

millenniumpost

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NO HALF TRUTHS

REACHING OUT: BISWA BANGLA OUTLET IN CHINA BY JULY THIS YR PG4



INDIA REJECTS ANY US ROLE IN RESOLVING INDO-PAK ISSUES PG5



FUTURE TENSE: COMPUTER PROGRAMMERS TO FEEL THE HEAT PG11



I FIND IT DIFFICULT TO DIGEST A FAILURE: TAAPSEE PG16



Quick News

Adityanath keeps poll promise, waives farm loans of ₹36,359 crore

LUCKNOW: The Uttar Pradesh government on Tuesday cleared a Rs 36,359-crore proposal allowing waiver of loans for marginal and small farmers of the state...

Madras HC orders waiver of farm loans for all

CHENNAI: The Madras high court on Tuesday asked the Tamil Nadu government to waive farm loans obtained by all farmers, instead of limiting the benefit only to those owning less than five acres of land...

India respects 'one-China' policy. We also expect China's reciprocal attitude

Graphic with text: In today's paper

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MAMATA ANNOUNCES PLANS TO SET UP 6 MULTI-SUPER SPECIALTY HOSPITALS AND A VARSITY

Jhargram becomes 22nd district of Bengal

OUR CORRESPONDENT



KOLKATA: Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee announced a Rs 200 crore development package for newly constituted Jhargram district on Tuesday. She also announced a slew of development projects for West Bengal's 22nd district...

CM Mamata Banerjee in Jhargram on Tuesday

take some time. The work of Biswa Bangla University is underway. We will think about Jhargram University later, she said, adding "Jhargram will get 9 colleges..."

land to Ramakrishna Mission on behalf of the state government. Baneerjee said 'Jangalmahal', the tribal area earlier dominated by Maoists had witnessed violence in the past but the peace has returned there after Trinamool Congress came to power in the state...

THIS WILL COST THE STATE RS 828 CRORE

Sabuj sathi: State to distribute another 30 lakh bicycles to students

OUR CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA: The Backward Class Welfare department (BCW) has selected three firms Hero, Avon and Hercules to supply another 30 lakh bicycles to the students of classes IX and X of state-run, sponsored and aided schools under the Sabuj Sathi project...

CHINA BLOCKING MASOOD AZHAR BAN

Veto won't stop us from acting against terrorists: US

UNITED NATIONS: The US said on Tuesday that countries using veto to scuttle sanctioning of terrorists will not "preclude" it from taking actions, amid continued Chinese opposition to efforts to get Pakistan-based JeM chief Masood Azhar banned by the UN...



Nikki Haley
The US wants to make sure that it is leading towards a "result" and "not sitting back" and allowing things to happen. "I think you are obviously seeing a very aggressive administration because we feel like in order to lead we need to act and in order to act we need to make sure we have those conversations with the National Security Council and we are having those conversations with the National Security Council" she said...

SYRIAN GAS ATTACK

At least 100 dead, 400 injured

BEIRUT: Suspected chemical attacks killed at least 100 people in Syria's rebel-held north-western province of Idlib on Tuesday and left over 400 suffering from respiratory problems, a Syria medical relief group said...



"We have seen more than 40 strikes since 06h30," it said. "The toll continues to increase as do the strikes in the Idlib region as well as non-chemical attacks in Hama," the group said. United Nations has formally launched an investigation in the aftermath of the attack...

Trump signs bill blocking online privacy regulation

WASHINGTON: After his press secretary blasted it as an example of rampant government overreach, President Donald Trump has signed a bill into law that could eventually allow internet providers to sell information about their customers' browsing habits...



information. Critics have argued that the rule would stifle innovation and pick winners and losers among internet companies. The regulation was scheduled to take effect later this year, but Congress used its authority under the obscure Congressional Review Act to wipe it from the books...

Internet companies like Google don't have to ask their users for permission before tracking what sites they visit, a discrepancy that Republicans and industry group have blasted as both unfair to companies and confusing to consumers. White House press secretary Sean Spicer said last week that the president's support for the bill was part of a larger effort "to fight Washington red tape that stifles American innovation, job creation and economic growth."

MOOTED BY TRAFFIC POLICE TO PREVENT DRIVER FATIGUE

Now, mandatory rest for drivers after six hour stint behind the wheel

PRITESH BASU

KOLKATA: Statistics have proved that a large number fatalities on highways have been on account of driver fatigue. Keeping this in mind, the state traffic police have decided to address the issue of drivers sitting behind the wheels for several hours at a stretch to reduce such mishaps on highways...

to continue driving. According to a senior police officer posted at the headquarters of West Bengal Traffic Police, sample testing of around 10 per cent vehicles passing through the check posts will be done and it is considered to be sufficient to check the menace of accidents on highways. Moreover, checking of each and every vehicle would lead to traffic congestion. In many cases, it was found that truck owners or car rentals, didn't give much time for drivers to take rest. They are asked to set out for another trip after returning from a long one. The drivers, often willingly take new duties in the hope of making extra money. Thus, the police have decided to not allow drivers to go on beyond 6 hours at a stretch. The drivers either of commercial or private vehicles will be taken to a restroom or dhabas near the check



posts where they will be made to take rest at least for an hour. In such cases, owners of vehicles will also be pulled up for engaging drivers for long hours at a stretch. Welcoming the move of the state traffic police, Dr AG Ghosal, a well-known pulmonologist, said: "This is an important issue as sleep deprivation causes driver fatigue and they fall asleep while driving in empty highways when cars move at a high speed. Most importantly, at present ten out of 100

people cannot sleep properly at night due to certain obstruction in the upper portion of the windpipe which is called obstructive sleep apnea. Thus drivers on highways should have a certificate that they are not suffering from obstructive sleep apnea, which is already in vogue in many countries." Debapratim Pandit, an associate professor of IIT Kharagpur's Department of Architecture and Regional Planning and expert in transportation planning, said: "In developed countries, a person driving a commercial vehicle cannot drive more than a certain time. There is a system to monitor that how long they were driving at a stretch. Each driver of a commercial vehicle carries a card that they need to punch while crossing check posts on highways and it gives clear indication that for how long he or she driving at a stretch."

Engg student live streams suicide tutorial on FB, then jumps to death

MPOST BUREAU

MUMBAI: 24-year-old Arjun Bhardwaj, an engineering student, checked into a suite on the 19th floor of hotel Taj Lands End in Mumbai before daybreak on Monday. Hours later, he broke a window and jumped. Security guards who heard a loud "thud" rushed and found his body. Before jumping around 6.20 pm, Arjun Bhardwaj, whose family is in Bengaluru, posted a macabre "suicide tutorial" on Facebook. "Step 1, write notes to people...step 2, get drunk, Step 3...enjoy the view, Step 4...have bacon pasta," he says in the short video. He is in a bathrobe, smoking and drinking from a bottle of wine. "See you guys on the other side," is the last thing he says before the video ends. He reportedly used a chair to break the double-pane window. The police say in one of the notes found scattered around the suite, he said "sorry" to his parents. He also wrote: "I'm a drug addict...I don't want to live anymore and hence commit-

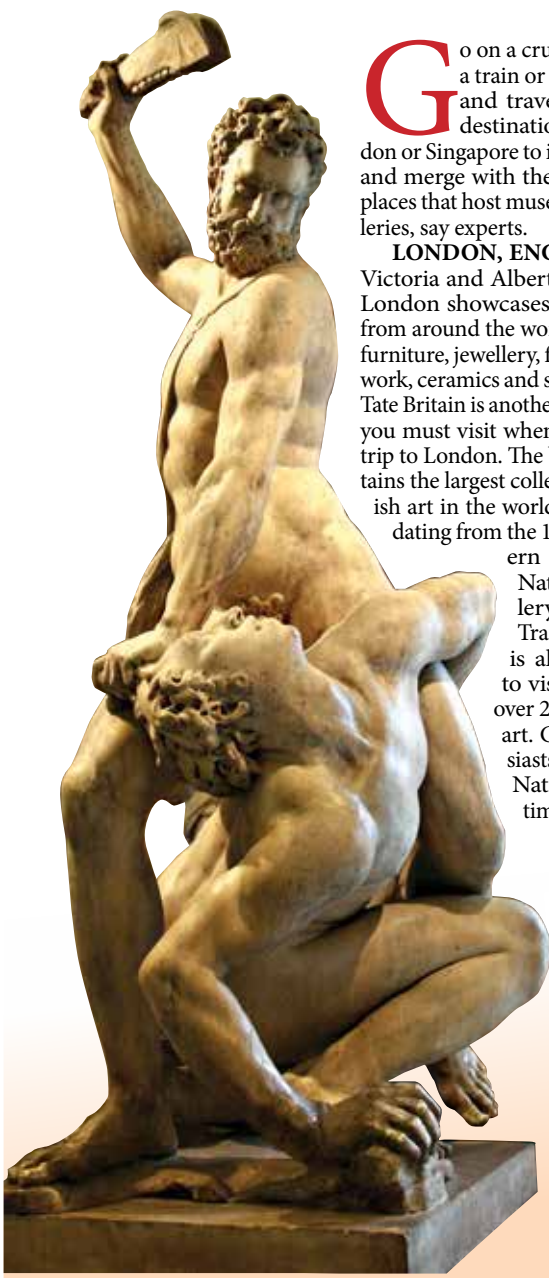


ting suicide." He had allegedly been depressed for some time and had come prepared. The student had submitted proper documents before checking in around 3 am on Monday morning, which helped the officials identify him. According to the police, his body was retrieved after a one-hour struggle as he had fallen on an 11th floor terrace of the hotel, which has 25 floors. Workers had to crawl through a ventilator shaft to get to him. The body has been sent for a post-mortem. Bhardwaj's father, a businessman, had reportedly been worried about his son, according to the police. He had met him a few days ago. The Mumbai police tweeted: "Deeply bereaved with suicide of a young boy in the city. We urge the youngsters to reach out to us #WeAreListening." A spokesperson of Taj said: "We will extend our full cooperation to all the investigating authorities concerned. Our heartfelt condolences are with the family of the bereaved."



# MUST-VISIT TRAVEL SPOTS FOR ART LOVERS

Here are some of the most mesmerising museums and galleries with endless number of iconic antique sculpture from all around the world that an art enthusiast must add to their travel list



Go on a cruise or hop on a train or board a flight and travel to various destinations like London or Singapore to indulge in art, and merge with the picturesque places that host museums and galleries, say experts.

**LONDON, ENGLAND:** The Victoria and Albert Museum in London showcases applied arts from around the world, including furniture, jewellery, fashion, glasswork, ceramics and sculpture. The Tate Britain is another art museum you must visit when you make a trip to London. The building contains the largest collection of British art in the world, with pieces dating from the 1500s to modern times. The National Gallery, located in Trafalgar square, is also a delight to visit as it hosts over 2,300 works of art. Cruise enthusiasts can visit the National Maritime Museum in



Greater London to browse through paintings that focus on the many moods of the sea and the travails of navigation.

**FLORENCE, ITALY:** The Galleria dell'Accademia houses the renowned 'David' by Michelangelo, besides other sculptures by the artist and a collection of breath-taking Renaissance paintings. The Uffizi, on the other hand, is located near the sparkling Arno River and must be visited if you wish to behold the world's most fascinating collection of Italian Renaissance art. Very close to the Uffizi gallery

is the Loggia dei Lanzi, an open-air museum that showcases antique sculptures. Built in the 14th century, this museum is very easily accessible as it requires no entry fee.

**SINGAPORE:** The best Asian contemporary art can be enjoyed at the Singapore Art Museum, which was inaugurated in 1996. Pay a visit to the National Gallery to indulge in an extensive collection of Singaporean and Southeast Asian art that dates from the 19th century, all the way down to modern times.

Another building that houses priceless pieces of art is the Peranakan Museum, dedicated to the culture of Peranakans – descendants of Straits Born Chinese. **AARHUS, DENMARK:** Aarhus is Denmark's second-largest city and a buzzing cultural hub. A walk down the city's streets will lead you to discover a seemingly endless number of galleries where you can spend hours browsing through art. The ARoS Aarhus Kunstmuseum, established in 1859, is one of the largest art museums in Northern Europe. The roof of the museum features an iconic rainbow panorama basement, while the gallery in the basement is influenced by Dante's 'The Divine Comedy'.

**PARIS, FRANCE:** History and art are present at every corner of the city, and vacationers can begin with a visit to the Musée Carnavalet, which is a tribute to the history of Paris. The Musée Picasso, as the name suggests, allows one to browse through the works of

Pablo Picasso and the Maison Européenne de la Photographie is dedicated to modern photographic art. Visitors also through the famous Louvre museum, which has become a central landmark of the city.

**THE BLOCK PRINTING** art and fresco paintings on Havelis of Mandawa, Fatehpur, and Nawalgarh are sure to mesmerize those exploring Rajasthan.

**THOSE TRAVELLING** to south, will get a chance to experience the awe inspiring paintings with subtle colours, detailed refinement and gesso work depicting the scenes from Hindu mythology. The brilliant art skills carried out on clothes in Mysore will surely mesmerise the art enthusiast. IANS



## Night workers may find diabetes harder to control



**PEOPLE WITH** Type 2 diabetes are likely to have poorer control over their blood glucose levels if they are working in night shifts, researchers say. The study revealed that night shift workers had an average glycaemic count of 8.2 per cent, significantly higher than the 7.6 per cent count for daytime workers and 7.5 per cent count for participants who did not work.

The study shows that poor long-term glycaemic, or blood sugar, control, was independent of what workers ate or



any sleep problems they had. Most people with diabetes should strive for an A1C level below seven per cent, according to the Hormone Health Network. "Our study data raise awareness of the difficulty in



diabetes control among night shift workers," said Sirimon Reutrakul, Associate Professor at Mahidol University in Thailand. Further, the sleep restriction and circadian disruptions caused by night shifts may also increase the risk of developing diabetes as compared to those who work in the daytime or are unemployed.

For the study, presented at the Endocrine Society's 99th annual meeting ENDO 2017, in Orlando, the team studied 260 individuals – 62 night shift workers, 94 daytime workers and 104 unemployed individuals – with Type 2 diabetes in Thailand. The night shift workers reported having shorter sleep duration, higher daily intake of calories and higher body mass index (BMI), than did the other two groups.

"Diabetic individuals who work at night should pay special attention to managing their disease through healthy eating, regular exercise and optimal use of medications," Reutrakul recommended. ¶11

## SPACES THAT weave memories

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**UNRAVELING THE** fascinating bond that exists between people, places and memories, "The Festival of Places" is a unique event which aims to highlight the rich cultural legacy of places that exist in Indian cities, towns and villages. It explores the invaluable cultural fabric and a memory associated with places and provides an opportunity for people to share their personal narratives. The festival is also about understanding the idea of 'Space as a Place'; about exploring 'Places' that form an integral part of cities and towns; about experiencing 'places as vital and meaningful connected spaces' through which urban life throbs; and rediscovering the lost art of creating vibrant places that nurture culture and creativity.

The Festival conceptualised by CATTs, a not-for-profit organisation working in the area of heritage conservation and management, has been envisaged as a convergence of people from all walks of life and disciplines who seek a deeper understanding of Indian culture through the places we live in as well as share

an eagerness to rejuvenate them. The festival encourages participation of people of all ages and experience for developing an in-depth understanding of the places and spaces we live in, seeking people to play an active role both in the creation of new places and the preservation and sustenance of existing ones.

