard it will be for the Democrats to take back the Senate in November. Yet Mr Biden's proposals

appear at least to have achieved their political aim of being broadly acceptable. The same could be said of his candidacy in general.

He could yet stumble. Despite a couple of good victory speeches, by his rambling standards, Mr Biden's weakness as a campaigner is manifest. To observe his look of mounting puzzlement, as his own sentences meander uncontrollably, can be a disconcerting experience. Yet, in the absence of a standout performer to rally their party's divergent quarters, Democrats appear to have settled on Mr Biden as their likeliest unifier. That largely reflects his personal qualities, including his reputed kindness, loyalty to Mr Obama and well-known forbearance in the face of personal tragedies—including the death of a wife and two children. This has marked him as a person of quality. "He's been there," said a weary-looking voter wearing hospital scrubs in Houston. "I trust him."

He may not stage huge rallies like Mr Sanders, and may be less thrilling to his supporters, but Mr Biden's reputation for steadiness and decency in public life may be enough. They are attributes Americans miss. It is also notable that he did especially well on Super Tuesday with voters whose main priority is to get rid of Mr Trump.

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The obvious reason for Joe Biden's unpredicted success is that a huge number of late deciders broke for him. Exit polls from ten states suggest he won more than 40% of them everywhere apart from Vermont; Bernie Sanders won far fewer

POLITICS IN SRI LANKA

Brotherly shove

Sri Lanka's ruling party calls an election, hoping for a landslide

JUST FIVE years ago the Rajapaksa family seemed to have lost everything. Mahinda Rajapaksa was beaten in Sri Lanka's presidential race in 2015, ending his ten-year tenure. His younger brother, Gotabaya, was no longer number two (to Mahinda) in the ministry of defence. Basil, the baby of the brood, had lost his job as minister of economic development, and their eldest sibling, Chamal, would soon be ousted as speaker of parliament. Worse, the incoming government was threatening to prosecute varied Rajapaksas and their allies for everything from corruption to human-rights abuses.

But five years is an age in politics. Sahodara Samagama or Brothers Inc, as Sri Lankans jocularly call the resilient political clan that first entered parliament three generations ago, in 1936, is very much back in business. In November Gota, as he is widely known, captured the presidency in a landslide. He picked Mahinda, the former president, to be his prime minister. Chamal is still an MP and Basil, though out of government, runs the family's political party, the Sri Lanka People's Front (known by its Sinhala initials SLPP). Few Sri Lankans doubt that when polls open for a

new parliament on April 25th, the nine-party coalition he has stitched will romp home.

Yet for the Rajapaksas, capture of the presidency, the cabinet and, in all probability, the legislature (in addition to considerable influence in the army, the police, the courts and much of the media) may not be enough. What they would really like is not merely a parliamentary majority but a two-thirds majority. That way they could roll back constitutional changes brought in by the previous government that trimmed the president's powers. They could also, fear some among the 30% of the island's 22m people who are not part of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority, scrap efforts to reconcile the country's different ethnicities and religions after the murderous civil war of 1983-2009. Rival politicians and liberal types, meanwhile, worry that they will redouble the assault on civil liberties that took place when Mahinda was president.

Signs of such intentions are already showing. After Gota became president in November he placed the civilian police and the registration of NGOs under the control of the defence ministry. The ministry itself is run by a fierce general, with another hard-

liner in command of the army; both have been accused of war crimes. Human-rights activists and journalists say that while there have been no disappearances, as in the bad old days, forms of intimidation such as surveillance and repeated interrogations are becoming common again. Among signs that have worried Tamils, a minority concentrated in the north and east and in Colombo, the capital, whose armed uprising sparked the war, was a ministerial order in January that the national anthem may now only be sung in Sinhalese and no longer also in Tamil. Ominously, too, the government in February officially annulled its predecessor's co-sponsorship of a resolution by the UN Human Rights Council, which had prescribed institutional steps for reconciliation between Tamils and Sinhalese.

Grisly terror attacks on churches and hotels last year by members of a local jihadist cult, which left 259 dead, drew attention to poor policing and intelligence and allowed the Rajapaksas to portray themselves as more reliably tough on security issues. "But in the guise of stability they want to arrogate all power to themselves and restrict public



Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in Colombo last year. Reuters

space," warns Rauff Hakeem, an MP and former minister who happens to be Muslim. "It's as if they are preparing for a police state."

Few analysts believe the SLPP will gain its desired two-thirds. But this has more to do with an electoral system of proportional representation, which tends to reflect Sri Lanka's demographic mix, than to the appeal or dy-

namism of the main opposition group, the United National Party (UNP). It is in disarray, split between a faction that backs Ranil Wickremesinghe, a seasoned but charmless politician, and one led by the more popular but less savvy Sajith Premadasa, the son of a former president. Mr Premadasa has forged an alliance of 12 groups to fight the SLPP. Mr

Wickremesinghe is not only refusing to join, but also to allow Mr Premadasa to use the UNP's symbol, an elephant. "What people are saying is, 'How can they run a country if they can't even run a party?'" says Malinda Seneviratne, a columnist and poet.

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CROSSWORD 4061



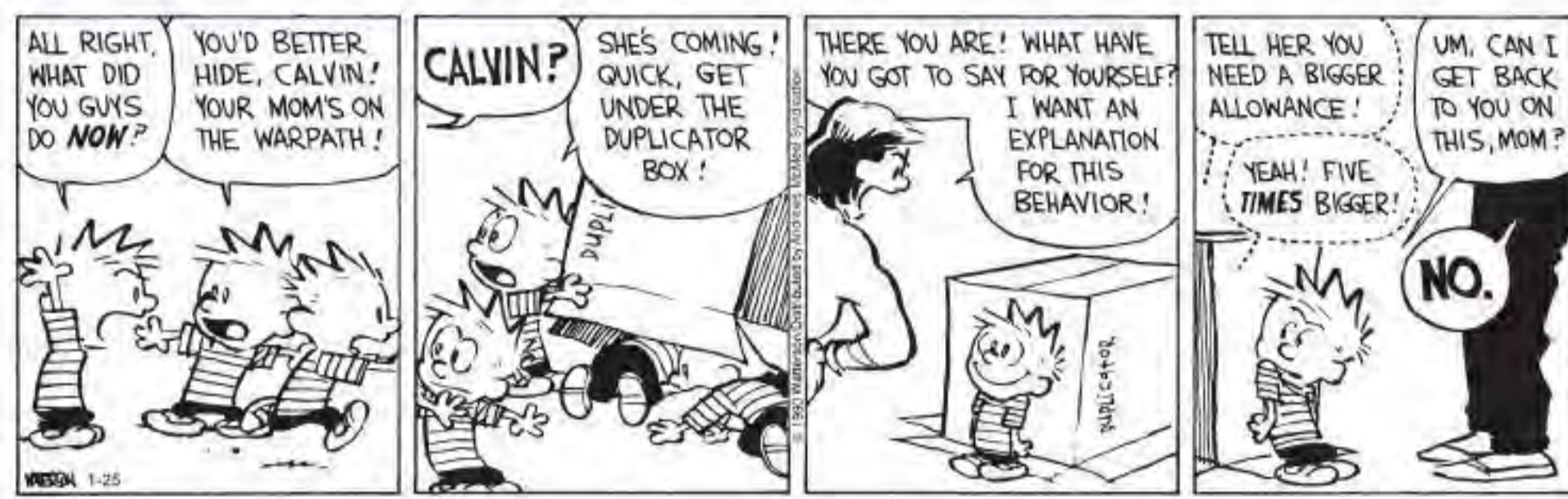
- ACROSS 1 Tell about Dracula (7) 2 Tired out and annoyed (5) 3 They support the game, perhaps (7,6) 9 Arbitration must include a sense of proportion (5) 10 He alone is happy (7) 11 She made her name in a production of Hamlet (6) 12 As transmitted, it signifies agreement (6) 15 See the bishop's concern (7) 17 One way to apply a finish to education (5) 19 It's thick-skinned, colourless and unwanted (5,8) 20 Admit defeat and return (5) 21 Put down to do more evening work? (7) DOWN 1 Quarrelsome oarsman (5) 2 Telephone for legal aid? (4,3,6) 3 Even the soldier assumes it (7) 4 Gadget wrongly labelled (6) 5 It was in the church's interest (5) 6 A tree leaning over a ramp, perhaps (8,5) 7 Locked up fruit? (7) 11 Passage where water comes and goes (7) 13 Approach with some pomp to perform a menial task (5,2) 14 One who issues statements at the bank (6) 16 Free from fault (5) 18 Lily reveals a great deal to us (5)

Solutions Crossword 4060: Across: 1 Their, 8 Impounds, 9 Pause, 10 Pretence, 11 Cargo, 12 Woe, 16 Chaise, 17 Redden, 18 Ear, 23 Vague, 24 Evidence, 25 Acute, 26 Doctrine, 27 Aside. Down: 2 Headache, 3 Insigma, 4 Embryo, 5 Forte, 6 Inane, 7 Ashen, 12 Wee, 13 Err, 14 Advances, 15 Required, 19 Ascent, 20 Seedy, 21 Witch, 22 Heirs.

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given clue.

Word jumble puzzle with clues: LONER, AEILLN, CNUIO, AINCFG. Includes a grid of letters and shaded squares.

Answer: Are you really sure that a ceiling can't also be a floor? SOLUTION: ENKRO, LITNOI, LFAJNO, LKACNO.

Difficulty Level 1s Instructions

To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Sudoku puzzle grid with numbers 1-9 and some empty cells.

Difficulty Level 1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius

SOLUTION SUDOKU 4143

Solved Sudoku puzzle grid showing the final arrangement of numbers 1-9.

TAMILNADU TEXTBOOK AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICES CORPORATION. NOTICE FOR ENLISTMENT OF NEW PRINTERS. RC.No. 12112/PS2/2018. The Tamilnadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation is printing and distributing textbooks for the standard I to XII viz. Annual edition and under trimester pattern.

SOUTHERN RAILWAY. TENDER NOTICE No. SA/A/RS/ED/OT/19-20/11A Date: 06.03.2020. The Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer, Rolling Stock, Southern Railway, Electric Loco Shed, Erode acting for and on behalf of The President of India invites online E-tender for the under mentioned work.