It will inspire people to enjoy and creatively engage with places in cities for meaningful action. And will motivate people to re-imagine, reclaim and revitalize places especially the ones in the public realm. It will encourage people to think about sustenance and resilience, about accessibility and mobility, about the future of their cities and communities. In this sense, the festival goes beyond just being an event to becoming a community movement for reviving and re-imagining places at the heart of healthy and vibrant communities.

**WHERE:** IGNCA, Janpath, Entry from Gate No – 1  
**WHEN:** April 7 – 9  
**TIMING:** 9 am onwards



## DAY IN DAY OUT

What's on Around Town

### DANCE EXPLOSION

To promote excellent young talent that usually goes unrecognized, Urshila Dance Company has organised 'Dance Xplosion... BFAB 2017,' which will feature more than 20 soloists, 10 duet performances, 500 dance students through 25 group acts, NGO dance crews, professional performances by leading dance companies and choreographers.

**WHEN:** April 5  
**WHERE:** Sri Ram Centre of Art and Culture, Mandi House  
**TIMING:** 10 am onwards

### CULTURAL REVOLUTION

To mark the 50th anniversary of the Cultural Revolution in Tibet, an exhibition of photographs by Tibet Museum, Department of Information and International Relations, Central Tibet Administration, Tibetan Government-in-Exile, Dharamsala will be inaugurated on April 1 at 6:30 and will continue for a week.

**WHEN:** April 2 – 8  
**WHERE:** Annexe Art Gallery, IIC  
**TIMING:** 11 am – 7 pm

### KHUSHRANG ART EXHIBITION

With an aim to bring visibility and credibility to the works of deserving talented artists who have largely been overlooked

within the mainstream discourse, Khushrang, a group art exhibition, curated by Erum Khan, will have 25 renowned artists participating and will display a variety of paintings, mass media, installation, photography, sculptures and more.

**WHEN:** March 31 – April 6  
**WHERE:** All India Fine Art and Craft Society  
**TIMING:** 11 am – 7 pm

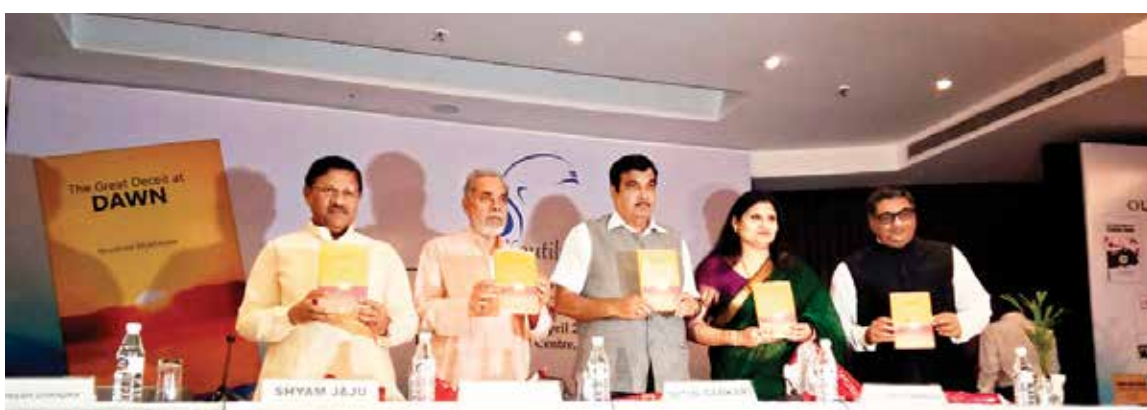
### SPRING FESTIVAL

Celebrating the spirit of spring, a two-day festival of dance and music, has been organised by IIC where the first day will witness a Sarod recital by Apurba Banerjee from Kolkata, followed by Hindustani Vocal Recital by Vivek Bhola from Delhi. The second day of the festival will have a Kathak Group Recital by Manjari Kiran from Jaipur, and a Kathakali Recital, Cleopatra – The Last Pharaoh of Egypt in Kathakali Stree Vesham – an adaptation of William Shakespeare's Anthony and Cleopatra by Prabal Gupta from Bangalore.

**WHEN:** April 6-7  
**WHERE:** CD Deshmukh Auditorium, IIC  
**TIMING:** 6 pm

## A book that traces the rise of Nationalist Ideology

Written by Anushri Mukherjee, 'The Great Deceit at Dawn' discusses the current scenario of political parties and their policies after independence



OUR CORRESPONDENT

The Book that discusses everything about governments and their policies after independence was released on April 3 at India International Center. On the occasion of the book launch ceremony of 'The Great Deceit at Dawn', Chief

Guest Union Minister Nitin Gadkari stressed that we need to move forward, the whole world has left its old political ideologies behind, this book by Anushri will give new directions to the Indian political ideology and will help us to move ahead with the new era. Presiding over the program

organised at the Multi purpose hall of India International Center, Ram Bahadur Rai, Chairman, Indira Gandhi National Center stated that this is best way to help our generations to understand the Indian polity post-independence.

He said, this book is based on research and consists political history

with modern ideology of Indian polity. BJP's National Vice President Shyam Jaju was present at the program as a special guest. There were many other celebrities as well.

During the program Shyam Jaju praised Anushri Mukherjee's efforts of bringing out the reality of Indian polity after independence. He said, "I

think nobody thought like this after independence, actually this book may be termed as the printed version of her ground experience."

'The Great Deceit at Dawn' is written by BJP leader and social worker Anushri Mukherjee. It discusses the scenario of current political parties, central governments and their policies after independence.

While the book has highlighted the ill-effects of foreign policy due to the wrong policies of old governments, it also reflects the changing policies of the political parties for vote bank.

Anushree points out that often the politics of India has been presented in different ways, but many times they are not able to come true. And this was the purpose of writing this book from the beginning.

The facts are compiled in this book, and it has suggestions on how modern India can be strengthened by learning from those political aspects. The book is published by Kautilya Publication.

Although every possible care and caution has been taken to avoid errors or omissions, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that information given in this publication is merely for reference and must not be taken as having authority of or binding in any way on the writers, editors, publishers, and printers and sellers who do not owe any responsibility for any damage or loss to any person, a purchaser of this publication or not for the result of any action taken on the basis of this work. All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent court and forums in Delhi/New Delhi only.



# Farmers breathe easy after CM waives agriculture land tax

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**KOLKATA:** Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's announcement to waive land tax to provide impetus to the agriculture sector in the state has come as a boon to farmers who are still in "deep trouble" due to the Modi government's hasty decision to demonetise high value notes.

Mamata Banerjee-government is undertaking major development works for an overall development of the state despite having a huge debt burden and being "deprived of" allocation of funds by the Centre for different projects. In such a situation, the Chief Minister has taken a huge decision of waiving land tax of those who own up to 12 acres of irrigated farmland or 18 acres of rain-fed land, to support farmers when they are distressed. It would cost Rs 120 to Rs 200 crore to the state's exchequer, according to an official in the state Secretariat.

The Land and Land Reforms



department has started working on it soon after the Chief Minister made the announcement from Kharagpur on Monday. The Block Land and Land Reform officers have been communicated in this connection so that local officials do not accept if any farmers come to

deposit land tax.

"Our country is supposed to run on the principal of welfare state. The Centre it seems is gradually trying to do away with the concept of the welfare state. But in our state we give importance and stress on welfare. So our Chief Minister has

introduced different schemes that benefit hundreds of people and it is from the principal of welfare state decision to waive the land tax for farmers have been taken," said an official. Most farmers had to take loans at high rates of interest as all of a sudden demonetisa-

tion was announced during the Kharif season. They are yet to clear the loan amount as they again had to arrange money for Rabi cultivation.

In such a situation if they have to give land tax it becomes quite difficult for the farmers. Thus the Chief Minister's announcement has come as a relief. Moreover, there are certain areas where the Centre can pose its "neglecting attitude" towards the state government and one of it is the agriculture sector. Since it is not irrelevant for West Bengal, the decision taken by the Chief Minister was quite essential right at this moment to let farmers survive, the official said.

Sources said that a complaint was lodged against officials in a Block Land and Land Reform office in which some farmers had alleged that they were asked to pay land tax (khazna) for the past few years at a time "as the land record was not available".

NEW BEGINNING



Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in Jhargram on Tuesday. Jhargram became the 22nd district of the state. Declaring this at public meeting, the Chief Minister said: "A long-standing demand of the people was fulfilled today (Tuesday). The days of violence are gone. Peace reigns in Jhargram now. April 4 will be celebrated as Jhargram Dibas from now." She further said: "We have set up nine colleges and six multi super-specialty hospitals in Jhargram district," she added. "We will set up a university in Jhargram district in the future as well as an archery academy in Jhargram," she informed. PIC/MPOST

## CMCH decides against transferring critical patients to other hospitals

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**KOLKATA:** The Calcutta Medical College and Hospital (CMCH) authorities have decided not to transfer critical patients to other hospitals.

The decision was taken after Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, a few days ago, gave a clear instruction to all the hospitals in the state that critical patients should not be transferred to other hospital. The decision was taken at a high-level meeting between the senior hospital officials and the members of the Rogi Kalyan Samiti at the hospital.

The officials have taken a decision that all critical patients should be given treatment at the emergency ward of the hospital. The doctors will examine the patient thoroughly. It has often been alleged that patients died while being shuttled between the hospitals. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in her recent meeting with the senior health officials categorically said that transfer of critical patients by the hospitals should not be allowed under any circumstances. She cautioned the private hospitals in the state as there were a series of allegations against them of transferring patients to other hospitals. It was learnt that during the meeting that was held at the Calcutta Medical College and Hospital, the senior doctors have been alerted that the transfer of critical patients does not happen in the hospital. They have been asked not to transfer the critical patients coming from the districts to other hospital. The doctors

**CM Mamata Banerjee in her recent meeting with the senior health officials categorically said that transfer of critical patients by the hospitals should not be allowed under any circumstances**

were told that they have to ensure that the patients get the best possible health services in the hospital. The hospital authorities are becoming more stringent to check the incident of transfer of patients.

It was decided that a patient will be allowed to get transferred to other hospitals if there is an absolute emergency and there were no beds vacant in the hospital. Providing health services to the patients coming to the city's medical colleges from the districts has become a challenge for the government as many of the district hospitals were transferring patients to the city despite of the adequate infrastructure. After becoming CM, Banerjee laid a great stress on the revamp of infrastructure at the district hospitals as well. Infrastructure has been properly placed. Despite the infrastructure reforms, the districts and sub-divisional hospitals were transferring patients causing a great burden on the city's hospitals and medical colleges.

## Jewellery worth Rs 9 lakh stolen from Rituparna's residence

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**KOLKATA:** Jewellery worth Rs 9 lakh was stolen from the house of actor Rituparna Sengupta at Robinson Street on Tuesday.

On Tuesday morning, the actor's mother found the box containing the jewellery missing from the locker in her almirah. She initiated a search thinking that she might have kept it somewhere else, but ultimately she couldn't find it. The actor went to her mother soon after getting the information.

The police were contacted and officers from Shakespeare Sarani police station and Kolkata Police's detective department rushed to the spot and initiated a probe in this connection.

It may be mentioned that in a similar manner, jewellery worth a few lakh was stolen from her in-law's house at Lake Gardens. Meanwhile, unidentified miscreants decamped with valuables and cash from a jewellery shop at Suri. They disconnected all the CCTVs in the showroom and stolen the valuables.

Police suspect that the miscreants had entered the showroom by scaling a boundary wall behind the building. Senior police officers went to the spot.

Police suspect that someone known to the owner of the showroom committed the crime or helped the accused to commit the crime. The incident led to panic in the area.

## Mamata condoles Amonkar's death

**KOLKATA:** Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday mourned the death of renowned Hindustani classical vocalist Kishori Amonkar. "Let me express deep regret over the death of legendary classical musician Kishori Amonkar...Her death has caused immense loss to the world of Hindustani classical music," Banerjee said in a message. Stating that Amonkar had received numerous awards in recognition to her contribution to music, Banerjee said, "May her soul rest in peace." The CM also consoled her family members.

OUR CORRESPONDENT



## Sufala: Cooperation dept introduces special delivery vehicles

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**KOLKATA:** In a bid to help common people get fresh vegetables at the right price at their doorsteps after procuring it directly from farmers, the state cooperation department has introduced special vehicles under its project "Sufala".

Arup Roy, the state Cooperation minister, handed over the keys of the vehicles to representatives of 15 beneficiary cooperatives on Tuesday in a programme held outside the New Secretariat building. The cooperatives will be procuring fresh vegetables directly from farmers and selling it to the common man. Roy said: "The Cooperation Fair will be held soon and our attempt is to provide the benefits of the Sufala project through the fair."



Introduction of the vehicles will be beneficial to both common people and farmers."

He further said: "Whenever prices of potato, onion and other essential commodities had skyrocketed, the state government had stepped in to provide relief to people. The state government has also procured potatoes so that farmers do not incur losses."

Though the state cooperation department has introduced 15 vehicles on Tuesday,

the department has set a target of introducing total 200 such vehicles by the end of this fiscal. The department will continue adding more vehicles in the next fiscals. With introduction of more such vehicles people all over the state will be benefited.

It may be mentioned that such initiatives of the state government will be immensely beneficial as price of vegetables and fruits will not go up unnecessarily due to foul play of a section of middlemen.

Moreover, farmers will no more have to worry about who they will be selling their produce every day. The reason being that their produce will be directly bought by the cooperatives.

Gradually, it will also be introduced in the city and its adjoining areas.

## 3rd complaint lodged against Alchemist Group

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**KOLKATA:** A third complaint against Rajya Sabha MP KD Singh's Alchemist Group was lodged with Baguiati police station on Tuesday. The complaint was lodged alleging that the complainant did not get the money, that he had invested in the group, back.

Two earlier complaints on similar charges were lodged with Garfa and Bowbazar police station.

An investor Jayanta Kumar Chattopadhyay lodged the complaint with the police against five officials of the group. He alleged that he was supposed to get Rs 11.5 lakh back from the group against his investment.

He did not get the sum back despite repeated attempts and request.

On March 16, a section of investors lodged a complaint with the Bowbazar police station alleging that the group had cheated them of Rs 2,53,01,063.

The investors had lodged complaint against Singh and two other directors, Kumarjit Singh and Pawan Verma. Cases against them were started under various Sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) on charges of cheating (420 IPC),

criminal breach of trust (406 IPC), and criminal conspiracy (120B).

Subsequently, the Kolkata Police had formed a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe into the allegations.

The Alchemist group had collected a huge amount of money from different parts of the state through its chit fund scams.

The police had initiated collecting information about activities of the group because that investors lodged complaint alleging that they were not getting their money back, as per the assurances given by the company.

The police would speak to some of the investors to get information about some agents who were well aware about the activities of the group.

The Directorate of Economic Offence (DEO) also initiated the process of assessing property of the group in Bengal. The agency has initiated probe against seven such chit fund groups.

The DEO will be distributing the money among the affected ones after auctioning of the property as per the West Bengal Protection of Interest of Depositors in Financial Establishments Act.

## Darjeeling faces liquor ban, tourism to feel the pinch

AMITAVA BANERJEE

**DARJEELING:** Close your eyes and think of Darjeeling. The image that comes to mind is the sprawling hills, the mist and the chilly winds and what could be your best companion to ward off the biting cold — a shot or two of your favourite drink.

However, all this has become a thing of the past with Darjeeling running dry with the Apex Court's liquor shop ruling. More than 90 percent of the liquor vending establishments has been affected owing to this ban. The tourism industry has already started getting affected. The Supreme Court has ruled that no liquor vends will operate within 500 metre of national and state highways to sell liquor in a bid to prevent accidents owing to drunk driving. In case of areas having population below 20,000, the limit was reduced to 220 metre. The order came into effect on April 1. However, the Apex Court exempted Sikkim and Meghalaya, owing to topographical constraints.

"Darjeeling has the same topography and is characterized by the same socio-economic factors like Sikkim and Meghalaya. Nearly all the liquor vending establishments fall within the 500 metre mark from the highways, hence, have been shut down. Owing to the topography we can't even shift address. Wherever

we shift we will fall in the 500 metre mark. We don't have a history of drunk driving accidents in Darjeeling. The bars mainly cater to the tourists and local residents. We hope that the Supreme Court reconsiders and exempts Darjeeling on the lines of neighbouring Sikkim and Meghalaya. Both Sikkim and Meghalaya are tourist destinations as well," stated Pasang Tamang of the Blue Pine Restaurant.

He has stopped serving alcohol in his restaurant. "Business has come down by 80%. Tourists are no longer coming. I don't know how to sustain my family and the employees," complained Tamang.

There are 40 off shops and on shops in Darjeeling. Out of which, 37 are closed. In Kurseong, there are 2 off shops and 4 on shops. All of them are now closed. In Kalimpong, there are 4 off shops and 7 on shops. "We appeal to the state government to take the initiative as in the case of Sikkim and Meghalaya. They need to approach the Supreme Court for a revision in case of Darjeeling," said Dharmendra Poddar, Acting Secretary of the Association in Darjeeling.

Poddar runs the single liquor wholesale in Darjeeling. Although the whole sale

is outside the purview of the ban, his business has come to a standstill as most of the off shops and on shops are closed.

"Tourists visit Darjeeling to enjoy. As the climate is cold, tourism and social drinking go hand in hand. As Sikkim has no ban, tourists prefer to go to there. We are already feeling the pinch. Tourism is the economic backbone of the Hills. We appeal to the Supreme Court to reconsider and exempt the Hills of North Bengal," stated Pradeep Lama, General Secretary, Darjeeling Association of Travel Agents.

The star category hotels are also affected. "While booking customers are inquiring whether the Hotel falls in the purview of the ban, they are cancelling their bookings as soon as we tell them that liquor is not being served. Business is badly affected," stated Suman Baraily, General Manager of a hotel chain.

Every year around three and a half lakh domestic and thirty thousand foreign tourists visit Darjeeling. "I am aware of the happenings and am deeply concerned. However, as it is a court directive I would not like to comment on it," said Gautam Deb, Minister in charge of Tourism, government of West Bengal. Many have expressed concerns over the fact that large scale bootlegging and black marketing will take place with Sikkim being exempted from the ban.

## State to set up 500 beauty parlours to make SC, ST girls self-reliant



TARUN GOSWAMI

**KOLKATA:** In a bid to make SC and ST girls economically self-reliant, Backward Class Welfare department (BCW) will set up around 500 beauty parlours in the blocks and municipalities in collaboration with Shahnaz Husain, the well known beauty therapist.

This is for the first time in the country when such a venture has been taken up by a state government. The girls who will receive training will become entrepreneurs and open their own beauty parlours. The West Bengal Scheduled Caste Welfare Department will provide Rs 2 lakh as soft loans to those who will open the parlours. A sum of Rs 10 crore has been provided for the purpose.

BCW has provided training in beautician course to 28,000 SC and ST girls in Level I. It was found that nearly 75 percent of the girls who had received training have become self-reliant and are working either in some beauty parlours or doing freelance business.

Taking cue from their success, the department selected 500 girls to provide them with higher training. The training is being given by the experts from Shahnaz Husain establishments.

The duration of the residential training course is three months. Those who have received training will get a certificate. The BCW will then give them financial assistance to set up their own parlours. A survey conducted by the department revealed that beauty parlours run by

**This is for the first time in the country that such a venture has been taken up by a state govt. The girls who will receive training will become entrepreneurs and open their own beauty parlours**

trained beauticians have tremendous potential in the districts up to the block levels. As it will be a joint venture with Shahnaz Husain, the quality will be maintained. The beauty therapists have been given training on bridal make-ups which is in great demand in the district.

Those who have already received training and are working either in parlours or doing freelance business may join the new parlours.

In a study, the department found that those who have received training are earning between Rs 10,000 to Rs 15,000 per month. "This amount will go up when there will be a proper beauty parlour with all modern facilities, whose quality will be maintained," a senior official said.

## Local TMC leader killed in Birbhum

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**KOLKATA:** Miscreants killed a Trinamool Congress leader at Birbhum's Lakhpur on Monday night. They hurled a bomb at Lakhrid Shekh (45) who died on the spot. Police have started an investigation.

Lakhrid, a trader, was standing in front of his shop on Monday night. His nephew Samuil Islam was also standing beside Lakhrid. They were probably waiting for some people.

Suddenly, those miscreants appeared there. The bomb hit the face of Lakhrid and he fell on the ground. His body was lying in a pool of blood.

Samuil also received splinter injuries and was taken to Burdwan Medical College and Hospital.

"Samuil was admitted in the hospital in critical condition. But we'll wait for his recovery. He may give us some informa-

tion about the assailants," said a police officer.

The relatives of the Trinamool Congress leader alleged that assailants were backed by CPI(M).

"My brother was popular in this area. People loved him as a leader. Local CPI(M) leaders tried to malign his image. But they were unsuccessful," said brother of Lakhrid Shekh.

"Those CPI(M) leaders planned to kill him. They hired those killers and gave them money to kill my brother," he further added.

However, the district CPI(M) ruled out the allegation.

The investigators suspected that those assailants had good knowledge of the area. They escaped the spot soon after the incident. "They probably used motorbikes to escape the spot. The entire operation was well-planned," the police officer added.

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### Bengal liquor sellers look to govt for solution

KOLKATA: Liquor sellers who have outlets along highways are looking for a solution from the West Bengal government after the Supreme Court's ban order that has rendered over 13,000 workers jobless.

The Apex Court on March 31 said vendors, hotels and restaurants falling within 500 metres on either side of national and state highways cannot serve liquor.

A Bench of Chief Justice Jagdish Singh Khehar, Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justice L Nageswara Rao, however, relaxed the ban to 220 metres in respect of municipal bodies with 20,000 or less population falling along the highways.

"As many as 2,140 outlets across districts have been affected," said Pradyut Saha, General Secretary of the All Bengal Excise Licensees Association.

According to industry sources, outlets which were forced to close after the Apex Court's order have liquor stock worth about Rs 400-450 crore.

"Unless a solution is worked out, it would affect the owners of bars, restaurants and workers. Even the state government will lose excise revenue," Saha added.



According to industry sources, outlets which were forced to close after the SC's order have liquor stock worth about Rs 400-450 crore

# Reaching out: Biswa Bangla outlet in China by July this yr

*Mamata Banerjee had earlier announced opening of the outlets in London and China*

OUR CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA: If things go according to plan, the state government is going to set up a Biswa Bangla outlet at Kunming Changshui International Airport in China this July.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in this regard was signed recently in the state administrative headquarters at Nabanna. It may be recalled that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had earlier announced opening of Biswa Bangla outlet in London and China respectively.

It was learnt that masks from Purulia and South Dinajpur, sital pati of Cooch Behar, dokra, Muslim saree and Muslim outfits will be displayed in the stall. The famous sitabhog and mihidana, sweets from Burdwan that have recently got GI tag would also be displayed at the Biswa Bangla stall.

A Chinese delegation had attended the Bengal Global Business Summit (BGBS) held in January and expressed its willingness to invest in Bengal. After BGBS, a Chinese had come to the city and held talks with businessmen and senior officials of the Industry department. Senior state government officials felt that opening of the stall would start a new chapter and would



showcase some of the typical products from Bengal.

It may be mentioned that Biswa Bangla stalls that have been set up in Dakshinapan and Park Street have got both domestic and foreign buyers. It may be recalled that after coming to power in 2011, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee took special measures to revive the nearly forgotten products like Muslim and sital pati along with utensils made of bell-metal.

The mask industry of Purulia and South Dinajpur also witnessed a revival. The artisans were looked after. The weavers who produced Muslins for generations were not only taken care of but also given elaborate training by reputed fashion designers.

Now, along with Muslim sarees, kurtas, pyjamas, tops for women, pillow covers and bed linens have become immensely popular.

A senior official of the Park Street outlet said jewellery made of Muslins have become popular and

the bright coloured shirts and kurtas of the same material are gaining great popularity these days.

He further added that the Biswa Bangla stall in Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International airport has been doing remarkably well.

He felt that an outlet in China or London would give extra mileage to Bengal's indigenous products. It may be mentioned that at the Biswa Bangla convention centre which is coming up at New Town, there will be another outlet too.

### MEDICAL NEGLIGENCE

## Mob ransacks pvt hospital at Ranaghat after death of 2

OUR CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA: A mob went on a rampage and ransacked a private hospital at Ranaghat in Nadia alleging medical negligence that led to the death of two patients.

The incident triggered tension in the area and a huge contingent of police rushed to the spot to bring the situation under control. The private hospital authorities lodged a complaint with the police in this regard. A police picket has been set up inside the hospital. The hospital authorities, however, denied the allegation of medical negligence. This incident had prompted the senior police officers to reach the spot.

The mob carried out destruction for nearly two hours on Tuesday morning before the police reached the spot and took control of the situation. The incident took place at Avenue Hospital in Ranaghat. The relatives of the deceased demanded the arrest of the accused doctors who had treated the two patients. The mob also attacked the residence of a doctor in this connection.

Namita Das (28) who was admitted to the hospital with abdominal pain died in the hospital on Tuesday morning. It was learnt that the woman had undergone surgery at the

hospital a few months ago. She was first admitted to the hospital around six months ago. She was later released after her condition improved following a surgery. After returning home, the patient again developed some complications and was taken to the hospital a few days ago. The family members of the victim were informed by the hospital authorities on Tuesday morning that the patient had died. This had infuriated the relatives and they started ransacking the furniture of the hospital.

In another incident, a 32-year-old woman Anita Pal was admitted to the hospital as she had a tumor in her body. She had undergone surgery in the hospital. It was alleged that the patient continued to bleed even after the surgery was conducted. The patient was transferred to another hospital where she died. As the news was broken to the family members of the victim, they became infuriated and joined the family members of the other victim to carry out the rampage. They alleged that Dr Nilanjana Moitra and Dr Ashoke Maltra were responsible for the death of the two patients. Police have started a detailed probe into the incident. They are yet to arrest anybody in this connection so far.

## 4 killed in 3 accidents in state

OUR CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA: Four persons were killed in three separate accidents that took place in the state.

In the first incident, a biker was crushed under the wheels of speeding truck. Two others riding in the pillion received severe injuries.

The incident took place near Gandahar village under Itahar police station of Raiganj in North Dinajpur on Tuesday morning. Police said that the victim has been identified as Najrul Mohammed (23) who was riding on a motorcycle with two others along National Highway 34 when a loaded truck lost control and hit the motorcycle from behind. After hitting the motorcycle, it rammied into another truck from behind.

The driver of that truck reportedly died in the incident.

The local residents rushed to the spot and took the injured victims to the Raiganj District Hospital where Najrul was declared brought dead. The other bikers were undergoing treatment with serious injuries.

The helper of the other truck was also reportedly injured in the incident.

Police are yet to identify the deceased truck driver. Police suspect that the accused driver might have fallen asleep at the time of the accident.

The incident created a huge traffic jam on the National Highway 34.

In another incident, a girl whose identity is yet to be ascertained by the police died after being run over by a train. The incident took place

on a railway bridge at Baltikuri area in Howrah.

The local residents alleged that many trains passed on the track after the accident took place. The matter was informed to the railway officials but it took long time to remove the body.

In the other incident a woman travelling in a bus was killed after it overturned. The incident took place in Mashankura area on the Cooch Behar Dinhatata state highway. The bus was going to Dinhatata from Siliguri.

Police said the bus driver lost control over the vehicle and it overturned.

The disaster management team and police rushed to the spot and rescued the injured persons. According to a senior official of the district, around 10 persons received injuries in the incident.

## State sets up Mukutmanipur Development Board

OUR CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA: The state Urban Development and Municipal Affairs department have set up Mukutmanipur Development Board for comprehensive development of the area, particularly tourism.

The area under the jurisdiction of the newly formed Mukutmanipur Development Authority (MDA) is 87.50 km. This includes 10 mouzas of Hirabandh block, 19 mouzas of Khatra block and 27 mouzas of Ranibandh block. MDA is headed by the District Magistrate of Bankura as its chairperson. The MLA from Ranibandh is the vice chairperson and SDO, Khatra is the executive officer.

The main purpose of MDA would be to develop tourism in vast areas surrounding Mukutmanipur. The planning area covers the Mukutmanipur dam, a well-known tourist spot with great scenic beauty, Pareshnath temple, Musafirana, a hillock beside the dam and Banpukhuria deer park. In addition to this, vast areas of Jangalmahal like Jhilmil Sutan and Talberia which are situated close to MDA will be developed as tourist spots. The areas have rich cultural heritage and there are artisans who can manufacture craft items from bamboo, babui grass etc. Attempts would be made to showcase the products made by local artisans.

### ON A MISSION



V Solomon Nesakumar, Deputy Commissioner (Traffic), flags off a bike rally as part of the Safe Life Save Drive mission

## Central grants to JU still low, will seek more grants: VC

KOLKATA: With Jadavpur University (JU) ranking fifth among universities in the country, its Vice-chancellor Prof Suranjana Das on Tuesday said it will appeal to the Centre for more financial grant to maintain its standard vis a vis central universities.

"We are competing with central universities mainly but our grant is meagre compared to theirs. While during the 12th Plan period the central varsities received Rs 200 crore-Rs 300 crore grant from the Centre, JU got just Rs 25 crore-Rs 27 crore from it," Das said here.

Eighty per cent of the university's annual budget is borne by the state government, he said. While JU has been ranked 12th in overall category, it secured the fifth spot among universities and the 9th position among engineering institutes in the HRD report.

"Among the state universities, we are the first only behind four central universities while among engineering colleges/institutes we are the ninth. This reflects the excellent standards maintained by JU and the constructive and creative thinking in the university where teachers, students and researchers work together. This is missing in other universities," Das, who had been formerly the V-C of Calcutta University, said.

JU, he said, has a strong inter-disciplinary teaching, learning process involving centres, faculty and students undertaking research.

With the institute securing the 12th place in overall category as a world class university (10 public and 10 private), he will also write to Centre for grant as a world class university.

Asked how the fund, if sanctioned, would be used, he said: "We need to upgrade our science laboratory to give more scope to my students." AGENCIES

## SONARPUR CASE

### Cops intensify search for mastermind



OUR CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA: The police intensified search for Qasem — the mastermind of the Sonarpur incident. Police suspect that he is well aware about the present whereabouts of all the other members of the Bangladeshi gang that had committed the crime.

Investigation revealed that an eight-member gang from Bangladesh had committed the heist. Police arrested one of the Bangladeshi dacoits, identified as Lablu Sardar, who told the police that the entire plan of dacoity was chalked by Qasem.

The latter is originally a resident of Bangladesh but he had managed to sneak into the country a few years ago. He had married Manjila Khan, who is a resident of Basanti in South 24 Parganas but he hardly put up there.