OFFICE THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER PWD (R&B) ELECTRIC DIVISION JAMMU. NOTICE INVITING TENDER. e-NIT No.EDJ/268 of 2019-20 Dated 04-03-2020. For and on behalf of the Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir e-tenders are invited on item rate basis from approved and eligible contractors/agencies registered with Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir for each of the following works:-

Khadi Gramodyog Bhavan Khadi and Village Industries Commission. Ministry of MSME (Govt. of India). Office: K-Block, Chaudhary Building, Connaught Circus, New Delhi-1. Khadi Gramodyog Bhavan, Khadi & Village Industries Commission, Ministry of India, Govt. of India has decided to Sale Khadi Rural Online/offline duly packed in boxes with sticker & label etc. Sealed Tenders are invited from eligible & qualified tenderers under two bid systems viz. Technical Bid and Financial Bid for selection of Agencies/ firms for supply/executing of following works.

Classifieds PERSONAL. I, Tinnu Tino W/o Tino Augustine Kadaviparambil R/o UG-01, Tower-E, Civitech Sampriti, Sector-77, Noida (U.P) have changed my name to Tinnu Thomas for all future purposes.

UJVN Limited (An Uttarakhnad Govt. Enterprises). H.O. "UJJAWAL" Maharani Bagh, GMS Road, Dehradun-248006, Telephone: 0135-2763508, 2763808, Fax: 0135-2763507. Office of the Executive Engineer (Gen.), Chilla Power House invites sealed tenders from interested bidders for following works.

GOVERNMENT OF CHHATTISGARH, WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT. OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER HASDEO CANAL W/M DIVISION, JANJGIR-CHAMPA. e-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE. eProcurement Portal: https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in (SECOND CALL). System Tender No.61815/NIT No.:27/SAC/2019-20, Dated: 06.03.2020 Online Tenders are invited for the following works up to 23.03.2020 at 17.30 Hour.

DAY TODAY BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20) Over the course of the week you will move from a position which is somewhat confused towards one which is thoroughly practical and down-to-earth. TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21) This is your week. By this I mean that enterprises and projects set in train three, or even six months ago, should soon come to fruition. GEMINI (May 22 - June 21) It's difficult to describe your exact situation at the moment but there could be something vaguely farcical about certain developments. CANCER (June 22 - July 23) The Moon is profoundly helpful, so positive lunar alignments should lift your spirits. LEO (July 24 - Aug 23) You may as well face the fact that intense planetary patterns are obliging you to cope with intimate and personal matters. VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23) The themes for the week are travel and communication. LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23) Sometimes the old sayings are the truest and, as the song says, it's money that makes the world go round. SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23) You are happily telling people anything they want to hear and why not? SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 23) Why are you so misunderstood? AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19) The ambitious Aquarian is an awesome sight at the moment. PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20) If we look at all the planets that are cajoling and encouraging you, then we find a remarkably complicated picture.

17 TALK ART, MUSIC, STYLE, FOOD



SHINING BRIGHT

The tale of Florence Nightingale, is being narrated through a show at the Florence Nightingale Museum at London's St Thomas' Hospital. A year-long exhibition celebrates her 200th birth anniversary through 200 objects, including her drawings and a gold watch gifted by her father.

Paradise Found, Then Lost

Author John Stratton Hawley on his new book on Vrindavan, and how the city's history is steeped in a vision of 'Hinduism' that doesn't correspond to the one propagated today

ANUSHREE MAJUMDAR

FORTY SIX years after he first visited Vrindavan, John Stratton Hawley, Claire Tow Professor of Religion at Barnard College, Columbia University, author and editor of over 20 books on Hinduism, found himself writing a deeply personal account of what many regard as "the spiritual capital of India." What was once an idyllic reimagining of where Krishna had spent his childhood and youth, Vrindavan today is plagued by real-estate development and a polluted Yamuna river. Hawley, 78, is still hopeful that the faith that steered the creation of Vrindavan, will triumph over blatant commercialisation of religion. Excerpts from an interview:



John Stratton Hawley (above); cover of his book *Krishna's Playground: Vrindavan in the 21st Century*

In your book, *Krishna's Playground: Vrindavan in the 21st Century*, you've written about how you were born into a Christian home, studied religion and psychology at Harvard, where you were introduced to Hinduism. Was Hinduism attractive to you because Hindu gods appear to be more human than one would imagine?

Yes, there's a sense in Hindu stories and belief that, somehow, human beings belong to a world larger than themselves, including the gods. The gods are fallible and open to the processes of human imagination. To me, that's a more honest approach to the way religion actually works. Vedanta, to my mind, makes it possible for one to do theology without having to posit the existence of a deity. You can be an atheist and 'Hindu'; the word comes from Indus, which is where the name India comes from. It's all about what the self means. The absence of that firm boundary between divinity and humanity was one of the major things that drew me to Hinduism, and in turn, India.

That word (Hinduism) is loaded because of the way it's historically been used as ammunition to discriminate against those who do not identify as Hindu.

Absolutely. That is another aspect of my great interest in Vrindavan, the one that appears in the *Bhagavata Mahatmya*, which is an 18th century text, so it's not that old. It talks about the Vrindavan that was built in the 16th and 17th century by the banks of the Yamuna. Now who built that? It was a result of a concordant between Akbar, Raja Man Singh, the Kachwaha Rajput king, and the Gauras. It's intrinsically an inter-religious space, where politics and religion are deeply entwined. The pink sandstone that you see there came because of Akbar, who used it in Fatehpur Sikri. On the outside of the temples, you don't see imagery that appears in other temples, probably as a gesture to Muslim sensibilities. The historical depth of Vrindavan actually offers a vision of 'Hinduism' that doesn't correspond to many modern-day visions of what Hinduism requires.

You first visited Vrindavan in 1974. What took you so long to write this book, which in parts, reads like a love letter to the place?

In 1974, people would see my face and say 'Hare Krishna', but I would say 'Radhe Radhe', which is the traditional greeting. I wanted to keep distance from the English-speaking environment that came with ISKON because I was going to work on the Ras Leelas, the old traditions. At that time, it was wonderful to see how the 16th century aspects of Vrindavan were being kept alive and were bringing people together.

Increasingly, there is no way to escape how the presence of ISKON and the rest of the world in Vrindavan is changing the face of the town. So I finally decided to look at those aspects of the town that I'd stayed away from, for so long. Vrindavan was intended as a 'lila-sthal', a playground, but its rapid degradation is because of our actions as an invasive species — the real estate situation, the polluted water and the population growth.

That idea of play comes alive especially during Holi, doesn't it, when we are treated to pictures of widows playing with colour? But on other days, does Vrindavan have a larger impact on their lives?

It's important to look beyond the yearly attention they receive. Recently, Sulabh Foundation has made money available to the widows. There are ashrams established for widows, or women who have been exiled from their homes, where they can learn skills; places that take care of abandoned children, especially girls. So there is an impetus in Vrindavan to take care of girls and women in a way that society outside doesn't do.

WEEK AHEAD



Musical Homage

DHRUPAD UTSAV is a two-day music festival being held in the memory of dhrupad musicians Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar, Ustad Zia Fariduddin Dagar and Pandit Ramakant Gundecha. The performances include a jugalbandi by the Gundecha Brothers and a recital by Ut Wasifuddin Dagar (pictured). On March 14 and 15 at Triveni Kala Sangam, Tansen Marg, 6 pm-9 pm. Contact: 9811501026.



Show and Tell

IMMERSE IN a walk centered around the open-air art museum in Lodhi Colony, guided by a member of the St+art India Foundation. Get to know the stories behind the murals created by various Indian and international artists and the historical significance of their locations. On March 14, 10 am to 12.30 pm. Meeting point: IHC, Gate 3. Tickets: Rs 700, at insider.in.



Festive Feasting

Chefs on the delicacies they remember most fondly from the Holi celebrations of their childhood

POOJA PILLAI

WHILE THANDAI and gujiyas may be an indispensable part of the feasting associated with Holi across the Gangetic plains in India, the menu of the feast varies from region to region. In Rishikesh Rai's hometown of Durgawati, Bihar, one of the must-have dishes on Holi was the Khade Masale Ka Gosht cooked by his aunt. "This was some 28-29 years ago. The mutton was fresh, the spices were handground and it was all cooked on an open fire. The taste cannot be replicated in a modern kitchen," says Rai, executive chef, Vivanta New Delhi, Dwarka. "Even the thandai was made fresh, with the masalas being ground by a man seated on a stool. He would keep churning out the thandai masala, which would be mixed with milk for us kids, and with bhaang for the adults," he recalls.

Nearly every family ends up forming its own food traditions. When Aditya Jha was growing up, the one dish that invariably formed a part of Holi lunch was the Dahi Chicken cooked by his maternal grandmother. "I can't recollect a single Holi when I didn't eat the dish," he says. "My grandmother would visit us every Holi and the celebration was simply not complete without this dish." That is why, when Jha, who is the head chef at In-Q, The Manor, Delhi, prepared a Holi-special menu for his restaurant this year, he insisted on including the dish. "Of course, it's a little different from how my grandmother used to make it. She would get a desi chicken and bones and all, would braise it in a yogurt-based sauce. There was no need to add stock. I soak chicken breasts in buttermilk to make the meat more tender and then caramelize it. The sauce recipe, however, is the same," he says.

Friends and families would gather to eat the festival delicacies, such as at Ashish Singh's home, where the fruit-based malpua (pictured, top) was a huge hit. "My mom and grandmother would use bananas and suji to make it. There was very little maida. And they would vary it, based on what people wanted — sometimes adding sultanas, sometimes apples," says Singh, corporate chef, Dhansoo Cafe, Delhi. Zohab Qureshi, executive chef, Namak Mandi, Delhi, remembers similar gatherings during Holi at the family home in Lucknow, where his mother and grandmother perfected the art of honey-dipped baked gujiyas. "Being a Muslim family, we don't traditionally celebrate the festival, but it was a time for us to meet all our friends, and everyone would come together at our house and feast on the gujiyas," he says.

HOLI SPECIAL MALPUA

BY ASHISH SINGH, CORPORATE CHEF, DHANSOO CAFE, DELHI

INGREDIENTS

For the batter

Milk: 1 cup
Semolina: ½ cup
Sugar: ½ cup

Banana: 1 piece
Refined flour: ¼ cup
Fennel seeds: 1 gm

For honey syrup
Honey: 200 gm
Water: 100 ml
Cardamom powder: a pinch
Saffron: 0.2 gm
For rabri
Milk: 500 ml
Khoya: 150 gm
Pistachios: 15 gm
Sugar: 75 gm

METHOD: Make the honey syrup by mixing honey with water. Add crushed cardamom powder and saffron strands.

For the rabri, heat milk in a pan till it reduces by half. Simmer for half an hour. Once a thick layer of cream starts to form on top, add khoya, sugar and saffron. Simmer it again for 15 minutes. Let it cool and add pistachios.

Mix flour and semolina in a large bowl, add crushed fennel seeds, sugar, a pinch of salt and mashed banana, and mix well. Add milk, little at a time, and keep whisking to form a smooth, lump-free batter. The batter should be thick, but of pouring consistency. Let it rest for 15 minutes. Heat oil or ghee in a wide pan on medium heat. The malpua doesn't need to be drowned in cooking fat. Ladle some batter into the hot oil. Reduce heat to low-medium, and fry it till it's golden brown. Flip and fry on the other side. Remove malpua from the pan. Dip it in warm honey syrup. Soak each side for 30 seconds. Serve malpua with rabri and garnish with pista flakes.

KHADE MASALE KA GOSHT

BY RISHIKESH RAI, EXECUTIVE CHEF, VIVANTA NEW DELHI



INGREDIENTS

Mutton: 1 kg
Curd: 50 gm
Turmeric powder: 1 tsp
Cumin powder: 1 tsp
Chilli powder: 1.5 tsp
Ginger paste: ½ tbsp
Garlic paste: 1 tbsp
Shahi jeera: ½ tsp
Coriander powder: 1 tsp
Green cardamom & mace powder: ½ tsp
Cinnamon: 1 stick
Allspice (kababchini): ½ tsp
Green cardamom: 4

Black pepper: ½ tsp
Bay leaf: 2
Onion, thinly sliced: 250 gm
Green chillies, julienned: 2

METHOD: Marinate the mutton using all the ingredients listed from second to 10th, and keep aside for one hour. Heat ghee in a thick bottom pot and add the whole spices. Once the whole spices start crackling, add sliced onion and saute till it turns light brown. Add green chillies and cook for few more seconds. Add marinated mutton and cook for five minutes. Seal the handi using dough and cook the mutton on medium heat for 45 minutes. Remove mutton from the fire and leave aside for 5 minutes. Open the lid and add chopped coriander, and close it again. Serve the mutton with phulka or tawa chapati.

DAHI CHICKEN

BY ADITYA JHA, HEAD CHEF, IN-Q, THE MANOR, DELHI



INGREDIENTS

For chicken
Chicken breast: 150 gm
Salt to taste
Buttermilk: 3 gm
Coriander, chopped: 2 gm
Ginger paste: 3 gm
Garlic paste: 5 gm
Cumin powder: a pinch
For yoghurt curry
Mustard oil: 20 ml
Coriander seeds (crushed): 3 gm
Garlic, chopped: 6 gm
Red chillies, whole: 2 pieces
Bay leaf: 1
Chopped ginger: 4 gm
Onion, sliced: 1 large onion
Ghee: 10 gm
Boiled cashew paste: 8 gm
Yoghurt: 120 gm

METHOD: Mix all the ingredients for the chicken and allow the meat to marinate for at least two hours. Heat a nonstick pan, pan sear the breast and cook in a preheated oven at 160C for 20 minutes. For the sauce, heat mustard oil in a pan and add dry spices. Add chopped garlic and onion and saute. Now add ginger, cashew paste and yoghurt together and keep stirring to avoid yoghurt to split. Allow sauce to simmer for 20 minutes, then strain it and reserve. Arrange the breast on a platter, then pour the yoghurt curry, garnish with tossed coriander seeds and chili flakes.

Colours of Kashi

You have to be in Banaras to experience the festival of Holi with all your senses

SANGEETA KHANNA

WESTERLIES IN the North Indian plains are considered the harbinger of spring. This subtle change in the wind direction becomes an emotion for someone whose biological clock is set to seasons and the movements of the sun. Every year when westerlies start and there is a profusion of flowers all over — mango trees blossom and butterflies moult in abundance — I am reminded of the way Pachhua was celebrated back home in Banaras. There is another local name for westerlies — Fagunahta, meaning Faagun winds. Falgun or Fagun is the month of Holi by the Hindu calendar.

In fact spring is celebrated with a string of festivals in Banaras. It starts from Basant Panchami, then comes Shivratri when the Shiva devotees offer scented *gula* to the Shivaling as a ritual. Shivratri is the day when Shiva married Parvati and the city celebrates the communion of Shakti with Shiva. This is the time when the world famous 'Dhrupad mela' is organised to celebrate the season of new colours and fragrances. Raag Khamaj reverberates in the air during this time as music lovers congregate from all over the world and listen to the ragas of the season. The playful Horis waft in the air if you walk along the Ganga ghats. It won't be a surprise if you hear some boatman singing Hori in the most rustic yet soulful way. Hori



and Phagua are the names for the Holi songs sung in semi-classical traditions. You have to be in the old city of Banaras if you want to experience the festival of Holi with all your senses. In fact there is a name for the euphoria induced by the season, Faag, almost synonymous with a drunken state of

mind. There is indeed a real hallucination of bhaang as well. The tradition of bhaang and thandai on Holi is because it was the favourite drink of lord Shiva and is considered *prasad* on the day. Bhaang ke pakode is a Holi speciality in Banaras.

Rang Bhari Ekadashi welcomes the festival in full force when lord Shiva brings his new bride home to Kashi and devotees welcome the happy couple with colours. Holi is a season in Banaras and between Rang Bhari Ekadashi and the day of Holika dahan, there are several celebrations indicating the welcome of spring and ritualistic burning of all the bodily sins. The full moon day after Holika dahan is the day when everyone wears new clothes and there are community feasts and colours.

The colours for Holi, back in the day, were prepared with real flowers and other aromatic substances. In fact people in Banaras offer *gula* and *ittar* together to Shiva during the Shivratri rituals. The season of Holi concludes with a folk festival called Budhva Mangal, where some elderly music

lovers congregate on large houseboats and music performances, poetry recitals and bhaang parties happen with gay abundance.

BHAANG KI PAKODI

INGREDIENTS
Bhaang: 100 gm
Green chillies (minced): 4-5
Besan: 200 gm
Rice flour: 50 gm
Salt: ½ tsp
Turmeric powder: ½ tsp
Mustard oil: 200 ml

METHOD: Rinse the bhaang leaves and chop them fine. Mix with all the other ingredients except the oil and pour 80-100 ml water slowly to make a batter. Heat the oil, drop spoonfuls of the pakodi mix in the hot oil and fry till they become golden brown and crisp. Serve with chaat masala sprinkled on the hot pakodis.

Sangeeta Khanna is a food consultant and writer

ON THE LOOSE



LEHER KALA

The Shape of Us

Despite its ubiquity, cosmetic surgery gets a bad rap

ACTOR SHRUTI HASSAN finally reacted to aggressive trolls who keep making fun of her lip enhancement and nose job on social media. "I'm happy to say this is my life and yes, I've had plastic surgery. Do I promote it? No. Am I against it? No. It's just how I choose to live," wrote Hassan in an Instagram post that got more and more emotional about the relentless scrutiny she has to face everyday. Hassan ended with: "No one, famous or not, is in a position to judge another person. That's just not cool."

One has to wonder if the positives of social media actually outweigh the negatives for celebrities who put themselves out there, when people can be so merciless. Unless one has developed a really thick hide, that kind of daily vitriol has got to rankle, somewhere. And nowhere, are people more vicious than when it comes to pointing out, gleefully, any kind of cosmetic improvement. Hassan doesn't owe anyone any explanations about her choices especially when she works in an industry where, let's face it, a lot depends on how you look. However, in these woke times, pointing out the obvious, that her income correlates to her appearance and a surgery may be a smart career move, is fraught. Not only will there be the barrage of sniggering criticism for committing the great sin of visual modification, there will be tedious and righteous opinions on how sad people's lives are, that their confidence stems from their appearance.

Yes, sometimes beauty is worth paying for. For people in front of the camera who earn millions via movies, shows and endorsements, their face is their fortune, and well worth investing in. However, 50 years after plastic surgery became a medical specialisation and millions of nose jobs later, the idea persists that someone fixing their face is inauthentic and shallow, and undeserving of the success (if and when it follows). For actors, it's not enough that their lives are a cycle of self-deprivation besides the lengths they have to go to, to maintain a certain aesthetic. They're now also expected to fight the good fight against the structures that demand gorgeousness.

Actually, there is much to celebrate in the fact that one need no longer have won the genetic lottery like Aishwarya Rai to compete in show business. Thanks to the miracles of science, an ideal can be bought, which, in fact, brings in a certain democratisation to the profession.

Since I'm at the age when many of my contemporaries have begun experimenting with youth rejuvenation procedures, speculation on who's gone under the scalpel and how good or bad the job is, has become an evening's worth of whispered conversation (aka gossip). It's not just the likes of Hassan who have to deal with trolls, anyone who's opted for a middle-aged re-moulding has to man up for this unwelcome attention. Luckily, it's only those in the limelight who are accosted with online posts which so meanly juxtapose before and after images, with randoms commenting on the tiniest change in salacious detail.

The best way to deal with this, celebrity or not, is to own it. If every one with dermal fillers and botox would proudly announce whatever methods they used to improve their flaws, and post before-after pictures themselves, the unsolicited transparency would shut everyone up. Currently, we live in a world where the body positivity movement encourages us to respect all kinds of figures — but someone taking a far tougher path, making all kinds of sacrifices to look good must constantly be on the defensive. Vanity, all said and done, shouldn't be looked down on, as some kind of crime.

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For people in front of the camera who earn millions via movies, shows and endorsements, their face is their fortune, and well worth investing in

This is a time to introspect. Failure teaches you a lot more than success. The team needs to be left alone and think of how we can be better in the next few years,

SMRITI MANDHANA

Beth, Midge and the greatest cricketing night of their lives

SRIRAM VEERA
MARCH 8

BETH MOONEY is eight and loves going on biking on the esplanade with her father and walk her dog, Jasper. She also liked playing cricket with her brothers in the backyard. One day, her brothers' team was a boy short and her dad piped up, "why don't you have a go?" She ran from fine-leg to fine-leg that day, "the fielding spot for the worst player in the team", but soon caught the imagination of the team.