Manjila has been arrested and she told the cops that Qasem came home a week ago after a long time. Further investigation revealed that he came to Basanti to finalise the plan of committing the dacoity in the jewellery shop at Sonarpur after a recce in the area.

Since it is a congested area, Qasem had visited the place thrice to chalk out the escape

routes. He had contacted the gang from Bangladesh and the members had sneaked into the country through the porous border 10 days ago from Basirhat side in North 24 Parganas. He had briefed the plan to all the other members and it was decided that the entire operation had to be completed within only three minutes. The situation had gone against the dacoits as they took around six minutes to leave the shop after killing its owner, Deepak Debnath, when he was chasing them. Investigating officers came to know that it was Lablu, who had opened fire at Deepak.

From Lablu, the police got some information about the dacoits who are still at large. But Qasem will prove to be an important catch and he is the one who can disclose all the crucial details about the others since he knows about the others' whereabouts in details.

The police have also come to know that the same gang was involved in many other dacoity cases that took place in the state. Thus, the police will contact the Bangladesh Police if necessary to reach to the root of the crime.

Traders at Sonarpur went on a strike on Tuesday protesting against the incident.

## Guwahati woman accuses city-based bizman of rape

OUR CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA: A woman from Guwahati lodged an FIR against a city-based businessman complaining that she was raped by him.

The woman lodged a complaint with the Lake police station on Tuesday, on the basis of which police started the investigation.

In her complaint, the woman alleged that the man had not only raped her, but threatened that he would post some intimate videos of her on social media.

The victim woman even informed the matter to the wife of that businessman but his wife allegedly did not believe her and said that the victim woman was lying about her husband.

The woman later came to police station and discussed her problem with the investigators. The investigators advised her to lodge a complaint.

Police learnt that the woman, a student of cosmetology, came to Kolkata for her career. But she did not get the opportunity which she wanted.

The businessman, resident of Salt Lake, promised her of providing a good job. The accused took her to a guesthouse. She was given drugs, consuming which the woman became unconscious.

The businessman took that chance and allegedly raped her in that guesthouse. He also allegedly took some video footage of that woman.

Later, the woman was blackmailed by the man. He threatened the woman of posting those videos on social media if she refused to go with him in that guesthouse once again.

"We have started the investigation and will take necessary steps," the officer added.

## Trader hacked to death in Malda's Rabindra Avenue

OUR CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA: Some miscreants hacked a trader to death at Malda's Rabindra Avenue on Monday night. The victim was taken to Malda Medical College and Hospital, but the doctors declared him brought dead.

The local residents alleged that the incident took place at a spot which was close to English Bazar police station. The trader, identified as Subir Singh (35) was hacked there. His body was lying in a pool of blood. The police and the local residents took the body to hospital.

Police learnt that Singh, the owner of a juice-bar, was returning home at night after closing the Monday's busi-

ness. Some people stopped him on Rabindra Avenue and demanded extortion. Singh refused and threatened the miscreants saying that they would be handed over to the police. "After being threatened by the trader, those miscreants started to hack him with sharp weapons. He fell

on the ground and the criminals fled the spot," said a local resident. The investigators also learnt that the trader was threatened by the extortionists for money a few months ago. But he paid no heed to the threats. On Monday, the extortionists demanded money from him again and after a small

altercation, they killed him on the street. "We are really scared after that incident. A man was hacked to death by extortionists. This is really a scary incident," said another local resident. Rabindra Avenue is crowded area of Malda Town. But the area becomes less crowded after 11 pm. It was around 12 am when Singh was passing by that road. Those criminals were probably waiting for him to come.

"I will say the policemen are very active. It is not possible for policemen to protect everyone. But the residents have some basic duties. If any resident is getting threats from extortionists, he should inform it to the police without delay," a resident said.

## Youth shot dead by three delinquents

OUR CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA: A youth was shot dead by some unidentified miscreants in broad daylight at Serampore in Hooghly on Tuesday morning.

The victim, Sekh Alaudin was walking along a road at Rishra area when three miscreants came on a motorcycle and shot at him from a point blank range. The victim received bullet injuries on his head and fell on the road. The local residents heard a gun-shot and rushed to the spot. They found the victim in the pool of blood. The miscreants, however, fled immediately after the incident.

Police said that the victim stepped out of his house after receiving a phone call.



When the victim was walking on the road, the miscreants shot him from close quarters. The miscreants fired three rounds of bullets at the victim one of which pierced through his forehead while the other hit his head. The local residents told the police that miscreants were three in number and they came on a motorcycle. They stopped and shot him.

The victim was rushed to the Serampore Walsh Hospital where the doctors pronounced him brought dead. The body has been sent for the post-mortem

examination. Police have started a detailed probe in this regard. Police are yet to ascertain the cause of the incident.

According to the preliminary investigation, police suspect that a business rivalry might have led to the incident. Police suspect that the victim had engaged in a quarrel over filling up of a waterbody in the locality. Police are investigating if the fallout had led to the murder of the victim. Police have started identifying the accused who led the attack. Police have started raid to nab the culprits.

## Manager of a pvt firm beaten up

KOLKATA: A manager of a private firm was allegedly beaten up by a few locals after he opposed their attempt to fence a 14 acre disputed plot. The incident took place at Dumurjola in Howrah on Tuesday. The victim claimed that his company had purchased the piece of land where they had planned to construct a building. The locals who used to live on the plot have alleged that the company did not pay them the amount that they were promised as the price of the land. There was meeting with the local administration which turned futile. When the manager of the company reached the spot and opposed the fencing, he was beaten up and got injured.

MPOST



# India rejects any US role in resolving Indo-Pak issues

OUR CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI: India on Tuesday swiftly rejected any US role in resolving Indo-Pak issues, hours after American Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley suggested that the Trump administration may "find its place" in efforts to de-escalate Indo-Pak tension.

In a veiled snub, the external affairs ministry spokesperson in New Delhi said, the "government's position for bilateral redressal of all India-Pakistan issues in an environment free of terror and violence hasn't changed."

"We, of course, expect the international community and organisations to enforce international mechanisms and mandates concerning terrorism emanating from Pakistan, which continues to be the single biggest threat to peace and stability in our region and beyond." The spokesperson's comments came in response



Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Gopal Baglay

to a query on Haley's remarks at a press conference in New York that "it's absolutely right that this administration is concerned about the relationship between India and Pakistan and very much wants to see how we de-escalate any sort of conflict going forward."

Haley's remarks signalled an apparent change in the US stance of not engaging in Indo-Pak disputes.

A senior Indian-American member of the Trump Cabinet, Haley said she expects that the administration is going to be in talks and try and "find its place

to be a part of that (de-escalating tension)...We don't think, we should wait till something happens."

She made the remarks when asked if the US can make any effort to get India and Pakistan together for peace talks as tension between the two South Asian neighbours over Kashmir has risen.

"We very much think that we should be proactive in the way that we are seeing tensions rise and conflicts start to bubble up and so we want to see if we can be a part of that," Haley said.

## Would 'find place' in efforts to reduce Indo-Pak tensions: US

UNITED NATIONS: The US said on Tuesday that it would try and "find its place" in efforts to de-escalate Indo-Pak tensions and not wait till "something happens", indicating that President Donald Trump could play a role in such endeavours.

"It's absolutely right that this administration is concerned about the relationship between India and Pakistan and very much wants to see how we de-escalate any sort of conflict going forward," US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley told reporters here, signalling an apparent change in the US stance of not engaging in Indo-Pak disputes.

Haley, a senior Indian-American member of the Trump Cabinet, said she expects that the administration



US envoy to the UN Nikki Haley

is going to be in talks and try and "find its place to be a part of that (de-escalating tensions)". "We don't think, we should wait till something happens," she said while addressing a press conference after assuming the role of President of the Security Council for the month of April. She made the remarks when asked if the US can make any efforts to get India and Pakistan together for peace talks as tensions between the two South Asian neighbours over Kashmir have risen.

## Foreign tourists with e-visa can stay up to two months

OUR CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI: Foreign tourists visiting India on e-visa can now stay up to two months, instead of the earlier one, and enjoy double-entry benefits while those coming for treatment can avail triple-entry facility.

Home Minister Rajnath Singh said on Tuesday that a new liberalised visa regime has been rolled out by the government beginning April 1 under which tourists coming on e-visa can stay up to two months with double-entry benefits.

"Duration of stay on e-visa increased from 30 days to 60 days with double entry on tourist and business e-visas and triple entry on medical e-visa," he said in a statement.

Earlier, a tourist coming on e-visa could stay in India up to 30 days only.

With the double-entry benefits, tourists can visit neighbouring countries like Bhutan and can return to India within the stipulated time.

"The government has lib-



Home Minister Rajnath Singh

eralised its visa regime to promote tourism, business travel and attract potential investors to the country," Singh said.

Effective April 1, e-visa has been sub-divided into three categories - e-tourist visa, e-business visa and e-medical visa.

The window for application under e-visa scheme has been increased from 30 days to 120 days.

Besides, both business and medical visas will be granted within 48 hours of application upon urgent requests.

The Home Minister said separate immigration counters and facilitation desks at assist

medical tourists have been provided at six major Indian airports.

The airports are Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad.

A new category of visa - Film (F) visa has also been introduced with maximum duration of one-year with multiple entry facility.

Another category of visa, titled Intern (I) Visa, has been rolled out for foreigners intending to pursue internship in India. Singh said e-visa facility has been extended to the nationals of 161 countries for entry through 24 airports and three Indian seaports. The seaports are Cochin, Goa and Mangalore.

The multiple entry tourist and business visas for a period of five years will now be available to nationals of most of the countries. Nine-four Missions having bio-metric enrolment facilities have started giving five-year tourist and business visas. The remaining Missions will be providing this facility in due course.

## Gave approval to Aircel-Maxis deal in normal course of biz: Chidambaram

OUR CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI: Former Finance Minister P Chidambaram on Tuesday said he had granted approval to the Aircel-Maxis deal "in the normal course of business."

"In the Aircel-Maxis case, taking into account the face value of the foreign investment, the FIPB (Foreign Investment Promotion Board) submitted the case to the Finance Minister and sought approval.

"As FM, I granted approval in the normal course of business," he said in a statement.

Chidambaram's remarks comes a day after the Supreme



Court asked the CBI to file status report on the probe being carried out on various aspects of the Aircel-Maxis deal. During the brief hearing on Monday, BJP leader Subramanian Swamy had told the bench that

he has received a reply from CBI stating that it was probing "all angles", including the FIPB clearance given to the deal by the then Finance Minister Chidambaram in 2006.

Swamy had said CBI should be asked to file a status report in the case. In his application, Swamy has alleged that Chidambaram had illegally granted FIPB clearance to the deal in 2006. He claimed that the former finance minister had given FIPB clearance to a deal that should have been referred to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), headed by the Prime Minister, as it alone was empowered

to clear foreign investments of over Rs 600 crore. "The money transaction involved in the process was around Rs 3,500 crore. FIPB clearance was given by the then finance minister, who should have sent it to the CCEA as the investment was way over Rs 600 crore," he had said.

In his statement on Tuesday, Chidambaram said FIPB consists of five Secretaries and that they examine the cases and recommend approval or rejection. They "apply the rules/guidelines" and submit each case to the CCEA or Finance Minister depending upon the value of the investment, he added.

OUR CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court has sought response from the Centre and the Uttar Pradesh government on a plea challenging the constitutional validity of provisions of RTE Act, mandating unaided private schools to reserve 25 per cent in nursery classes to children from weaker sections.

A bench of Justices Dipak Misra and A M Khanwilkar issued notice to the Union government and Uttar Pradesh government seeking their reply to the PIL in four weeks.

The plea has been filed by petitioner NGO Independent Schools Federation of India

which said that the apex court has upheld the validity of 25 per cent reservation in private schools for the children between the age group of 6 to 14 years.

He claimed that even after the apex court verdict, the states are forcing private schools to also admit children below the age of six years in nursery classes despite that there is no constitutional obligation.

"Any such extension of reservation to children below the age of 6 years would re-open challenge to such 25 per cent reservation as there is no such constitutional obligation under Article 21-A of Constitution," advocate Ravi Prakash Gupta

appearing for the NGO said. The petitioner NGO has also challenged other provisions of Right to Education Act which define 'disadvantaged groups' and 'weaker section' and give power to the states to declare any group of children as belonging to backward classes.

It has been contended in the PIL that by 93rd Constitutional amendment, Parliament has been empowered to make reservations with respect to private schools only in favour of backward classes and SC and ST. But by the RTE Act the benefit has been extended to any class of persons so declared by states to be belonging to 'disadvantaged groups' which

is impermissible as per the Constitution.

It said that reservation in favour of weaker section is prone to abuse by authorities as 95 per cent people in India transact in cash and do not file IT returns.

The plea has contended that states do not have power to identify any backward class and the power only rests with backward class commission whose report shall be presented in Parliament.

But under the RTE Act, states have been "unconstitutionally" given power which may lead to political appeasement of any group or class, it said.

A further Development in Bankura, the land of laterite  
In the presence of

# Mamata Bandyopadhyay

Hon'ble Chief Minister, Government of West Bengal

**Inauguration of a cluster of projects, laying of foundation stones and providing services**

5 April, 2017 • Venue: Shunuk Pahari Ground • Time: 2 p.m.

### Inauguration

Administrative Building of Bankura University • Newly- constructed bridge over the river Bhairabnaki on Krishnapur-Raipur —Phulkusma-Benagoria Road (State Highway-9) • Bishnupur Youth Hostel • Training and Marketing Centre for Self-Help Group at Ailakandi in Bankura-I Block •Karmatirtha at Katiam in Ranibandh Block and at Ailakandi in Bankura-I Block • Up gradation of roads of Bibarda-Harmasra-Pathardanga in Taldangra and simlapal Block, of Taldangra-Asna-Onda Road in Taldangra and Onda Block and 3 metalled road in Onda Block • Roads: 1 in Patrasayar Block, 3 in Indpur Block, 1 in Ranibandh Block, 1 in Khatra Block, 1 in Joypur Block, 1 in Raipur Block, 20 in Simlapal Block, 1 in Sonamukhi Block, 1 in Taldangra Block, 1 in Gangajalghati Block, 1 in Mejia Block, 3 in Sarenga Block and 2 in Bankura-II Block • Jaltirtha at Dharampur and Bansi Mouza in Indpur Block and at Buriyam Mouza in Ranibandh Block • Class Room, Science Lab, Computer Room, Library Room and Art Culture Room in Bankura Town School, at Mejia High School in Mejia Block, at Pirhrabani High School in Gangajalghati Block, at Phulkusma Nityabala Girls' High School in Raipur Block, at Chyangdoba High School in Jaipur Block, at Chandra High School in Shaltora Block, at Puran Pani High School in Ranibandh Block, at Majuria Baish Patra High School in Sarenga Block, at Garhkotalpur Rabindra Vidya Niketan in Onda Block, and at Ichharia High School in Sonamukhi Block • Jim Allison Collection Books in the Central Library of Bankura University • Check Dam at Matranga in Indpur Block, Gopalpur in Jaipur Block, Botha Canal in Sarenga Block, Chanaknayan in Kotalpur Block and at Kamala in Simlapal Block • Renovation of Nargashole Check Dam in Khatra Block • Mini Indoor Stadia at Gargaria Subhas High School in Sarenga Block, Onda Police Station College and Onda High School • Office with 100 MT Storage Godown of S K U S Ltd. of Sarenga region • 3 Anganwadi Centres in Sarenga Block • Indoor Buildings of Simlapal Block Primary Health Centre and Lakshmisagar Primary Health Centre • New School Building along with Hostel at Kanthalia in Ranibandh Block • Development Office for members of the Scheduled Tribes in Jhilimili • Girl's Hostel for Chhendapathar SKST High School in Ranibandh Block • Hostel for tribal students of Shaltora Netaji Centenary College • Hermitage Hostel for Kartik Orang Natungram Sareskhanali Sammilani Adibasi High School in Onda Block • Dwelling Units for CCL Boys belonging to Bishnupur Sumangalam Home • Additional Class-room and Dining Hall of Haludkanali SC High School • Narayanpur Primary School • Saburbandh Junior High School • Shyampur Primary School • Intensive Development Project at Sagarvanga Village in Raipur Block • Bhutsahar Handloom Development Project in the Common Facility Centre, Bhutsahar in Simlapal Block • Talbandi Tank Digging Project for members of the tribal community of Nakajhuri Gram Panchayat in Onda Block • First Phase of re-digging of the Samudrabandh in Jaipur Block.

### Laying of Foundation Stones

Beautification and infrastructural development of adjacent area of the reservoir of Kangsabati at Mukutmonipur. • ITI at Onda and Indus Block • Students hostel and Bijnan Bhavan at Bankura University • 3 higher Primary health centres at Municipal area of Bankura • 2nd phase of Gobindanagar bus terminus at Bankura Municipality • Hetia bus terminus at Joypur Block • 50 bedded building for destitute people at Bankura Municipality • 1 underground and 5 overhead reservoirs for supply of drinking water in Bankura Municipality • Pipeline for drinking water at Sonamukhi • Karmatirtha at Shaltora, Gangajalghati, Joypur and Indus Blocks • Shilpatirtha and Karmatirtha at Mukutmonipur • Marketing centre for natural fiber development project in Circuit House adjacent area at Bankura Town • Ceramic Development Centre at Panchmura in Taldangra Block • Up gradation and widening of road from Santashram to Khosbag at Indus Block • Renovation and upgradation of road from Mukutmonipur to Baroghutu Tourist centre • Roads : 1 at Sonamukhi Block, 1 at Indus Block, 1 at Onda Block, 10 at Simlapal Block, 1 at Taldangra Block, 1 at Mejia Block, 1 at Santor Grampanchayet, 3 at Sarenga Block and from Danga Bus stop of Bankura to Amader Hospital • Strengthening of Saltora — Murulia Road • Expansion and strengthening of Chandrokona —Goaltor-Sarenga roads, Taldangra — Panchmura-Chowbeta Roads and Simlapal-Khatra Roads • Bridge over the canal Shaldah on Taldangra —Panchmura — Choubeta road • Auditorium and Marriage Hall in Shaltora Block • Submersible pumps at 10 locations in Simlapal Block • Duck-farms at Bamunpathor in Simlapal Block, at Jhilimili in Ranibandh Block and at Jatadum Barrage in Raipur Block • Eco-tourism at Sutan, Talberia Dam and Jhilimili in Ranibandh Block • Barhkola Check-dam over Kalaboni Jorh, Malbera Jorh, Sindrium Jorh, Laledi Jorh, Dudhenala Jorh, Kathalia Jorh & Bansol Jorh in Ranibandh Block and Chanitorh Check —dam in Chhatna Block • Drumstick farming project at Hamargarah Village in Raipur Block • Staff Quarter in Sonamukhi Block • Tissue Culture Date Palm Gardens at Napitbandh, Punishole, Perera, Brindaboni and Tumka Village in Onda Block.

### Providing Services

Kanyasree • Sabujisree • Sabujisathi • Sikshasree • Necessary equipments for Sericulture • Items for personal use for the students of Asram — Hostel • Anandadhara • Old age Pension for the Artisans • Hearing Aids • Swami Vivekananda Swanirbhar Karmasanthan Prakalpa • Sports Equipments • Nets, Containers, Thermo-insulated boxes for preserving fishes and cycles fitted with thermo-insulated boxes for preserving fishes • Dhamsa —Madol • Bonbhumi Patta • Krishi Patta • Aamar Phasol Aamar Gola • Relief & Rehabilitation • Social Security Scheme for the Building & other Construction workers and Transport workers. • Lok Prasarakolpa • Gotidhara • Term Loan • Horticulture.

### Dignitaries to be present

Sri Shyamal Santra, Hon'ble Minister, Government of West Bengal  
Sri Indranil Sen, Hon'ble Minister, Government of West Bengal  
Srimati Deb Barma (Moon Moon Sen), Hon'ble MP  
Sri Soumitra Khan, Hon'ble MP  
Sri Arup Chakraborty, Hon'ble Sabhadhipati

Sri Swapan Bauri, Hon'ble MLA  
Srimati Jyotsna Mandi, Hon'ble MLA  
Sri Birendra Nath Tudu, Hon'ble MLA  
Sri Samir Chakraborty, Hon'ble MLA  
Sri Arup Kumar Khan, Hon'ble MLA  
Sri Gurupada Mete, Hon'ble MLA

Sri Tushar Kanti Bhattacharya, Hon'ble MLA  
Srimati Sampa Daripa, Hon'ble MLA  
Sri Subhasish Batabyal, Vice Chairman,  
West Bengal Agro Industries Corporation Limited  
Sri Basudeb Bandyopadhyay, Chief Secretary,  
Government of West Bengal

Department of Information & Cultural Affairs Government of West Bengal

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LIQUOR BAN ALONG HIGHWAYS

# States divided on political lines

OUR CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI: The ideological differences among political parties have cropped up as a major roadblock among the states to take a united call on seeking a relook at the Supreme Court's verdict banning liquor vends within 500 metres of national and state highways.

The apex court order passed last week also recorded that eight states, which are ruled by parties other than the BJP, had rushed to it for modification of the December 15, 2016 verdict.

The states which had approached the apex court for modification of its verdict were Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Sikkim, Telangana, Meghalaya and Andhra Pradesh. Besides, the union territory of Puducherry has also sought changes in the judgement.

Later, Andhra Pradesh withdrew its application say-

ing the state government has accepted the last year's judgement. Eighteen states have preferred not to file any application against the verdict.

While the Centre through senior advocates Ajit Kumar Sinha and AK Panda had "unequivocally" asserted that the union government stands by the judgment rendered by this court on December 15, 2016, Attorney General Mukul Rohatgi, who appeared for Tamil Nadu government, had assailed the directives for doing away with vends along 500 metre radius of national and state highways.

"The judgment rendered by this court has transgressed the limitations on the constitutional power conferred by Article 142," Rohatgi had said. Various contentions for modification of the order raised by the Attorney General were not agreed to by a bench headed by Chief Justice J S Khehar which



A closed liquor shop in Bhubaneswar on Tuesday

said that "the error, in the submission of the Attorney General, lies in comparing national and state highways".

"Moreover, it is urged that even if the prohibitions were to apply to both national and state highways, an exemption ought to be provided for the location of liquor shops in municipal

areas through which the state highways traverse," the bench noted, adding, "Alternately, it was urged that a smaller prohibition in terms of distance would be appropriate in relation to state highways. The Attorney General has confined his submission to the state highways only."

## Many states mull denotification of NHs to 'safeguard' revenues

NEW DELHI: Taking a cue from Rajasthan government's move to denotify certain sections of state highways passing through populous towns, several states are mulling to denotify highways to "safeguard" their revenue. According to a senior official of Road, Transport and Highways Ministry, the department has received "several requests" from some states to convert National Highways as district roads apparently to protect revenues.

Among the states considering moving court is Goa, whose Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar said his government is contemplating approaching the Supreme Court for proper clarification (on the order), and possibly (seek) some special

consideration for the state.

Kerala too is considering going to the Supreme Court to "seek time" for implementation of its order. Meanwhile, Chhattisgarh government has constituted an 11-member committee to study the excise policy of other states where liquor is banned or is being sold under supervision. Some road stretches were denotified in Rajasthan but officials said that it had nothing to do with the apex court order. In Delhi, the Road, Transport and Highways ministry officials are in a fix as they have received peculiar requests to denotify highways when the Centre plans to take length of such roads to 2 lakh km from the existing about 1 lakh km. **MP05T**

## Meanwhile, man behind ban 'keeps getting threats'



CHANDIGARH: Harman Sidhu, who led a campaign against liquor vends on highways and drunken driving, has said that he keeps getting threat calls but would like to take them in his stride.

"I keep getting such calls. There is nothing new," he said.

47-year-old Sidhu's campaign had recently led to the Supreme Court ordering shut down of liquor shops and bars within 500 metres of highways across the country. When asked to comment

on the nature of threat calls, Sidhu said, "Some callers say 'hume apko haar pehanane hai' (we want to garland your photo after your death). I just try to take all this in my stride."

On being asked whether he had demanded any security from the government, he said, "One-and-a-half years back, I had requested the Chandigarh administration in this regard, but they thought it was not required. Afterwards, I was provided with two personal security officers by the Punjab and Haryana High Court. I am satisfied with that."

When contacted, Chandigarh SSP Eish Singhal on Tuesday said that Sidhu had been provided two PSOs. Asked if Sidhu had lodged a complaint against receiving threat calls, Singhal said, "So far, we have not received any complaint from him". **AGENCIES**

## BJP demands sacking of Lalu's minister son Tej Pratap

OUR CORRESPONDENT

PATNA: Senior Bihar BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi on Tuesday demanded Chief Minister Nitish Kumar sack his Environment and Forest Minister Tej Pratap Yadav for his alleged involvement in the "soil purchase scam".

Modi, the former Deputy Chief Minister, also asked the CM to order probe into the alleged "soil purchase scam" of worth Rs 90 lakh.

"Chief Minister Nitish Kumar should order a high level probe into the 'soil purchase scam' in which Tej Pratap Yadav is involved. CM should sack Yadav from his cabinet without making any delay," Modi said while talking to reporters here on the sidelines of 'Janata Darbar' at his official residence.

Modi charged Lalu Prasad's minister-son Tej Pratap Yadav of giving contract of Rs 90 lakh for earth filling work in Sanjay Gandhi Biological Park located in the state capital.

## Geetha Johri becomes Gujarat's first woman DGP

OUR CORRESPONDENT

AHMEDABAD: Senior IPS officer Geetha Johri was on Tuesday appointed as the new Gujarat DGP following the resignation of incumbent P P Pandey.

The 1982-batch IPS officer is the first woman to become the Gujarat police chief. At present, the 59-year-old is the Managing Director of Gujarat State Police Housing Corporation (GSPHC), a post she will continue to hold. Making the announcement at Gandhinagar, Minister of State for Home Pradeepsinh Jadeja said the government has accepted the resignation of Pandey.

Johri will replace Pandey, who had to put in his papers after his appointment was challenged by former top cop Julio Riberio in the Supreme Court.

Riberio had filed a plea seeking a direction for removal of Pandey on several grounds including that CBI had filed charge sheet against him and others in the case of alleged fake encounter killing of Mum-



Geetha Johri taking over as the state's director general of police at Gandhinagar on Tuesday

bai girl Ishrat Jahan. He had also challenged Pandey's extension as in-charge DGP.

"We have accepted the resignation of P P Pandey. Our Chief Minister Vijay Rupani today appointed Geetha Johri, the senior most IPS officer at present, as the new DGP in-charge of Gujarat," said Jadeja.

The minister said Johri would continue to serve as the MD of GSPHC. On Monday, Pandey, a 1980 batch Gujarat-cadre IPS officer, expressed his willingness to step down, an offer accepted by the state government. As per the government records, Johri was born

on November 28, 1957.

Talking to the media after being appointed to the top post, she said her priority will be to address problems faced by women and to maintain law and order. In her career spanning almost 35 years, Johri has seen many ups and downs.

In the beginning of her career, she shot into limelight while serving as DCP in the city during mid 1990s.

At that time, she raided the den of slain underworld don Abdul Latif in highly sensitive Dariyapur area and managed to catch Latif's key aide Sharif Khan.

## Pak violates truce along LoC, 3rd in 24 hrs

OUR CORRESPONDENT

JAMMU: Pakistani troops violated the ceasefire and shelled forward posts and civilian areas along the Line of Control (LoC) in Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir on Tuesday, the third such violation in 24 hours.

"Pakistani Army initiated indiscriminate firing of small arms, automatic and mortar shells from 1100 hours on Tuesday on Indian Army posts along the LoC in Bhimber Gali (BG) sector of Rajouri district," a defence spokesman said.

Army troops deployed on forward posts retaliated strongly and effectively, the spokesman said, adding the exchange of firing continued till last reports came in.

Tuesday's ceasefire violation is the third such incident



A villager showing part of a mortar after heavy shelling from Pakistan at the Bhimber Gali sector near the LoC in Rajouri on Tuesday

in less than 24 hours along the LoC in Rajouri and Poonch districts.

On Monday, Pakistani troops had resorted to firing and shelling of mortar bombs on forward posts in Balakote sector of Rajouri district from 1100 hours and it continued for some hours.

## Stop backing militancy in J&K: Mehbooba to Pak

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti today asked Pakistan to stop backing militancy in the state and enable restoration of peace so that a dialogue process could begin. "It is my appeal to those across (the border) that they should renew the policy of not supporting militancy or the gun that they had adopted during (Prime Minister A B) Vajpayee's time," she said addressing an election meeting in Dooru in Anantnag constituency.

"Help us restore peace in J&K and then talks will take place here and across (PoK) as well," she added. **AGENCIES**

## NATION BRIEFS

### RAILWAYS PIPS TARGET, HAULS RECORD 1.107 BILLION TONNES OF CARGO

NEW DELHI: In a major boost to the policy framework of Railways Minister Suresh Prabhu, the national transporter has hauled 1.107 billion tonnes of cargo in the year ended March 31, surpassing its most recent target of 1.094 billion tonnes for fiscal 2017. During the financial year 2016-17, Railways has also marked a highest ever in creating railway infrastructures which would lead the country much ahead. The railways has commissioned 2855 kms of new lines, gauge conversion and doubling of tracks.

### FISHERMEN TO PARTICIPATE IN APRIL 7 TRIPARTITE TALKS IN SRI LANKA

RAMESWARAM (TN): Fishermen of various Associations in Tamil Nadu today said their representatives would participate in the tripartite talks between India and Sri Lanka in the island nation on April 7. Among their demands would be release of 141 boats still under Sri Lankan custody. If this was not done, fishermen from all over the state would leave to Katchatheevu islet and launch an indefinite fast, Rameswaram Fishermen's Association leader P Sesuraja and secretary of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry Fishermen's Association N J Bose, told reporters.

### VIOLENCE AFTER RAM NAVAMI

### POSTERS TORN IN BIHAR'S NAWADA

NAWADA (BIHAR): Mischreants on Tuesday tore up posters and flags of Ram Navami festivity triggering stone pelting on members of a community, an official said. As the news of tearing up of posters and flags spread, a mob gathered on the spot and pelted stones on members of a particular community, Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) Rajesh Kumar said. A large number of vehicles were stranded on NH-31 and nearby state highway due to stone pelting incident, the SDO said.