From 11 to 18, she played for Hervey Bay's boys' Cavaliers before she joined for Queensland Fire while pursuing her teaching degree, which she would take a big call to drop out to hang on to her cricket dream. Alyssa Healy was a teenager when she joined Dr Barkers College and said she would love to play the combined team for boys and girls. There was no precedent but the men in charge Thomlinson and Andrew Payne felt why not.

The boys, in particular the bowlers, had a doubt: should they bowl as fast as they usually do or send it slower? As fast as you can, was the answer from the coaches and Perry soon made those doubts redundant. Further proof came in their first game against Trinity College when a left-handed boy sent a bouncer first-up and in Thomlinson's telling, "She just side-stepped and hooked it for a four". Now, even the oppositions had no doubt left.

Healy likes to belt the ball freely; Mooney likes to punctuate her deft glides with perfectly-placed inside-out drives over covers. Healy keeps, Mooney wants to keep for the national team; she does for her other first-class teams. Midge, as Healy is called by her friends, is more gregarious, comfortable in her skin, possesses a natural ease about her, and is always playing pranks on her team-mates. Mooney is more reserved though blunt who speaks her mind.

Three years back, when Healy was on top of her game and known worldwide, Mooney was in the middle of a semi-crisis. Fiercely ambitious, she felt her game would improve if she got to play county cricket in England.

But when she approached Australia's head coach Matthew Mott, she was shown the mirror: "Until you get to the minimum level where we think your lack of fitness isn't compromising your skills, you have to stay back."

An unhappy Mooney was fired up with a desire to prove people wrong – and interestingly, prove herself wrong. Over the years, she had internalised the mansplaining around her that she can't be really fit, she can't run as fast as others. Her response to Mott's frank words was stunning. She rewound to her childhood days at the coastal town of Hervey Bay, bought a road bike and cycled 50 km every day.

"I wanted to prove myself wrong, instead of just accepting, you're never going to be this; you are never going to be that," she told *Cricket.com.au*. The transformation was stun-

HUNTING IN PAIRS

3 Alyssa Healy and Beth Mooney have become just the third opening pair to score 50 runs in an innings of Women's T20 World Cup final, joining Hayley Matthews and Stafanie Taylor from 2016 and Healy and Meg Lanning in 2012.

75 Alyssa Healy's 39-ball 75 is the highest individual score in a World T20 final bettering Hayley Matthews' 66 in 2016.

ning. She used to run two-km in 10 minutes; she is now the fourth-fastest in the national team. Improved fitness and that mindset led to greater and consistent performances for the last three years. The desire isn't new. Six years ago, she had taken a decision to quit teaching degree as she felt it would end up hurting her cricket.

"I didn't want to be 30, and have regrets about what could have been had I tried." She plunged herself into the professional world of cricket and once she amped her fitness, she has been on a ride of her life. The Australian media have mentioned a recent "family crisis" without divulging any details and she has talked about

how the T20 World Cup would allow her to get away from an over-worrying "brain".

Healy's journey has been well documented. A niece of Ian Healy, former wicket-keeper for Australia, she jostled with Mitchell Starc, her future husband, for wicket-keeping duties from the age of 10-14. Both wanted to be the keeper in the combined team and ended up sharing the gloves until Starc moved away to become a fast bowler. "Growing up, I was one-of-a-kind, the only girl in my team. I thought that was normal, just one of the boys, and I was definitely a tomboy, and still am," Healy would say later.

As a kid, she would go to watch her uncle Ian play for Australia and not get why he wasn't running to shake her hands during training. Healy, however, had entered the World Cup with some of her worst form leading up to it. Just 15 runs in five innings in a tri-series involving England and India. Her coach Mott and the captain Meg Lanning weren't fussing too much.

"The swing is back in nets, she's being cheeky as ever and she is couple of shots away from being back in form," Lanning would say at the start of the tournament. They were right; only nervous ones were the opposition bowlers.

When she isn't playing, Mooney loves walking and spending phone-free time with her dog Ruby and is a coffee aficionado, hunting down cafes wherever she goes. Perhaps, in the years to come, Beth and Midge would sit in a café somewhere, and talk about the greatest cricketing night of their lives.



Alyssa Healy and Beth Mooney were involved in a 115-run opening stand against India on Sunday. This was their second century partnership in this tournament.

Blizzard of Oz

Australia bag record fifth ICC Women's T20 World Cup title, trouncing India with their athleticism and big-hitting prowess

TUSHAR BHADURI
MARCH 8

WITH AN attendance of 86,175 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, it was billed as the biggest women's cricket match ever, and it delivered in every respect other than the contest on the field. India were bowled out for 99 in 19.1 overs but, truth be told, two-thirds of those runs came when the destination of the trophy was all but decided. It held an eerie similarity to another famous Australia vs India final. The 2003 men's 50-over final pitted a team with proven pedigree against a team in red hot form.

The early exchanges showed that the Aussies were up for it while the Indians suffered from stage-fright – poor bowling and dropped catches. Then while chasing a huge target, the writing was on the wall with all the usual suspects dismissed inside the first few overs.

The Australian women's team showed that it has some of the characteristics historically displayed by their male counterparts, especially in rising to the big occasion. The 85-run win for the hosts brought them their fifth world title in this format and was a measure of the gap between the two teams on the day.

Mitchell Starc may have prompted a few raised eyebrows when he left his team in South Africa to cheer for the women's team in the ICC Women's T20 final, especially his wife Alyssa Healy.

But the latter and her opening partner Beth Mooney made his decision worthwhile with an assault of such belligerence that it reminded some of Adam Gilchrist and Ricky Ponting in the 2003 final. Some of Healy's five sixes – one went 83 metres, another 75 metres – would have cleared the rope on any cricket ground in the world and were an argument for not bringing the boundaries in for women's matches.

The Powerplay went for 49 runs as the butter-fingered Indians gave both openers second chances. The eighth over, bowled by Rajeshwari Gayakwad went for 16 runs, while Shikha Pandey was taken for 23 in the 11th over when it looked like a score of 200 was on the cards.

After Healy departed, it was Mooney who took up the mantle and though the scoring rate came down ever so slightly, it was more than what the Indians, more used to 130-150 range matches on sluggish pitches, were used to getting in big games.

The Indian bowlers, all but one of them spinners, played into the hands of Healy and Mooney by bowling all over the place. They had been successful in the group stage by bowling stump to stump, taking the pace off the ball and giving it plenty of air. But in the final, they were prone to push the ball through which prevented them from extracting any purchase from the surface.

Quick learners

The Aussies also showed they were quick learners and handled leg-spinner Poonam Yadav much better, camping on the back-foot most of the time, and not rushing at her like they did in the tournament opener.

It was, admittedly, a much better wicket to bat on and right down the Aussies' alley. Also dropped catches, one in the first over itself which went for 14 runs, and fielding lapses did India no favours.

Meg Lanning's team also showed their class in the way they set about defending their score of 184. Shafali Verma had announced her arrival on the big stage with a straight six off Megan Schutt.

She seemed to have the wood on the veteran Aussie, who had promised before the final that she had something up her sleeve against the teenager from Rohtak. She delivered, forcing Shafali to nick behind in the first over itself.



A jubilant Australians after winning the Women's T20 World Cup title in Melbourne. They have won five of the seven editions that have been played so far. ICC

I hope there's girls in this team that are going to experience that for a long period of time, but for me I never thought we'd get the opportunity to do something as cool as what we did today and play in front of almost 90,000 people at the MCG in a World Cup final. It's a dream come true and for me I enjoyed every single minute, I don't think you saw me without a smile on my face the whole time."

ALYSSA HEALY,
AUSTRALIA WICKET-KEEPER

The others big guns in the Indian batting – skipper Harmanpreet Kaur, Smriti Mandhana, Jemima Rodrigues and Veda Krishnamurthy – weren't having a prolific tournament and it didn't change in the final while chasing a stiff target. All of them succumbed while trying to clear the field. Also, Taniya Bhatia had to retire hurt, paving the way for the introduction of Richa Ghosh as a concussion substitute, when she was hit on the helmet while going for a sweep off Jess Jonassen in the second over.

India had based their run to the title clash on the strength of their bowling attack, especially the spinners. But after Shafali used to give the team rousing starts in every match, the other batters struggled to capitalise on her good work. The likes of Harmanpreet and Mandhana were expected to step up on the big day, but were found wanting. In contrast, the big guns for the hosts revelled in the spotlight, with their collective experience of big games a telling factor.

Australia again showed that they are the team to beat in the women's game but India will have the satisfaction that they are now firmly among the top teams in the world, though taking the final step towards silverware will take a bit more time.

Harmanpreet stands by misfiring troops

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MELBOURNE, MARCH 8

MEMBERS OF the gutted Indian women's team, led by captain Harmanpreet Kaur, were trudging towards the dressing room moments after their part in the presentation ceremony when coach WV Raman called them back and made them stand and applaud their opponents. This was not a case of Raman, a hard taskmaster, giving his team a lesson on sporting spirit. One could forgive Harmanpreet and her troops because more than anything else, it was the magnitude of the soul-crushing loss that had left them deflated. Playing the Women's T20 World Cup final in front of more than 86,000 spectators at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, India were completely outclassed in all facets of the game to go down by 85 runs.

At the end of the summit clash, the Australians were in a huddle, cock-a-hoop and chuckling away in delight. Not far away stood the Indians with glum and desolate faces that did little to mask their disappointment. Amidst this gloom, Harmanpreet – the most experienced player in the Indian team – tried her best to quell the negativity amongst her team-mates and was also seen in an animated discussion with disconsolate 16-year-old opener Shafali Verma.

However, Harmanpreet would try to forget what happened on her 31st birthday. From the moment she lost the toss, nothing has gone her way. The Indian captain was expected to bail her team out of a tough chase, when she walked out to bat with the score reading 8/2. But the relentless pressure mounted by the Australians resulted in another low score – four runs off seven deliveries – as the cornerstone of Indian batting finished the tournament with 30 runs from five innings.



Harmanpreet Kaur has had a torrid run in this tournament, registering 30 runs from five innings. PTI

Smriti Mandhana and Shafali may have risen through the ranks in recent times, but whenever Harmanpreet strikes it big as a batter, the confidence resonates in her captaincy as well as her team-mates. On Sunday, there wasn't anything remotely gratifying about India's performances. Nevertheless, Harmanpreet came out in support of her team-mates.

Shafali's blazing starts had often given India the desired impetus during the league matches. On Sunday, in the biggest match of her fledgling career so far, the teenager couldn't get her act together.

"She is only 16, and playing in her first

World Cup. She did really well and performed for us in the league matches. For a 16-year-old kid, it's difficult to keep thinking positively and stay in the game... it's a learning lesson for her but it could happen to anyone. We can't blame her because there were others also in her position," the skipper reasoned.

Harmanpreet admitted that dropped catches and below-par fielding was the overwhelming factor instrumental in Australia's stunning dominance. "Today, it was unfortunate that we dropped all those catches, because of which we were unable to create those chances. It's a lesson for all of us as we have to be at 100 per cent when we're fielding because that's the most important part of cricket," she dwelled.

These errors notwithstanding, Harmanpreet reckoned there's enough potential in this squad and insisted that reaching the final will motivate girls in India to take up cricket as a profession. She also cited the result of the previous World T20 in the Caribbean, where India couldn't progress beyond the semifinals, to drive home the point about her team's steady progress.

"If we talk about the last World T20, we got to the semis, and this time we made it to the final. I think this team is on the right path. Every year we are showing improvement. We just need to think of how we play with focus during those big games," she noted.

Going forward, Harmanpreet conceded that the IPL-style Women's Challenger tournament was the way forward because it helped in spotting talent. It was during this tournament last year that Shafali came to the limelight and her performances catapulted her to the national team. "This year, we are hoping for some more games in the Women's Challenger as this tournament has helped us identify two good players, hopefully in the upcoming tournaments we can get some more," Harmanpreet concluded.

SCORECARD >>

Australia vs India

Final | Melbourne | Toss: Australia

AUSTRALIA 184/4 IN 20 OVS

A Healy c Krishnamurthy b Yadav 75 (39b, 7x4, 5x6)
B Mooney not out 78 (54b, 10x4)
M Lanning c Pandey b Sharma 16 (15b, 2x4)
A Gardner st Bhatia b Sharma 2 (3b)
R Haynes b Poonam Yadav 4 (5b)
N Carey not out 5 (5b, 1x4)

■ Extras: (b 1, nb 1, w 2) 4
■ Fall of wickets: 1-115 (Alyssa Healy, 11.4 ov), 2-154 (Meg Lanning, 16.2 ov), 3-156 (Ashleigh Gardner, 16.5 ov), 4-176 (Rachael Haynes, 18.5 ov)

■ Bowling:
D Sharma 4-0-38-2
S Pandey 4-0-52-0
R Gayakwad 4-0-29-0
Poonam Yadav 4-0-30-1
R Yadav 4-0-34-1

INDIA 99 ALL OUT IN 19.1 OVS
Shafali Verma c Healy b Schutt 2 (3b)
S Mandhana c Carey b Molineux 11 (8b, 2x4)
T Bhatia retired hurt 2 (4b)
J Rodrigues c Carey b Jonassen 0 (2b)
H Kaur c Gardner b Jonassen 4 (7b, 1x4)
D Sharma c Mooney b Carey 33 (35b, 2x4)
V Krishnamurthy c Jonassen b Kimmince 19 (24b, 1x4)

R Ghosh c Carey b Schutt 18 (18b, 2x4)
S Pandey c Mooney b Schutt 2 (4b)
R Yadav c Mooney b Jonassen 1 (2b)
Poonam Yadav c Gardner b Schutt 1 (5b)
R Gayakwad not out 1 (3b)

■ Extras: (w 5) 5
■ Fall of wickets: 1-2 (Shafali Verma, 0.3 ov), 1-5* (Taniya Bhatia, retired not out), 2-8 (Jemimah Rodrigues, 1.6 ov), 3-18 (Smriti Mandhana, 3.1 ov), 4-30 (Harmanpreet Kaur, 5.4 ov), 5-58 (Veda Krishnamurthy, 11.3 ov), 6-88 (Deepti Sharma, 16.1 ov), 7-92 (Shikha Pandey, 17.1 ov), 8-96 (Richa Ghosh, 17.3 ov), 9-97 (Radha Yadav, 18.1 ov), 10-99 (Poonam Yadav, 19.1 ov)

■ Bowling:
M Schutt 3.1-0-18-4
J Jonassen 4-0-20-3
S Molineux 4-0-21-1
D Kimmince 4-0-17-1
N Carey 4-0-23-1

■ Australia won by 85 runs



Shafali Verma had a rare failure. AP

Ankita helps India bag historic Fed Cup play-offs berth

Chance of a lifetime

Saurashtra, with home advantage, and Bengal know they may not get a better shot at Ranji Trophy glory

Fit-again Hardik, Dhawan recalled for SA ODI series

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DUBAI, MARCH 8

THE INDIAN Fed cup team created history by progressing to the play-offs for the first time ever with Ankit Raina leading the side to a 2-1 win over Indonesia, here.

Ankita on Saturday night pulled off a crucial singles win against talented Aldila Sutjiadi to lock the tie 1-1 after Rutuja Bhosale suffered a crushing defeat against an unranked Priska Madelyn Nugroho.

Up against the 16-year-old Indonesian, who is ranked 15th on the ITF junior circuit, Rutuja lost 3-6 6-0 3-6 in one hour and 43 minutes in the opening singles.

Ankita, who lost her previous two singles, demolished the challenge of Sutjiadi 6-3 6-3 in the second rubber. She then combined with seasoned Sania Mirza to beat Sutziyadi and Nugroho 7-6(4) 6-0 to seal India's place in the play-offs where they will take on either Latvia or the Netherlands in April.

They overcame a sluggish start as they were trailing 1-4 but regrouped to dominate the decisive set.

India finished second in the six-team Group with four wins in a row after losing the opening tie to China, who remained unbeaten in the tournament.

Since earning their place back in Asia/Oceania Group 1 in 2016, India has remained in the regional group.

With the rise of Ankita, things began to improve. Rutuja also played a key role as she provided winning starts in a few ties, sharing the burden with Ankita.

Sania's return to Fed Cup after four years also helped as her inspirational presence and guidance helped the side immensely.

India's non-playing captain Vishal Uppal is delighted with the result.

"It's a historic moment and to be part of it feels surreal. I am proud of each and every member of our team -- the players, physio, coach, manager. We all came together and worked towards a common goal," Uppal told PTI. "The key was to do the fundamentals well and keep it simple on court. As a team everyone stepped up one day or the other which is very important. I hope this win will give a big boost to women's tennis in India."

DEVENDRA PANDEY
RAJKOT, MARCH 8

BENGAL COACH Arun Lal could not control himself when shutterbugs frequently trespassed the practice area at the Rajkot stadium. Media from 18 organisations have come from West Bengal, apart from other national and local media, and it was a bit of a scam out there.

"We have a Ranji final tomorrow. I request you to please leave this place," Lal said out loud, calling for administrators to prevent players being bothered. The area was soon cordoned off. Even as both camps talk about "keeping it simple", they know that this is as great an opportunity as any to win the premier domestic competition of the country.

Lal calls the game bigger than a Test match. He says this is their best chance, who knows when their time will come next. Saurashtra will hope to be fourth time lucky, their previous three final experiences in the last few years were at away venues. Four finals in eight years is a big achievement but they are at a point now when that feeling seems like only a consolation.

They now want to get their hands around that old trophy that weighs a good 15 kilograms. Saurashtra have Cheteshwar Pujara, Bengal possess Wriddhiman Saha and Manoj Tiwary, who would be playing his 100th Ranji Trophy game.

The last time Bengal was in a final was 13 years ago. The last time they lifted the trophy was in the early 1990s; their current coach Lal was then the captain. In some ways, Lal has almost been a piper for Bengal this season.

Who doesn't like a heartwarming story, especially when he is considered one of the nicest men in Indian cricket? He beat cancer a few years back and put his hand up to lift Bengal cricket, took some tough and considerate calls to get the team up and into the final.

Experience galore

Even Saurashtra's coach is an old India hand; at 68, Karsan Ghavri is four years older than Lal. A passionate cricketer and coach, Kadubhai, as he is called, has ensured his life continued to revolve around cricket even after retirement. He grew up in Rajkot and soon found that he was too fast for the city and shifted his cricketing base to Mumbai and punctuated his medium pace with deceptively-quick bouncers for India.

Some Indians would remember seeing Lal walking in slow motion out of a Kolkata metro train in the video for the national integration song, mile sur mera tumhara, in the 1980s. Ghavri's India career was a more accomplished one but over the years, both have continued their love affair with the game.

Playing in Rajkot will be a big deal for Saurashtra. Their previous three finals away from home were one-sided affairs. In 2012, they lost to a star-studded Mumbai team by an innings and 125 runs.

In a neutral venue final in Pune in 2016, Saurashtra lost again to Mumbai by an innings and 21 runs.



India internationals Wriddhiman Saha (left), who will represent Bengal, and Saurashtra's Cheteshwar Pujara during a training session in Rajkot on Sunday.

Last year, they went down to Vidarbha in Nagpur by 78 runs. Pujara played in the last two finals but had minimum impact. But at home, Saurashtra is certainly a tough team to handle. It would also be a sweet feeling for him to turn up for the final with Ghavri as coach as when he was a boy, it was the latter's validation of his talent - "Chhokra upar mehnat karva jeev chhe (the kid is worth investing your time on) that had driven his passionate father Arvind.

It's just not the old faces or established Indian stars that this final is about. Jaydev Unadkat is Saurashtra's captain who has taken 65 wickets to lead from the front.

He learnt his cricket at the famous Duleep school of cricket started in 1945 in Porbandar and as an upcoming bowler, his greatest worry, as recalled by his coach Rambhai Odedera once, was whether he would have to start having non-vegetarian food to sustain as a pacer. When he was se-

Whatever final matches we have played were played away from home. We have young players, playing good cricket and playing at home will be an advantage for us. I have an idea of conditions here, everyone here knows how the pitch behaves and definitely it will be home advantage for us."

CHETESHWAR PUJARA

lected for the Indian Premier League, Odedera found a few fans in Porbandar losing their head in pride and told Unadkat that IPL is good but the aim should be to play for India.