### RAMAN SINGH REVIEWS DEVELOPMENT WORK IN NAXALITE-HIT AREAS

RAIPUR: Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Raman Singh has stressed on effective implementation of development schemes in Naxal-hit areas and said laxity on this front will not be tolerated. Singh took stock of implementation of government schemes and ongoing developing works in Bastar region during a meeting with officials in Sukma district last night. During the meeting, the chief minister stressed on effective implementation of development schemes in Naxal-hit areas so that people get benefits meant for them, an official statement said here on Tuesday.

## No respite from heat despite rain, snowfall in parts of north

NEW DELHI: Most parts of the country witnessed heatwave conditions on Tuesday despite snowfall in hilly regions of Jammu and Kashmir and scattered rainfall in some areas of other northern states.

The country's highest temperature (43.2 degrees Celsius) was recorded in Khajuraho followed by Wardha (Maharashtra) 43, and Daltonganj (Jharkhand) at 42.9. In Delhi, which witnessed cloudy and sunny patches through the day and light rainfall by the evening, the maximum temperature was recorded at 36.3 degrees Celsius while the minimum was 21.8.

The weather department has forecast likelihood of rain,

duststorm and thunderstorm in Delhi and NCR for Wednesday due to an active western disturbance across northwest India. The IMD in an evening bulletin said heatwave conditions were observed at most places across the country while severe heatwave conditions were observed at a few places over West Rajasthan, at many places over East Rajasthan, at a few places over Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi and East UP. Rajasthan's Pilani (7 mm) and Churu (5 mm) also received light rain.

The maximum temperature continued to hover above normal across Haryana and Punjab even as several parts of the two states received rains. **AGENCIES**

## ED giving out 'concocted' value of assets seized, alleges Virbhadra

OUR CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI: Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh on Tuesday accused the Enforcement Directorate of "concocting" facts and giving out a "concocted" value of the assets seized by the agency in connection with its money laundering probe against him and others.

"While one expected political opponents to distort facts to drive political mileage, it is a matter of grave concern that a responsible government agency is behaving in such a manner and spreading a canard against me," he claimed. Singh's reaction came in the wake of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) attaching a farmhouse here having a market value of Rs 27 crore.

The agency alleged the property in the upmarket south Delhi area of Dera Mandi near Mehrauli was purchased "out of laundered money through shell firms". **AGENCIES**

NEW DELHI: Continuing its crackdown on shell companies and money laundering, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday arrested two people and attached properties worth over Rs 100 crore in multiple locations across the country.

The ED arrested G. Dhanaanajaya Reddy from Bengaluru and K. Liakath Ali from Chennai in separate cases of alleged money laundering. It attached assets worth over Rs 61 crore in the multi-crore synthetic drug racket case in Punjab, while in Chhattisgarh it attached assets worth Rs 36 crore of suspended IAS officer B.L. Agrawal, who is alleged to have laundered money through numerous fake bank accounts.

The agency also attached assets worth Rs 5 crore in connection with the money laundering case against Surat-based "hawala operator" Afrooz Fatta



Suspended IAS officer B L Agrawal

and his associates. Informing about the twin arrests, an ED official said that Reddy had floated more than 20 shell companies and obtained loans through dubious means.

An engineering graduate from Bengaluru, Reddy defrauded United Bank of India of Rs 70 crore by "submitting forged or fake documents and by impersonation".

Facing three cases under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), he was sent to two days' ED custody

by a Bengaluru court.

The second accused Liakath Ali - nabbed from Chennai - was involved in cheating Indian Bank, Thousand Lights Branch, Chennai, using eight shell companies and remitted \$11,778,120 (Rs 78 crore) out of India, against forged Bill of Entries without effecting any actual imports, said the official.

Ali and his brother Elyias Peer Mohamed masterminded the fraud by opening fictitious accounts in the names of shell companies like Galaxy Impex, Green International, and Snow City and Company.

The agency attached over Rs 36 crore worth of properties of Agarwal, who was the Principal Secretary (Higher Education) in the Chhattisgarh government, and was arrested by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The attached property belongs to Agarwal and Raipur-based Prime Ispat Ltd, a company owned by his brothers.

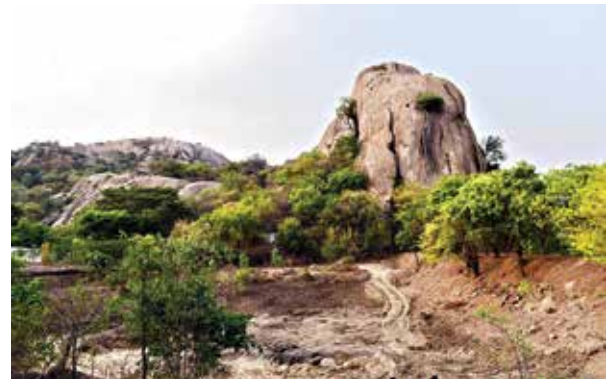
## After 42 years, Ramgarh of Sholay fame to come alive for visitors

OUR CORRESPONDENT

RAMANAGARAM (KTAKA): The Sholay magic is set to be recreated in the rocky terrains of Ramanagaram with plans afoot to bring alive the trail-blazing characters, 42 years after they were immortalised in the iconic Bollywood film.

A Rs 7.5 crore proposal has been mooted to establish "Sholay-the-3D Virtual Reality Village" for cine lovers on a locale at Ramadevara Betta that was popularly known as Ramgarh where the blockbuster film was shot by Ramesh Sippy in a dacoit-gangland setting. The place, about 50 km south-west of Bengaluru, is a paradise for trekking, rock climbing and photo shooting.

The main purpose of establishing the virtual village is to enthral visitors using goggles, virtual reality headsets, laser disc-based systems, VR-3D, audio and visual equipment



A view on Tuesday of Ramadevara Betta (Mountain) near Bengaluru where the iconic film Sholay's village Ramgarh was pictured

and multiple screens, an official said here.

Seven hills are located within a 10 km radius of Ramanagaram, including Ramadevara betta, where Gabbar Singh, played by the late Amjad Khan in the antagonist role in the 1975 film, was pictured.

Gabbar Singh's dacoit role

ture reserve area, but outside it.

The virtual village will bring the film's characters to life through three-dimensional (3D) printing and Virtual Reality (VR) technology, a top district official said.

The virtual actors will come to life and deliver world famous punchlines in the film, and the visitors can deliver the following dialogues, the official said.

"When Gabbar Singh says Kitne aadmi they.... the visitors can immediately deliver the dialogue that follows 'do sarkar'... 'woh do they aur tum teen,'" the official said, reminiscing a scene when Gabbar Singh attacks the village for the first time in the film.

The plan is for either the district administration entering into a partnership with Sippy Productions and other private agencies under a PPP model or for the government taking up the project on its own, the official said.

The project, however, will not be established in the vul-

## Amonkar cremated with full state honours; PM mourns loss

OUR CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI: Renowned Hindustani classical vocalist Kishori Amonkar, who passed away on Monday night, was cremated here on Tuesday with full state honours. Those who attended the cremation at the Dadar crematorium included Maharashtra cultural affairs minister Vinod Tawde, santoor maestro Pandit Shivkumar Sharma, musician Abhijit Pohankar, actor Vikram Gokhale, acclaimed percussionist Taufiq Qureshi and noted playback singer Suresh Wadkar.

Singer Mahesh Kale and theatre and film director Vijaya Mehta also paid their tributes to Amonkar, whose body was draped in the national tricolour before the cremation. Amonkar's eldest son Nihar lit the funeral pyre.

Paying his tributes, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the demise of Amonkar (84) is an irreparable loss to the Indian classical music.



File photo of Hindustani classical singer Kishori Amonkar

"Deeply pained by her demise. May her soul rest in peace. The works of Kishori Amonkar will always remain popular among people for years to come," he tweeted.

Amonkar's body was kept at the Ravindra Natya Mandir in Prabhadevi area to enable people to pay their last respects and was then taken to Dadar crematorium for the last rites.

Born on April 10, 1932 in Mumbai, Amonkar was recognised as one of the foremost singers in the Hindustani tradition and as an innovative exponent of the Jaipur gharana.



## YOGI GOVT'S 1ST CABINET MEET

# CM sets 3-month deadline for dev works in Varanasi

OUR CORRESPONDENT

LUCKNOW: Setting a three-month deadline to complete ongoing development works in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday issued a slew of directions to authorities to spruce up Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Lok Sabha constituency.

In his first meeting to review the ongoing projects in Varanasi, the Chief Minister instructed that work should be taken up on a war footing so that they are visible on the ground in three months' time. Adityanath said he will himself visit the temple town in May for an inspection, officials said.

The chief minister asked the officials to take necessary steps for giving a facelift to the area around the renowned Kashi Vishwanath temple.

Cautioning officials against any laxity, Adityanath said the progress of the projects in the city does not match the allocation of the funds by the central government, they said.

He suggested setting up a cow shelter in Varanasi on the lines of Kanha Upvan in Lucknow. The shelter home for cows and stray animals is run by an NGO supported by Samajwadi Party patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav's daughter-in-law Aparna



UP CM Yogi Adityanath arrives for Cabinet meeting in Lucknow on Tuesday

Yadav.

Reviewing the projects in power, urban development, tourism, PWD, housing and urban planning, irrigation, Varanasi Development Authority and NHAI, the Chief Minister instructed senior officials to work out the problems that are delaying their completion.

He said work on bridges must be completed in a fixed time frame and Railways department's help must be sought in case of pending overbridges.

He said Urban Development Minister Suresh Khanna will inspect the works soon.

During the recent Assembly election campaign, Modi's rivals had alleged that he had failed to

deliver on his 2014 poll promise of developing Varanasi on the pattern of Japanese city of Kyoto. The BJP had alleged that the then Samajwadi Party government was hindering development of the district.

To address the problem of traffic snarls, Adityanath on Tuesday gave his nod for a multi-level parking and four laning of roads. He expressed his unhappiness over digging of roads for various works and then leaving them unattended.

He sought a detailed project reports for two-lane road on Panchkosi Marg and viability of multi-storey building for people residing around railway tracks, the officials said.

## Govt denies 'overzealous' crackdown on abattoirs

LUCKNOW: The UP government on Tuesday denied any "overzealous" crackdown by authorities on abattoirs in the state and stated there would be no compromise on illegal slaughterhouses. Health Minister Sidharth Nath Singh said: "There will be no compromise on illegal slaughterhouses. The ones that have applied for renewal of licenses would be considered and their licences would be renewed." He said that so far 26 illegal abattoirs have been sealed by the authorities and added that there has been no "overzealous" crackdown.

MPOST

# Yogi govt to go after cheating mafia

OUR CORRESPONDENT

LUCKNOW: Aiming to curb the activities of "cheating mafia", the Yogi Adityanath led Uttar Pradesh government has directed officials to blacklist centres where mass copying takes place and register FIRs in this regard.

The newly elected BJP government has also decided that FIRs would also be registered against government teachers who are found running private coaching institutions.

The state government has decided to come up with guidelines to curtail exorbitant school fees charged by private schools and colleges. In a meeting which Chief Minister Adityanath held with education department officials, it was decided that school examinations should be held over a span of 15 days and the results out in the next 15 days.

"The endeavour of the government will be to ensure that examinations are held timely and on the other hand, efforts will also be made to curb cheating and use of unfair means during examinations," an official spokesperson of the Uttar Pradesh government said.

He added that the government would act tough on examination centres from where instances of copying are



reported and also against persons involved in mass copying. "The state government will blacklist such centres and register FIRs," the spokesperson added. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, watched a presentation of the Education Department at Shastri Bhawan, late last night where he "emphasised on the need to improve the quality and level of education, for which cheating mafia has to be effectively curbed", officials said.

In the meeting, the chief minister made clear his strict stance on coaching classes run by teachers of government schools and government-affiliated colleges. FIRs would be registered against such teachers, officials said. "Efforts should be made to ensure that the syllabus in schools in completed in 200 days. Attendance of teachers and students in the schools will be monitored using biometric devices. Apart from this, steps will be taken to ensure regular classes," the spokesperson said.

# Women activists want ban on anti-Romeo squads



Aruna Roy, Indira Jaising and Vrinda Grover (L-R)

OUR CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI: Demanding immediate ban on Anti-Romeo squads in Uttar Pradesh, women activists have alleged that the 'self-declared' volunteers of "Anti-Romeo Squads" are threat to women's freedoms.

"The serious issue of violence against women and routine sexual harassment of fairer sex in Uttar Pradesh cannot be addressed by setting up anti-Romeo squads. These 'squads' impose their own aggressive and arbitrary code through moral policing," the activists said in joint letter signed by imminent social activists, including Aruna Roy, Indira Jaising, Vrinda Grover, etc.

Highlighting the wrong doings of volunteers of social policing outfit, the activists said, "It has already come to light that in many cases these 'anti-romeo squads' have become an even greater source of harassment and fear for women and men. It has also been acknowledged by UP police in its March 22 order."

"We therefore strongly disapprove the process of this form of policing, including its outsourcing to private actors in some cases," they said, adding, "Maintaining law and order is primary function of the state and nothing can be done contrary to law in the name of addressing women's safety issue."

"The so-called Anti-Romeo squads are being encouraged by a state which reneges on its own obligations to maintain law and order. When the right to personal liberty and privacy is compromised by these squads, the state must be held fully accountable for such violations, and must be made to restore the dignity of the citizens," the joint letter said, which has been signed by 20 noted social activists.

The group has also demanded quashing of FIR and complaints against advocate Prashant Bhushan apart from setting up a prompt grievance redressal mechanism to deal with cases of sexual harassment.

# Govt's approach to poverty alleviation is comprehensive, asserts PM Modi

OUR CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi tonight said his government's approach towards poverty alleviation is "comprehensive" and "not isolated" as all key schemes are aimed at achieving this goal.

"Our approach to poverty alleviation is comprehensive not isolated. All key schemes are aimed at eliminating poverty," he said.

This came in response to a tweet by a follower who praised him for the Ujjwala scheme to provide subsidised LPG to the poor people after it crossed 2 crore mark.

Responding to a tweet by another follower who praised the effective implementation of the scheme, the Prime Minister said, "Good point on



implementation. It is as vital as the scheme itself. Implementation & ground level reach of Ujjwala Yojana is commendable."

Another follower tweeted to Modi that crores of women will bless him for the scheme.

In his reply, he said, "Several women, particularly poor women in rural areas have been sharing the transformative impact of Ujjwala Yojana." The PM Ujjwala Yojana

This reaction came in response to a tweet by a follower who praised him for the Ujjwala scheme to provide subsidised LPG to poor people after it crossed the 2 crore mark

is an ambitious social welfare scheme of the Modi government launched on May 1 last year from Ballia in Uttar Pradesh.

The programme is aimed at replacing wood-based cooking with LPG-based kitchens.

The government intends to give such subsidised connections to 5 crore households under this programme.

# Hospitals still violating govt order on pricing of coronary stents

DHIRENDRA KUMAR

NEW DELHI: With major hospitals rampantly violating government order on capping prices of coronary stents, the Centre's bold move to provide affordable healthcare treatment to countrymen has been abandoned by the errant private hospitals.

According to latest report of National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA), 40 hospitals gave 'knowingly' violated the price fixation order of the government between the period of February 14 to March 15 periods. After examining the papers, the NPPA has referred most of the cases to State Drug Controllers (SDC) for 100 per cent auditing.

Some of the major hospitals against whom NPPA has



Mumbai's Lilavati Hospital is one of the violators, says NPPA report

received complaints of overcharging of stents are Max Hospital, Saket (New Delhi), Lilavati Hospital, Mumbai, Fortis Escorts Hearts Institute, New Delhi, Metro Hospital, Faridabad (Haryana), Yenepoya Speciality Hospital, Mangalore, etc.