"I told him in 1932, Maharaja Natwarsinghi of Porbandar, who eventually started the Duleep School of cricket, was the original captain for India's first tour but was replaced in the end by CK Nayudu. You have this great chance to play for India, someone from Porbandar, imagine." He has done that; can he now become the first captain of Saurashtra to win the Ranji trophy? For that, he would need more than a little help from Pujara. The India batsman was keeping an eye on Saurashtra's Ranji progress and in touch with Unadkat even while involved in a tough Test series in New Zealand. Pujara says home advantage will definitely come into play.

"Whatever final matches we have played were played away from home. We have young players, playing good cricket and playing at home will be an advantage for us. I have an idea of conditions here, everyone here knows how the pitch behaves and definitely it will be home advantage for us," Pujara told The Indian Express.

Two days before the game, the team watched the movie 'Point Break' to gain some motivation from the adventure drama. Unadkat wants everyone to be in their comfort zone and away from pressure.

Photo session

Bengal had a light net session and kept the photographers from Bengal newspapers busy. Tiwary and Saha were requested for a combined photo; they obliged. To make it seem 'candid', a photographer asked them to act as if they are chatting with each other; they oblige again. At some point, Tiwary says that he has got his son Yuvaan's name on the back of his bat, and flips it to show it to Saha.

Once he finished training, Saha said he had never been part of a Ranji final, something he had wanted for years. "The feel and experience of a Ranji Trophy final is something different," he said, before ducking questions on being left out of both Tests in New Zealand. Tiwary has been in two Ranji finals, but victory eluded him. "Twice we came close but couldn't finish off the game. We have a good chance here as our team has been playing good cricket for the last two months. Touch wood, I have got good stats at this venue, had hit a double hundred too," he said.

TV: Star Sports 2, from 9:20 am.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AHMEDABAD, MARCH 8

BRUISED AND battered in New Zealand, India's ODI squad on Sunday got a major boost as a fit-again Hardik Pandya returned for the three-match series against South Africa, having successfully recuperated from a back surgery.

Along with Pandya, opener Shikhar Dhawan and seamer Bhuvneshwar Kumar will also add depth to the 15-member squad, selected under the chairmanship of Sunil Joshi.

However, it could be curtains for veteran Kedar Jadhav as Shubman Gill's return in the white-ball fold is a good enough indicator.

Vice-captain Rohit Sharma is yet to fully recuperate from his calf muscle injury and is expected to return to action during the Indian Premier League later this month. Thus, Prithvi Shaw retained his place in the ODI squad, while Mayank Agarwal, after a dismal New Zealand tour, had to make way for Dhawan.

The Mumbai duo of Shardul Thakur and Shivam Dube paid for their shoddy showing in New Zealand as Pandya and Bhuvneshwar rightfully got their places back. Dhawan had dislocated his shoulder during the final ODI against Australia at home and missed the New Zealand series. Bhuvneshwar, on the other hand, had a sports hernia surgery but has successfully completed his rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy. But the biggest news was Hardik's comeback, which, though, was on predictable lines.

Pandya's last ODI was against New Zealand in the World Cup semi-final in Manchester and the last international game was a T20 against the Proteas in Bengaluru in September.

His absence affected the balance of the ODI side as Dube's underwhelming show in the 14 chances he got showed that he is still not cut out for international cricket. Pandya's performances at the DY Patil Corporate Cup was not about the 150 odd he scored or the wickets he took but was about how fit he looked out there in the middle.

At the same time, the soon-to-be-35 Jadhav, who has literally stopped bowling in ODIs and is also not doing well batting at the No 6 slot, has been finally dropped from the side. With the next 50-over World Cup in 2023 when Jadhav will be 38, it is highly unlikely that he will add to his 73 ODIs.

Shardul, who did improve as a batsman, leaked runs during the T20s as well as ODIs. Bhuvneshwar's experience as a swing and seam bowler was sorely missed in New Zealand conditions. The three ODIs will be played in Dharamsala (March 12), Lucknow (March 15) and Kolkata (March 18).

INDIA'S ODI SQUAD: Shikhar Dhawan, Prithvi Shaw, Virat Kohli (C), KL Rahul, Manish Pandey, Shreyas Iyer, Rishabh Pant, Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Yuzvendra Chahal, Jasprit Bumrah, Naveed Saini, Kuldeep Yadav, Shubman Gill.

BOXING: ROAD TO TOKYO 2020

Pooja to carry Hawa Singh's legacy into Olympics

After earning Tokyo spot, Vikas hopes to get third time lucky

GAURAV BHATT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

"I'LL ADMIT, I was very nervous and under pressure today. For one, I hadn't seen my opponent box before," Pooja Rani says after the dominating unanimous win over Thailand's Pornnipa Chutee on Sunday. "But more than that, I realised that it was this one bout between me and the Olympics. *Agar ab bhi nahai hua, to mujhe stop kar dena chahiye*. I shouldn't be boxing."

She laughs it off, but Pooja's words had put in context the stakes in her 75kg bout. Eight years ago this month, she fetched a silver at the Asian championships but admits she wasn't ready for the Olympics. In March 2016, she lost in the first round of the qualifiers but believes a federation-less Indian contingent was handed a raw deal by judges - "Can you believe that I was given a warning for landing a clean uppercut?"

The ongoing Asian qualifiers in Amman, Jordan, were realistically the last chance. Win the bout and go to the Olympics. Lose, and end an unsung 12-year career.

Stakes were further raised given Pooja's status as the de facto torchbearer of two-time Asian Games gold medallist Hawa Singh's legacy.

The 28-year-old trained at the Hawa Singh Boxing academy in Bhiwani, under the late Arjuna and Dronacharya awardee's son Sanjay Kumar, who wants Pooja to succeed more than his own daughter Nupur.

And in a twist worthy of a blockbuster, it was at the trials in December that Nupur and Pooja faced off for a spot in the qualifiers. When quizzed about her feelings on the eve of the fight, a fidgety Nupur couldn't shake off the exasperated grin.

"She's my elder sister. I am going to feel really weird fighting her for a berth. And I know my father would also be supporting Pooja di."



Coach Sanjay Kumar, late Dronacharya awardee Hawa Singh's son, wants her ward Pooja Rani to succeed more than his own daughter Nupur.

My parents were against me taking up boxing. They were worried, *ladki hai, chat vot lag jaayegi. Aur chat lagti bhi thi. When there were bruises or marks, I would stay at Rani ma'am's place. She would call my parents up and say, 'My husband is out of town. Please let Pooja stay with me for a couple of days'. She would only send me back once my face had cleared up. I have been calling her 'Ma' since those days.*

POOJA RANI, ON COACH SANJAY KUMAR AND WIFE MUKESH RANI'S ROLE IN HER SUCCESS

of the bout. I was asking around, 'please sir, do something that the bout doesn't take place. I get a direct selection'. I was told that the federation would oppose something like that, so I had to fight Nupur. I couldn't even celebrate

my win because I was feeling so sad for Nupur." Pooja's career began in 2009. "Back then, I didn't know Hawa Singh. For me, Sanjay sir was the superstar boxing coach."

It was Sanjay's wife Mukesh Rani, a lecturer at Pooja's college, who spotted her. She was already 5'8", even though she hadn't filled out her frame. Rani, a former national-level basketball player, convinced Sanjay to train her, who in turn had to convince Pooja's father, sub-inspector Rajbir Singh.

"My parents were against me taking up boxing. They were worried, *ladki hai, chat vot lag jaayegi*," says Pooja. "Aur chat lagti bhi thi. When there were bruises or marks, I would stay at Rani ma'am's place. She would call my parents up and say, 'My husband is out of town. Please let Pooja stay with me for a couple of days'. She would only send me back once my face had cleared up. I have been calling her 'Ma' since those days."

There have been bruises aplenty for Pooja, who admits she was no prodigy. It was also a

rough initiation, as other trainees would bully the newbie in the ring.

"Boys, girls... *sabse pitayi hi ho rahi thi meri*. I ran away a couple of times, but one time Sanjay sir called me back and said: 'Train diligently for a month, and if you still get beaten up, then you can quit.' After a month, I was beating up all of them."

Sanjay himself would pull a 'Haaikarak Baapu' once in a while.

"This one time, I was very angry. Pooja ran away, but I knew where she was headed. I went straight to my home, and she was hiding behind my wife," Sanjay laughs. "My wife would often be caught in the crossfire but that's the discipline that helped shape her into an Olympic medal hopeful."

Her ill-fortune and the resulting start-stop career has had Pooja contemplating retirement before. In 2016, a Diwali mishap left her right hand severely burned, keeping her out of action for seven months. After coming back, in an attempt to guard her hand, she injured her left shoulder. Then the wrist.

Then came the gold medal at last year's Asian Championships, her biggest triumph thus far, where she beat the reigning world champion Wang Lina of China to win the 81kg gold, despite being 6-7kgs lighter for the division.

"I didn't want to compete in 75kg because it was Nupur's category. Then (foreign coach) Raffaele Bergamasco explained to me, 'listen, India needs a middleweight and it is you. It's what's best for everybody'. Normally, a boxer has to fill an application for a weight change but Raffaele himself put my name in 75kg."

For now, she has repaid the faith of Bergamasco and, more importantly, that of the Hawa Singh clan.

"We were all watching the bout on a big screen today," says Sanjay. "My wife and Nupur were alongside me. I looked at my daughter and told her: 'Tu ye waali bout nahii nikal paati.'"

Five book berth

PTI adds: Along with Vikas Krishan (69kg) and Pooja Rani (75kg), Satish Kumar (+91kg), Lovlina Borgohain (69kg) and Ashish Kumar (75kg) secured Tokyo Olympic berths on Sunday by advancing to the semifinals of the Asian Qualifiers.

NITIN SHARMA

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 8

VIKAS KRISHAN returned empty-handed from the last two Olympics, and on Sunday became only the second Indian boxer after Vijender Singh to book his place for a third Games. Krishan sealed the quota with a unanimous 5:0 decision over world number six and third seed Sewonrets Okazawa of Japan in the quarterfinals of the 69 Kg category at the Asia-Oceania Olympic qualifier in Amman, Jordan.

"Earning the quota is the first step in achieving the big goal of winning an Olympic medal," he said.

Okazawa unsettled Krishan initially with his long reach before the Indian responded with some clean punches to take the opening round in a split 3:2 verdict. In the second, Krishan's accuracy with his left jabs and body punches resulted in a 5:0 score.