Recently, the apex drug

price regulator revised the prices of cardiac stents due changes in the World Price Index (WPI). According to the NPPA order, the drug eluting stents will now be priced at Rs 30,180 and bare metal stents at Rs 7,400.

The complaint against Max Hospital, Saket for overcharg-

ing had come to the notice of NPPA on February 17. After finding hospital's reply inclusive, the NPPA has started 100 per cent auditing of all cases. Though, the national drug price regulator has received all the sought documents, the examination of papers are under progress.

The complaints against Metro Hospital, St Philomenas Hospital, PGI Hospital, Chandigarh, Lilavati Hospital, Fortis Escorts Hearts Institute, Delhi Heart Institute & Multispecialty, Punjab have been referred to state drug controllers for 100 per cent auditing of all such cases.

Notably, complaints have been filed against these hospitals earlier too for breaching the government notification on stent pricing.

# MCI directs cancellation of 500 admissions in UP, TN med colleges

OUR CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI: The Medical Council of India (MCI) has directed some private colleges in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu to cancel admissions of around 500 students who had allegedly not appeared for NEET exam last year.

According to a senior MCI official, these are suspected to be backdoor admissions allegedly done after receiving capitation fees as these states were among those who had opted for NEET.

Around 17 to 18 private colleges in UP have been issued notices asking them to cancel the admissions of over 400 students, MCI secretary Dr Reena Nayyar said.

Similarly, in the line of fire is a private college in Tamil Nadu which has been issued a discharge notice to cancel the admission of around 36 students as it was allegedly done in violation of norms.

"The monitoring committee of MCI found that these institutes have admitted students who did not appear for the NEET exam despite the states opting for NEET," said Dr Nayyar.

The Centre had last year given state governments the option to either conduct their own exams or opt for NEET to fill undergraduate seats.

The committee, Nayyar said, is keeping an eye on admissions in all the medical colleges across the country and is yet to find out the exact numbers of students who did not appear in the NEET but still got admission.

"Such admissions are illegal as the concerned states had opted for NEET and so they cannot bypass it," she said.

## NATION BRIEFS

### SHIV SENA DEMANDS FARM LOAN WAIVER IN MAHARASHTRA

MUMBAI: Maharashtra's ruling alliance partner and Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray on Tuesday demanded a loan waiver for farmers in the state, as he congratulated Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for writing off loans of over 2.15 crore farmers totalling Rs 36,359 crore. He also aimed a barb at the BJP, saying the UP CM has showed that loan waiver was not just a "chunavi jumla" (poll slogan). "Yogi Adityanath has provided relief to farmers burdened by loans. I congratulate him for taking a quick decision," said Thackeray.

### CHOPPER SERVICES TO AMARNATH CAVE BECOME CHEAPER

JAMMU: The chopper services to the cave shrine of Amarnath have become cheaper as compared to last year. For the forthcoming Yatra 2017, the one way passenger fare for the Neelgrath-Panjtarni sector has been fixed at Rs 1,715 per head and that for the Pahalgam-Panjtarni axis will be Rs 2950 per person, Umang Narula, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board said. In 2016, the one way heli-fare for the Neelgrath-Panjtarni route was Rs 2000 and Rs 4300 for the Pahalgam-Panjtarni route.

### NOW, LIVE BULLET FOUND IN SOLDIER'S BAGGAGE AT AIRPORT

SRINAGAR: A live bullet was on Tuesday found in a soldier's baggage at the airport here, a day after two grenades and some other ammunition were recovered from the luggage of another jawan, regarding which the army seemingly was preparing to question one of its senior officers. The bullet was found in a bag belonging to Pandia Raj, who was proceeding to Delhi on leave, a security official said. He was handed over to the army for further investigation, the official said.

### PUDUCHERRY GOVT ROW: LG BEDI ORDERS ACTION AGAINST CHIEF SECY

PUDUCHERRY: Hardening her stand in an ongoing row with the Congress government in Puducherry, Lt Governor Kiran Bedi on Tuesday recommended to the Union Home Ministry to transfer the Chief Secretary and initiate disciplinary action against him for "gross violation" of service rules.

### Will start campaign to unite 'samajwadis': Shivpal Yadav

LUCKNOW: In a new twist to the feud within the Samajwadi Party, its leader Shivpal Singh Yadav on Tuesday said he will soon launch a campaign to unite "samajwadis" (socialists) to bring them on one platform.

Shivpal, the warring uncle of SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, had threatened to launch a new party after the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections.

"We will not let the legacy of 'samajwad' (socialism) to weaken and will soon launch a campaign to unite socialists to bring them on one platform," he said here while felicitating Sayed Sagir Ahmad, a senior socialist leader. "The fight for social justice will be fought with full strength. In the name of Rama, politics of social justice should be done and not of hatred," Shivpal said. MPOST

# India slams China for objecting to Dalai's Arunachal visit

OUR CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI: India on Tuesday hit out at China over its objection to the Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh, saying no "artificial controversy" should be created around the visit and asked Beijing not to interfere in its internal affairs.

China has kept a close watch ahead of the Dalai Lama's visit, starting Tuesday, and the Chinese Foreign Ministry had warned India against the visit of the Tibetan spiritual leader to Arunachal Pradesh, which Beijing claims as part of Tibet, saying it will cause "serious damage" to bilateral ties.

However, unfazed by the Chinese warning, India asserted, "No additional colour should be ascribed to his religious and spiritual activities



Dalai Lama arrives at Bomdila, Arunachal Pradesh, on Tuesday

and visits to various states of India." It also reiterated the government's position that the Dalai Lama is a revered religious leader who is deeply respected by the Indian people.

The government, therefore, urges that no "artificial controversy" should be created around his present visit to

# 'No need to change law to use ballot papers'

OUR CORRESPONDENT



tion of the People Act, a senior Election Commission functionary said the law provides for the use of both, the EVM and the ballot paper, to cast votes.

The functionary said there is no need to change the law and it is the prerogative of the Commission to decide on whether to use EVM or the bal-

lot paper.

"EVMs have made their mark in successive elections. They are a more reliable and safer way for people to cast their vote. Things have become faster and more convenient after introduction of the machines," another senior EC functionary said.

Like it did in 2009, the Elec-

tion Commission is once again thinking of inviting parties and others in the coming days to try and hack its EVMs.

Top EC officials had conveyed its plans to invite politicians and others to try tamper with the EVMs to AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal when he had met them at Nirvachan Sadan last week over the issue of reliability of the machines.

In 1988, the Representation of the people Act (1951), was amended to introduce the use of EVMs for voting. The new Section 61 A made it clear that any reference to a ballot box or ballot paper in the law or the rules be construed as including a reference to EVMs "wherever such voting machine is used at any election".

Therefore, as per law, both EVMs and ballot papers can be used.

# CBI registers FIR in death of Indian sailor

OUR CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI: The CBI has registered a case to probe the alleged suicide by an Indian sailor on board a ship with Cyprus flag while sailing from China to Fujairah.

The case of criminal conspiracy and murder has been registered on a complaint by sailor Satyanarayan Singh's son Sunil Kumar who had alleged that his father had not committed suicide.

"It was the result of a planned conspiracy resulting in the death of my father," Kumar, a resident of Sonapat, said in his complaint. It is alleged that Singh was working as a pump-



man on board ship M T Peterpaul, which was sailing from China to Fujairah with Cyprus flag, had committed suicide on July 21, 2015.

Kumar had alleged that after meeting some of his father's fellow crew members, he came to know that his father was tortured in barbaric manner by the Captain and that the death of his father was not due to hanging.



## EDITORIAL

## For greater transparency

The Right to Information Act, which was passed by Parliament in 2005 during the tenure of the then United Progressive Alliance government, remains a critical piece of legislation for the Indian people. What it did was to provide a transparent mechanism through which citizens could hold their government accountable. It played a significant role in exposing massive corruption scandals involving the distribution of telecom spectrum and allocation of coal blocks, besides a whole host of other cases. Last week, the National Democratic Alliance government had announced that it had decided to update the rules for the implementation of RTI, merely five years after a similar exercise by the previous administration. It is the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), which acts as the nodal government agency for enforcing the Act. On its website last week, the DoPT published the draft rules and sought feedback from the public by April 15. Without drafting rules, any attempt to implement the law is a futile exercise. Rules enable governments and citizens to put the law into practice. After Parliament passes a law, the rules required to implement it are framed, sent to the Law Ministry for final review and then notified in the Gazette. Any attempt to tweak RTI rules must result in making it easier for citizens to obtain information from the government. Experts, however, fear that some of the changes proposed in the government's draft could end up discouraging citizens from using the law. Why the government would engage in such an exercise is evident, and that is a debate for another time. Under the draft rules published on its website, many concerned citizens have raised alarm over two particular provisions. One permits the withdrawal of an application. In 2011, the UPA government had proposed similar provisions which were vehemently opposed by civil society. The then administration decided to drop it altogether. The second provision under the scanner says that pending appeals proceedings will come to an end automatically with the death of the appellant. Both provisions are very problematic.

The two provisions of Rule 12 of the government's draft are as follows:

"12 (1) The Commission may in its discretion allow a prayer for withdrawal of an appeal if such a prayer is made by the appellant on an application made in writing duly signed or during hearing. However, no such prayer may be entertained by the Commission after the matter has been finally heard or a decision or order has been pronounced by the Commission."

"12(2) The proceedings pending before the Commission shall abate on the death of the appellant."

Although the RTI has become a vital instrument for holding prominent public officials accountable, it has come at a grave cost to many information activists, who have often suffered at the hands of those working against greater transparency. The nexus of corruption ties together businesspeople, contractors, criminals, politicians, bureaucrats and even the judiciary. They all receive their share of kickbacks from public money and work to protect this nexus. An honest official or a concerned citizen, who wishes to expose this corruption, faces a possible backlash from such powers. And yet one scam after another has been exposed by brave officials and other whistleblowers, often at great risk to their lives. Far from whistling the acts of these whistleblowers as epitomes of patriotism, our legislature has shown a remarkably lackadaisical attitude towards their protection. According to the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, an international non-governmental organisation, the first three months this year have witnessed more than 375 attacks against people (including 56 murder cases), seeking information to highlight corruption in public offices. Public policy experts contend that the two provisions listed above could further encourage vested interests from using violence against those individuals seeking crucial information. Citizens could withdraw their RTI application after suffering from intimidation. And if the government allows the closure of application after the applicant's death, murder could become a tool for vested interests seeking to protect themselves. As per the Act, applications and first appeals are required to be mandatorily disposed of within 30 days of their receipt. For information concerning the life and liberty of a person, a response should be forthcoming within 48 hours. For second appeals, however, no time limit has been prescribed for its disposal, leaving information activists vulnerable to threats. Many concerned citizens have pushed for a final deadline under which the Central Information Commission (CIC) must act on appeals. The government must work on if it wants to burnish its anti-corruption credentials. Recent reports indicate that an estimated 30,000 cases are pending before the CIC. The government must also work towards bringing political parties under the ambit of the Right to Information Act. Another unfortunate provision of the draft rules is that if the postal charge for an RTI application is above Rs 50, the cost will be borne by the applicant. At a time when the government is yet to operationalise the Whistleblower's Protection Act due to its inability to frame the rules necessary for its implementation, the public must come out and compel the government to drop these possible changes to the rules that govern RTI.

## First, acknowledge the problem

In a rather unfortunate development, the Heads of African Mission issued a statement last week, calling the recent spurt of attacks on expatriates from the continent in Greater Noida "xenophobic and racial" and sought an independent investigation by the United Nations Human Rights Council. A statement from the envoys also said that they had reviewed similar incidents from the past and noted that the Indian government had taken "no known, sufficient, and visible deterring measures" to tackle them. These are rather damaging claims for New Delhi, which wants to extend its economic influence on the continent. The Centre, however, responded to these claims by suggesting that the attacks were not xenophobic and racial in nature, and instead recast them as stray criminal acts. For the record, the Centre did put out a detailed statement, discussed the episode in Parliament and ordered the Uttar Pradesh police to investigate the matter in a timely fashion. However, what is rather undeniable is the racist and xenophobic nature of these attacks. Allegations made that African nationals are disproportionately involved in drug trafficking, or accusations of cannibalism (a throwback to disturbing colonial attitudes) are deeply racial in nature. Last year, a mob in Bengaluru assaulted, stripped and paraded a 21-year-old Tanzanian student, in addition to setting fire to her car. By all accounts, her only fault was that she happened to pass through the same neighbourhood, where an hour before, a Sudanese student had run over and killed a resident. What was particularly frightening about this incident was how the collective mob attacked a helpless woman based on her skin tone. These acts must be seen in the context of organised racism. Although the problem of racism is not limited to this country, the Indian state must acknowledge the nature of these violent acts. The first step towards resolving the problem is to acknowledge it. The second step is to ensure timely prosecution of those locals involved in such disturbing acts. Although the Greater Noida police have done the needful, past record suggests that the prospects of prosecution are bleak.



KALYANI SHANKAR

**Why is Mamata blocking the Teesta pact? She has domestic compulsions, and cannot go against the interests of her state. She holds that the flow of the river is weakened when it reaches West Bengal because of the hydropower projects constructed in Sikkim and suggested a trilateral meeting between West Bengal, Sikkim, and New Delhi**

## Quote martial

**Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success**

HENRY FORD

**Xi has emerged as a passionate advocate of unfettered global trade while Trump has been a vocal proponent of protectionism and trade barriers as part of his "America first" and "buy American, hire American" philosophy. Even on the existential crisis of climate change, it is China that has been taking the global leadership position**

## Hasina visit crucial for ties

*Teesta water sharing issue remains an unresolved for both sides*

When Narendra Modi took over as Prime Minister on May 26, 2014, he surprised everyone by inviting the heads of state from the neighbouring countries for his swearing-in ceremony sending a signal that he is keen on 'neighbours first' concept. He had also taken it forward by visiting most of the neighbouring countries and improving the neighbourhood ties. After seven and a half years of gap, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will be visiting India from April 7-10. For both Hasina and Modi, this will be an important visit to showcase the improved neighbourhood ties.

However, the Teesta water sharing agreement, which is of interest to Hasina may not be on the table although some optimists expect some surprises and there could be something on water security. If resolved, this will strengthen the hands of Hasina as the opposition has been critical of her inability to get the Treaty signed since September 2011 when the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had made his visit to Dhaka. Teesta was almost clinched then, but it was West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who had backed out at the last minute embarrassing Singh. Despite the disappointment, in Dhaka's official circles, Singh's visit had been described as a landmark visit. Modi's visit in 2015 has taken the ties forward.

Dhaka has repeatedly been raising the Teesta issue in almost all discussions with New Delhi, concerned as a lower riparian country, India has been consistently responding that it would be signed after 'internal discussions' with Mamata. Although Article 253 of the Constitution gives the Centre the power to conclude any treaty, it cannot ignore the concerns of the people of the state. Mamata wants to protect the interests of five districts in North Bengal which would be affected if more water were released to Bangladesh and there is no meeting point so far. This is the crux of the issue.

Earlier, Mamata had softened her stand and supported the endorsement of the Land Boundary Agreement in Parliament in 2015, which could not be signed for 41 years and also accompanied Modi to Dhaka. Persuaded by the Centre, she also visited Bangladesh where Hasina gave her a royal welcome



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina

in February 2015. Mamata promised them to be supportive, but since her return, Mamata has not mentioned any advance in Teesta negotiations.