Thereafter, Krishan, competing in only his second international tournament after his return to the amateur circuit, kept the attacking Japanese at bay and landed some clean punches in between to score a 30:27, 29:28, 29:28, 30:27, 30:27 victory. "My strategy has been to tire the opponent initially but it did not happen in the first round as Okazawa was taking advantage of his long reach. So my aim was to hit single punches and then step back. Once I unsettled him, it was easier for me in the second round to tire him and surprise him with my jab. Facing such a quality opponent means that one can't relax in the final round and I knew that my defence had to be up to the mark to deny him scoring chances," Krishan said.

Return to the amateur fold

Krishan, who had been competing in the 75 Kg category since 2014, made the shift to professional ranks in 2018 signing with Top Rank in USA. The Haryana boxer won his two bouts in America but an urge to appear in his third Olympics brought him back into the amateur fold.

Prior to the national camp, Krishan trained



under coach Ronald Simms and he recalled the initial change.

"In professional boxing, the focus is more on high-impact blows to score knockout wins or lasting 10-12 rounds while in amateur; it's about impressing the judges. When I shifted to professional boxing, I made a lot of adjustments including my guard position. Even though I had competed at amateur level for more than 12 years, I had to learn things like feet movement and improving my pace on my return, apart from re-learning my guard position. Coach Ronald Simms made me try things like step-back and head slip action from making me run 15 Kms instead of 5 Kms earlier. I also worked on my jab, for which a lot of Santiago Nieva too worked at the national camp."

In the trials for the Asia-Oceania qualifiers, Yadav edged out Duryodhan Negi in 69 Kg, a category where he competed from 2011 to 2015 and won a bronze medal at the 2011 World Championships. Early in his career, Krishan had shifted to 69 Kg after struggling to maintain weight in 64 Kg. High performance Director Santaigo Nieva believes Krishan's strength lies in the 69 Kg category. The Swede didn't get much time to train Yadav after joining post 2016 Olympics but the last six months has seen Nieva making some changes in Yadav's approach.

"When he joined us in the national camp last year, Vikas was flat-footed and stationary in the ring. So we had to work on improving his feet movement and worked to make him throw more punches as compared to middleweight (category). His ability to throw power punches in middle-weight helps him in welter-weight. His blocking is good but he needs to counter immediately, which can help him win a medal in Tokyo. He has faced a lot of opponents in his career and his experience will come handy in Tokyo," says Nieva.

As for Krishan, he wants to win a medal in Tokyo for his three kids. "My elder son was an infant when I lost in London and the other two have not watched me competing. I want to win a medal with them watching and that has kept me going."

INTERVIEW: PRAFUL PATEL

“What is ‘sold Indian football’? Does anybody have a solution to undo what has been done in the past?”

MIHIR VASAVDA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

IN THE last decade or so, Indian football has swung from one extreme to another. The team sunk to its lowest-ever world ranking (175, March 2015) before breaking into the top 100; the leagues (I-League and ISL) reaching new corners of the country, like Kashmir and Aizawl, and getting rejuvenated in old, Kerala and Chennai for instance, but at the same time, struggling in traditional pockets; and financially, the All India Football Federation has gone from being cash-strapped to being in a relatively better situation.

During this period, Praful Patel has been at the helm of the All India Football Federation (AIFF). In an interview with *The Indian Express*, the veteran politician talks about heading the federation during this turbulent period, why optics are important for him as well as the governing body and the reason he is optimistic about a new-look national team in the next five years.

Excerpts:

During your tenure, India has qualified for the Asian Cup twice, broke into the top-100 of FIFA rankings, hosted the under-17 World Cup, and will be in the AFC Champions League next year. How do you assess this period?

Earlier, Indian football was only there (gestures at the top) and nothing below. Everything was an individual effort. You had Sunil Chhetri, Bhaichung Bhutia, the stars. And then you have all these national team players who spurted from here and there. There was no proper ecosystem. We have not reached where we wanted to, and that'll probably be my only little regret, but judge us from what we have managed. Earlier, there was nothing below. Now we are building from the bottom to the top.

It can be argued that though football's popularity has exploded, the quality of the domestic game has not improved enough.

People watch these EPL, La Liga games and compare that with India. That's an unfair comparison. When you watch Messi or a Ronaldo playing, and say I-League or ISL isn't the same level of fun, it's not fair. How can you suddenly reach that level?

But is it sudden? EPL on TV has been there for decades, and so has the decline of Indian football...

Yes, but I can't be answering for that. In between, Indian football had collapsed. There was no money, the federation couldn't make ends meet. Today at least, the federation has given a roadmap. People criticise ISL but the league brought in big corporates who invested money, television coverage is better than before, clubs are bringing more people to the stadium. It's moving in the right direction. Ultimately, the quality of players will also improve.

Critics, however, say that for the sponsorship money you brought in, you 'sold Indian football'.

To whom? Who is saying this? It's a very myopic approach to a large problem. When you look at the larger picture, has Indian football grown or shrunk? In the larger picture, is Indian football headed in the right direction or not? And what is this 'sold Indian football'? Does anybody have a solution to undo what has been done in the past? Why should we sell Indian football? I had nothing to do with Indian football. I was only a vice-president and happy to do my thing in Maharashtra. It's only when Mr. (former AIFF president Priya Ranjan) Dasmunshi got unwell that I got in, otherwise I was not coming into Indian football.

For someone who wasn't interested in football governance, you are now in FIFA (a council member).

I am happy that at the world stage, first AFC and now FIFA, there is so much optimism outside India that sometimes I feel sad



AIFF president Praful Patel says he would prefer the Indian national team losing to top opponents rather than beating lower-ranked teams. File

there's so much pessimism within India. They don't know anything and they are optimistic. We know everything and we are pessimistic. When I go there, I get very high respect because of India. It's remarkable.

You used the words 'growth' and 'shrink'. In the last decade, around 20 clubs have either shut shop or scaled down operations. The presence is absolutely zero in the heartland.

It's a big problem. Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are not able to come up in Indian football. I can't help it. There are no local sponsors, the local federations have to take more interest. As a federation, you can't do everything for every state and say that the whole country will function in the same breath. And on the flip side, see how many more cities and states have been brought into Indian football. Earlier, it was only a Goa, Kolkata affair.

But then Goa has now slipped...

I can't help it. It's their fault, not ours. How can you say it slid completely? FC Goa have topped the ISL table, have got the (Asian) Champions League slot.

There were plenty more top teams from Goa though.

You are absolutely wrong on that count. These are individuals who promoted clubs when club football was an amateur to semi-professional thing. When professional football has come fully into India, individuals like JCT, Mahindra, Dempo or Salgaocar, they don't have money themselves. They were running their own private clubs. They were not inviting sponsorships or inviting anybody else to participate in their clubs, not giving shares to anybody to invest in a club. How can you use that definition to say clubs have shut down? This has always happened. Today also, clubs will shut down but new players will come also. All these ISL teams are brand new clubs, no? They were never in the footballing system. Big corporates who were never a part of the system are in football. When you talk of these three-four states that don't have football, there are new cities that have come into football which were not there earlier.

In these new cities, do you think there is actual youth development happening? A lot of teams are taking advantage of ready-made players from the North-East.



I would be happy to lose against a top team rather than win against an underdog. (But) Everybody liked that arrangement. Players liked it, the coach also liked it. So end of the story. I also did not push because, ultimately, if they are not ready mentally then what's the point of pushing and taking it beyond a point."

PRAFUL PATEL
ON INDIA BEATING LOWER-RANKED TEAMS

There is a lot of player development happening all over India. Players from the North-East may be a preferred option right now. But I don't think that trend will last for long with the number of grassroot programmes and academies across the country – in Bombay, Baroda, and smaller cities. Today, the ratio of youngsters in metro and tier-one cities is 50:50 when it comes to cricket and football.

Still, an informal, community-based coaching system in Mizoram, for example, is churning out a lot more players than the 2,000 licensed coaches, say, in Mumbai... Do we get lost in jargon instead of just letting the youngsters play?

We did so much of that! What was Mission 11 Million? We gave all the children a football...

There has been little follow-up to Mission 11 Million, the school-level programme.

How can the AIFF do a follow-up? That has to be done at a local level, no? Sitting in

AIFF, you are expecting that I monitor whatever is happening from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. That isn't practically possible. We can give a larger structure, prepare an ecosystem for football. We cannot be a catalyst for every single thing. You have to look at it from AIFF's point of view. You have to carry people along and build confidence in the system, which is exactly what we are doing. Look at the pipeline of young Indian footballers. We have started baby leagues, different age-group leagues, women's league. Directionally, we are okay. If you compare it with the past, the participation numbers are growing at an exponential pace. Did you have any other academy apart from TFA? The youth programmes that the ISL clubs run, aren't they being run well?

One of the problems in India is the lack of matches and game time for Indian players. India has one of the shortest leagues in the world.

That will increase now. The league will get bigger, the number of matches will increase. The number of games is an issue that we have to solve and we will in two years, in both ISL and I-League.

Do you think the players could have tried their luck abroad? Not necessarily the top European leagues but even in superior Asian countries.

Players also were not bold enough to go out and take those opportunities. Everybody thinks of England and big countries but they should have gone into the regional leagues.

Why do you think they weren't bold enough?

The standard of the current team is based on the available talent pool in the country. As the new talent pool which is developing and going through different age-group teams, when they come into the senior team, there will be a larger pool available. The younger ones have gone through better training, better nutrition, mental conditioning and exposure. They have had better formal training from a young age so they will be better equipped. When they play for the national team, the whole level of the national team will improve. They will be playing better football.

How much does optics matter to the federation? We have seen that when India's age-group team beat an Italian

side, it was blown up. Mission 11 Million was blown up.

Optics are important because, at the end of the day, people want to associate with a game that has positivity. We watch EPL and La Liga or World Cup and Champions League and compare that with Indian football. That's an unfair comparison. If you evaluate Indian football independently, though the national team and ranking might not have changed, when you see the quality of the league, the quality of play, see all these international coaches and players coming, there's a marked improvement. Football is the most competitive global sport. It takes a whole generation to remove the style and capability of the past and replace it with a brand new style. The process that's been going on aggressively for the last 5-7 years, when it finishes in the next five years, its impact will be zabardast (great) on the national team.

In terms of optics, would you prefer a 13-match unbeaten run against lower-ranked teams or losing to stronger opponents?

I would be happy to lose against a top team rather than win against an underdog. (But) Everybody liked that arrangement. Players liked it, the coach also liked it. So end of the story. I also did not push because, ultimately, if they are not ready mentally then what's the point of pushing and taking it beyond a point.

Does it frustrate you, as a federation, that the team has a good result against a team like Qatar and then isn't able to beat Bangladesh and Afghanistan?

Of course, it's frustrating. That means there's no consistency. And it's a sporadic, one-off thing. *Nahi hota hai toh meroko bhi kharab lagta hai na* (If we don't play well, I feel bad too).

In 2004, officials said India will qualify for the 2010 World Cup. Later, there was this thing about qualifying for the 2014 World Cup. Then, 2018... 2022... Should we be obsessed with World Cup?

I have said we should aspire for the 2026 World Cup because that's an expanded edition and more teams from Asia will qualify. So we should aspire for qualification. But I'm not obsessed with that alone, or sometimes even with Asian Cup qualification. It's important but I am not hassled about that. I would rather see a friendly between India and Argentina, or India and Spain, and whatever may be the result in that.

BRIEFLY

Limpele resigns as badminton coach

New Delhi: With little over four months to go for the Tokyo Olympics, Indonesia's Flandy Limpele has stepped down as India's doubles coach, citing family reasons. Limpele, who was hired by the Badminton Association of India to replace Malaysia's Tan Kim Her last March, has played a crucial role in the Indian men's pair Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy's rise in the international circuit. On Saturday, Limpele flew back home. Last December, Limpele had criticised the Indian players, saying their poor attitude of and lack of team work is affecting the growth of the doubles game in the country. Asked if attitude of the players was one of the reasons behind his departure, Limpele said: "No, nothing to do with attitude, the reason is personal."

ATK beat Bengaluru, storm into third final

Kolkata: Two-time champions ATK relied on a David Williams brace to script a spectacular turnaround and storm into the final of the Indian Super League with a 3-2 aggregate win over holders Bengaluru FC here on Sunday. In the driver's seat after winning the first leg 1-0, Bengaluru FC struck in the fifth minute for a vital away goal advantage through Ashique Kuruniyan, his first of the season, from a counter attack. Up 2-0 on aggregate, Bengaluru had one foot in their third consecutive ISL final. But ATK produced a stunning recovery in front of a 50,000-plus crowd, with Roy Krishna (30th) Williams scoring the goals (63', 79').

Kerala, TRAU win in I-League

Margao: Henry Kisekka scored in the last minute as Gokulam Kerala FC beat Churchill Brothers 2-1 in a thrilling match of the I-League. Gokulam Kerala's victory gave a serious jolt to the Red Machines' hopes of finishing in second place on the points table. With the win, Gokulam now have 22 points from 15 games - the same as TRAU FC and Real Kashmir FC, overtaking Churchill Brothers in the process, who have 20 points to their kitty. TRAU, meanwhile, scored a last-gasp goal to beat All India Football Federation's developmental side Indian Arrows 1-0 at the Khuman Lumpak Stadium. Deepak Devrani scored the all-important goal in the 89th minute to give TRAU the crucial three points.

Manpreet, Rani bag Player of Year awards

New Delhi: National team captains Manpreet Singh and Rani Rampal on Sunday won the Dhruv Batra Player of the Year Award 2019 in the men's and women's categories respectively at the third Hockey India Annual Awards here. Awards carried a total prize purse of Rs 1.64 crore. Among other awards, Olympic gold medalist Harbinder Singh won the Major Dhyan Chand Lifetime Achievement Award. He received a cash prize of Rs 30 lakh and a trophy. Goalkeeper of the Year 2019 went to Krishan B Pathak, while Harmanpreet won the Defender of the Year recognition. Midfielder of the Year was bagged by Neha Goyal, while Mandeep Singh was named Forward of the Year. Lalremsiami won the women's Upcoming Player of the Year while Vivek Sagar Prasad was named men's Upcoming Player of the Year.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

TRACKING THE VIRUS

No fans to be allowed at Bahrain GP, European football continues to be hit

ASSOCIATED PRESS
SAKHIR, MARCH 8

FORMULA ONE'S Bahrain Grand Prix has been closed to spectators due to the global virus outbreak, but won't be postponed like the Chinese round of the championship. The Bahraini organizers' decision comes as the wider sporting world battles turmoil caused by the new coronavirus. Soccer, golf, skiing, marathons and Olympic qualifying tournaments have all been disrupted.

Japan's Spring Grand Sumo Tournament started Sunday without spectators, and with wrestlers arriving in face masks. One of Italian soccer's biggest games - the potential title decider between Juventus and Inter Milan - was played Sunday in an empty stadium.

Bahraini organizers said having crowds at the March 22 race would have undermined "aggressive social distancing measures" used to prevent the spread of the virus, which causes the COVID-19 disease. Discouraging people from gathering in

large crowds can prevent the virus from spreading. "Given the continued spread of COVID-19 globally, convening a major sporting event, which is open to the public and allows thousands of international travellers and local fans to interact in close proximity would not be the right thing to do at the present time," organizers said in a statement.

The F1 season is set to begin with the Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne on March 15. China was scheduled to hold the fourth race of the season on April 19, but that was postponed due to the virus outbreak and no new date has been set. Serie A soccer games resumed Sunday in empty stadiums amid strict anti-virus measures in Italy - despite the sports minister calling for teams not to play - while a French league game between Strasbourg and Paris Saint-Germain was postponed from its scheduled date Saturday.

The CEO of the German Football League, which oversees the top two divisions, called on clubs to work with local authorities but

One of Italian football's biggest games - the potential title decider between Juventus and Inter Milan - was played Sunday in an empty stadium

said it was "without question" that all remaining games must be played this season with no delays beyond mid-May. "That is only way for the clubs and the (league) to have security of planning for the upcoming period of competition despite difficult circumstances," Christian Seifert said in a statement.

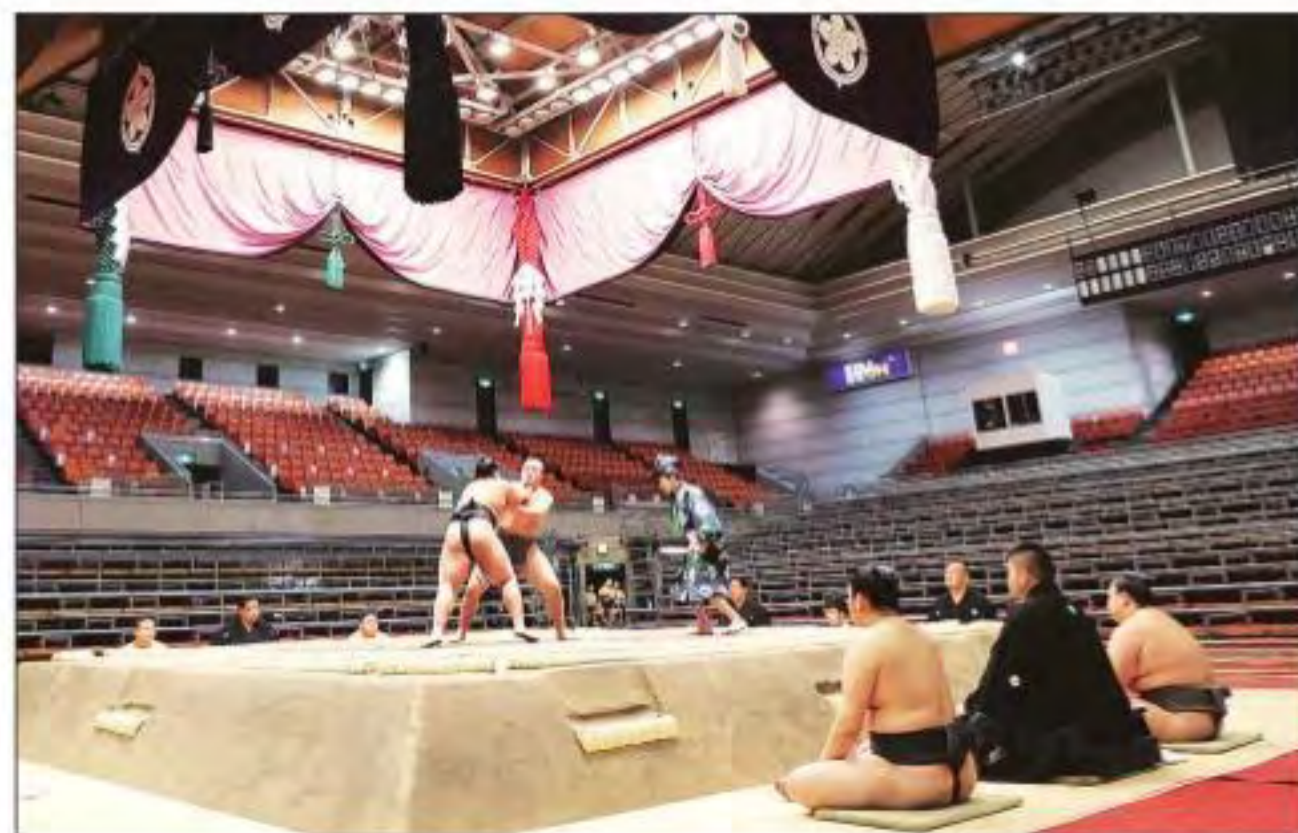
That followed a call from German Health Minister Jens Spahn for organizers to reconsider hosting events due to attract more than 1,000 people, including sports competitions. A total of 550 fans of Bundesliga club Borussia Monchengladbach from a virus-affected area took advantage of an offer to refund their tickets for Saturday's game

against Borussia Dortmund, the DPA news agency reported.

The offer was open to fans from nearby Heinsberg, which has a cluster of virus cases, and offered them free tickets for a European game next season. The Alpine skiing World Cup Finals, Italian cycling races and the women's ice hockey world championships have all been canceled.

In Greece, all sports events will take place without spectators for two weeks, the country's Health Ministry announced. British sporting events could soon also be held without spectators, with a meeting between sports bodies, broadcasters and the government set to take place on Monday.

When events do go ahead, fans and athletes are taking new precautions. Soccer players in the English Premier League have scrapped their traditional pre-game handshakes, while leading cricket players have used fist-bump greetings and been issued with hand sanitizer. Face masks are an increasingly common sight in crowds around the world.



A match of the Spring Grand Sumo Tournament takes place in Osaka behind closed doors amid the spread of the coronavirus. Reuters