Why is Mamata blocking the Teesta pact? She has domestic compulsions, and cannot go against the interests of her state. She holds that the flow of the river is weakened when it reaches West Bengal because of the hydropower projects constructed in Sikkim and suggested a trilateral meeting between West Bengal, Sikkim, and New Delhi.

Mamata is annoyed about the way the Modi government is dealing with the Narada and Sarada scams involving her party leaders and arresting them. Also, she needs a massive financial package from the Centre, as West Bengal debt burden has piled up to a huge amount. Moreover, Mamata is worried about the growing influence of the BJP in her backyard. She has hardened her stand. Recently she told a TV channel "But I can only say I have not been consulted so far. I don't have any clue about the discussions. I cannot put a seal of approval on the treaty at the cost of my state's interest." Mamata and the other northeastern Chief Min-

isters may attend the banquet hosted by President Pranab Mukherji in honour of Hasina, who will be the guest at Rashtrapati Bhavan as a special gesture.

The Indo-Bangladesh cooperation has been enhanced in several fields including energy and bilateral trade as India accorded duty-free benefits to Bangladesh on a large number of items. Energy security is important as India is not only assisting Bangladesh in producing electricity, but also exporting 600 megawatts of electricity and has promised to export more if Dhaka wants. The Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) agreement has resolved the enclave problem.

From the Dhaka side, Hasina has been cooperating in curbing the activities of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence in smuggling fake Indian currency notes, drug trafficking, and infiltration of terrorists. She has also been supportive of India in isolating Pakistan in the SAARC forum by refusing to attend the summit last November. Now it is payback time for Delhi.

The Narendra Modi government is giving special importance to this visit for these reasons. The ground has

already been prepared by Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar who had paid a two-day visit in February this year to chalk out the areas of bilateral cooperation, including border security, power, energy, shipping and railways. Most important of all, India is to offer \$500 million line of credit for Bangladesh, which is the highest ever to any country.

Given Dhaka's strategic importance, India and Bangladesh are expected to sign two agreements and seven Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) related to defence issues during Hasina's upcoming visit.

India is also concerned about the growing Chinese influence in Bangladesh. During the recent visit of the Chinese President Xi Jinping to Bangladesh, China has entered into a strategic partnership agreement with Dhaka and has also promised \$40 billion investment. Recently it sold two submarines. India has to compete with China by equally showing favours to Bangladesh. Hasina is most interested in Teesta agreement, and that is the big issue before the Indian Prime Minister.

IPA  
(Views are strictly personal.)

## dear EDITOR

## AIMING BETTER

*Aiming for a Congress-mukt Bharat would have made more sense had it been a little more than a shallow political tactic. This country does not need any Congress, or BJP, or just any party for that matter. The most imperative thing this country needs is welfare and development. If only the energy was directed towards making India better in more substantial ways instead of engaging in avoidable elimination practices, things would have been favourably different.*

LALJI PATHAK Via email

## millenniumpost.in

Log on to write letters to the editor or send them to letters.mp@gmail.com You can also send your comments to The Editor, Millennium Post, Pratap Bhawan, 5 Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi 110 002

## Which Trump will Xi meet at Mar-a-Lago?

*China may opt for chess as America goes for checkers, writes Mayank Chhaya*

Chinese President Xi Jinping may have a hard time understanding which President Donald Trump he will encounter when the two meet in Mar-a-Lago in Florida on April 6 and 7.

Would it be the Trump who has accused China of "raping our country" and being a currency manipulator, or the more transactional and ideology-free businessman with a next-to-nothing grasp of complex diplomacy?

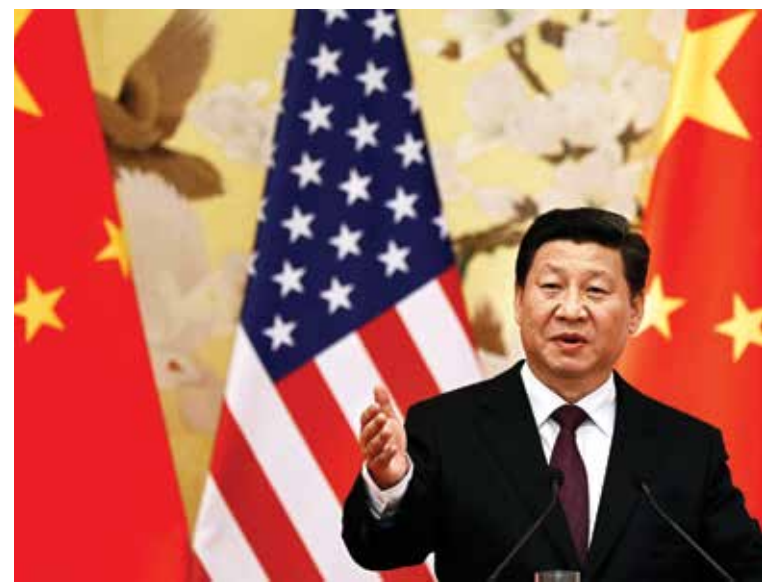
There are apprehensions that while Xi will come fully prepared to the meeting, as is his wont, Trump will improvise as he goes along. One will bring deep deliberateness to the exchange even as the other will choose to wing it.

The highly contrasting styles between the inscrutably modest Xi and the unabashedly vainglorious Trump are expected to inform the first meeting between the two leaders. The US President has already telegraphed via Twitter that he expects the meeting to be "very difficult" because of the "massive trade deficits". Xi, on the other hand, has refrained from hyperventilating in keeping with the traditional style of the Chinese leadership.

The choice of Mar-a-Lago, a property owned by Trump, is a careful one aimed at giving a tropical backdrop to a relationship which is at best unpredictable. Trump muddied the waters early on when he chose to speak to Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen in December last year, weeks before being sworn in, much to Beijing's chagrin. It was for the first time an elected President had spoken to Taiwan's leader since 1979.

China regards Taiwan as one of its breakaway provinces, and Washington has historically respected the one-China policy. In playing down the disquiet over his phone conversation with the Taiwanese leader, Trump had then tweeted: "Interesting how the US sells Taiwan billions of dollars of military equipment, but I should not accept a congratulatory call."

The Taiwan matter appears to have been put to rest after, according to The



Chinese President Xi Jinping

New York Times, Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, in tandem with Chinese Ambassador to Washington Cui Tiankai, arranged a phone call between the two leaders in February. According to the newspaper, during that conversation Trump "pledged to abide by the four-decade-old one-China policy on Taiwan, despite his earlier suggestion that it was up for negotiation."

That, coupled with not following up on his rather ludicrous promise of declaring China a currency manipulator on day one of his administration -- now more than 70 days into it -- is expected to have given Xi some sense of the chasm between what Trump declaims and what he actually might do. There are reports of China's diplomatic establishment having learned that the best way to reach and influence Trump is via his family. To that end, his son-in-law Kushner has emerged as the conduit.

Beijing has also been rather kind to Trump's business in China by approving several trademark applications of The Trump Organisation that were

pending for quite some time. Kushner came close to selling a prime piece of New York real estate to the politically well-connected Chinese company, Anbang Insurance Group, but shied away amid mounting criticism over conflict of interest.

None of this, of course, still means that Trump will not play hardball with Xi for public consumption to keep his core base in good humour. There are expectations that recognising the value of not triggering a trade war and creating an appearance of helping the US President; Xi might announce some significant investment in infrastructure projects, which Trump can then relay as a triumph of his tough talk on Twitter.

Last year, China invested \$45 billion in America in real estate, finance and entertainment. A sizable investment in infrastructure projects with the potential to create construction jobs of the kind that would benefit Trump's core constituents is an attractive proposition for the Chinese leader.

The two will meet amid a polar switch in the way they view the global

roles of their respective countries. Xi has emerged as a passionate advocate of unfettered global trade while Trump has been a vocal proponent of protectionism and trade barriers as part of his "America first" and "buy American, hire American" philosophy. Even on the existential crisis of climate change, it is China that has been taking the global leadership position even as Trump and his cohorts have been busy rubbishing the whole science behind it.

No one seriously believes that the meeting will convert Trump back to a globalist and a supporter of climate change policies. In a way, Trump's policy of retreat from a global engagement suits China eminently as it goes about assertively assuming that mantle. At the same time, Xi will be mindful that Trump's threat of imposing a 45 per cent tariff on Chinese imports does not become a reality considering that the Chinese economy is experiencing its own often understated albeit serious strains.

One particular issue that is expected to consume much oxygen is North Korea, particularly in the light of Trump's ultimatum that the US would go for it alone if China did not lean on Pyongyang to end its nuclear programme. In an interview with The Financial Times, he said: "Well, if China is not going to solve North Korea, we will," but refrained from giving any details on how. This could be part of his characteristic grandstanding before his meeting with Xi.

On his part, the Chinese leader may be keen on resolving North Korean President Kim Jong-un's increasingly belligerent posturing but without destabilising the already embattled neighbour because that will have direct consequences for Beijing.

It is one of those meetings where China may opt to play chess as America goes for checkers.

IMMS  
(Mayank Chhaya is a Chicago-based journalist and commentator. The views expressed are strictly personal.)



# Going beyond govt in tackling TB

Swagata Yadavar argues why India should use private pharmacies in its war against the deadly disease

**As part of the revised national tuberculosis control programme, India's flagship anti-TB programme, nearly 75,000 pharmacy outlets were engaged in 12 districts across four states over a four-year period (2010-14) through a public-private partnership to detect and control TB. Approximately 10 to 15 per cent of suspected cases referred by 7,000 pharmacists over two years were found to be positive and placed on treatment**

India has over 850,000 private pharmacies or chemists nationwide; yet, only nine per cent of them have been engaged in efforts to control tuberculosis (TB), according to a January 2017 paper published in the Journal of Pharmaceutical Practice and Policy.

The paper, 'Engagement of the private pharmaceutical sector for TB control: Rhetoric or reality?', reviewed public-private mix interventions to fight TB and analysed global-level documents from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Stop TB Partnership in five phases from 2003 to 2015. This is especially important since India has set 2025 as the deadline for eliminating TB, which would require 95 per cent reduction in new cases.

The number of TB deaths doubled -- from 220,000 in 2014 to 480,000 to 2015 -- due to notifications from providers in the private sector.

As part of the revised national tuberculosis control programme (RNTCP), India's flagship anti-TB programme, nearly 75,000 pharmacy outlets were engaged in 12 districts across four states over a four-year period (2010-14) through a public-private partnership to detect and control TB. Approximately 10 to 15 per cent of suspected cases referred by 7,000 pharmacists over two years were found to be positive and placed on treatment, the study found.

"Clearly, this example illustrates not only the success of engaging retail drug outlets but also the need for steady scale-up to increase national coverage," the authors of the paper noted. Despite making free drugs and treatment for TB available under directly observed treatment short course (DOTS) since 1997, nearly 2.2 million -- or around 50 per cent -- TB patients in India seek treatment in the private sector, according to a November 2016 study in the medical journal Lancet.

The Indian government considers private providers as assets in its efforts to reach all TB patients for care and control, the draft of the National Strategic Plan for Tuberculosis Elimination 2017-2025, released in February 2017, said. Despite the success of previous efforts, the government has not fully tapped the potential of private pharmacies to fight TB.

Under the DOTS strategy, in the first 2-4 months of treatment, called the intensive phase, patients have to take all their doses under direct observation of the DOTS provider, three times a week (now changed to a daily regimen in five states and set to be expanded). For patient convenience, public-health facilities, private medical practitioners, and even local points of contact such as convenience stores, were recognised as DOTS providers.

"While even local paan-walas were engaged as DOTS providers in some cases,



Representational Image

chemists had been left out," said Manjiri Gharat, Vice-President and Chairman, Community Pharmacy division, Indian Pharmaceutical Association.

**Local pharmacists are easily approachable, available, and attentive**

Private pharmacists tend to be from within the local community, are familiar with residents, are available for long hours and can be easily contacted.

In 2006, the IPA started a pilot project to train pharmacists to detect TB and refer those with symptoms to the public system in Mumbai; almost half of 150 pharmacists so enlisted became DOTS providers, setting up centres in their outlets.

Since pharmacists picked up patients who frequently came with symptoms of TB, such as prolonged cough, they could refer the patients for further tests in government facilities and help them get treated on time. Also, patients found it convenient and less of a stigma to visit a local pharmacy.

By 2010, the project was scaled up, as we said, to four states and 12 districts across the country.

In 2012, the RNTCP signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the IPA,

the All India Organisation of Chemists and Druggists, the Pharmacy Council of India and others to "engage pharmacists in RNTCP for TB Care and Control in India".

By 2017, this Lilly MDR-TB partnership was running in eight states: Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka, and Goa. In Maharashtra alone, 134 pharmacies in four municipal corporations were engaged, 70 of whom became DOTS providers and have since referred over 68 patients and treated 500 patients in their pharmacies.

**In Navi Mumbai, 30 per cent patients referred by pharmacists tested positive for TB**

In the narrow lanes of Sector 1, Airoli, a locality in Navi Mumbai, lies Sandeep Medical Store. With neatly stacked bottles of drugs and pharmaceutical products, it looks like any other pharmacy, but a board outside says, "DOTS Provider Centre, Free medicines for Tuberculosis are given here".

Proprietor Sandeep Deshmukh has been running the pharmacy since 1989. His pharmacy was recognised as a DOTS provider in 2010, and he has treated 30 patients in the past seven years. "I see it as a kind of social

service, which gives me immense satisfaction," Deshmukh told *IndiaSpend*.

About 30 per cent of the cases referred by pharmacists in Navi Mumbai turned out to be sputum-positive for TB, according to the IPA.

"Patients are generally afraid of going to government hospitals because of the long waiting period, and private doctors often do not bother referring them for sputum test in spite of (the patients) suffering from a cough for months, which is where chemists can make a difference," said Satish Shah, Vice President, Navi Mumbai Chemist Association.

Most patients are not aware that medicines to treat TB are freely available in the government centre, or that TB can be cured in six months, he said, adding that this is the kind of awareness that pharmacists help spread.

**Time to marshal resources and scale up efforts**

The RNTCP had planned to scale up engagement to reach about 500,000 pharmacies through IPA's efforts, according to this extract from 2012 World Conference on Lung Health of the Union. By 2015, only

75,000 -- or 15 per cent of the target -- were engaged in the initiative. This is a missed opportunity in many ways.

"We know what works and we no longer need 'pilot initiatives' -- it is time to marshal resources and scale up private pharmacy efforts as part of RNTCP's broader private sector strategy," Niranjana Kundi, co-author of the January 2017 paper and Principal Technical Advisor, United States Agency for International Development, System for Improved Access to Pharmaceutical and Services programme, told *IndiaSpend* in an email interview.

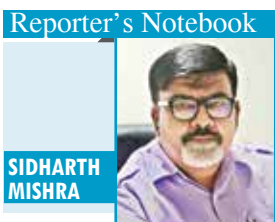
It would also help India in preventing Antimicrobial resistance by rational dispensing of antibiotics through effective regulation and enforcement with the cooperation of state food and drug administration, TB control department, and pharmacists, he added.

"If RNTCP integrates pharmacists all across the country, the impact (of this initiative) would be manifold," said the IPA's Gharat.

(In an arrangement with *IndiaSpend*, a data-driven, non-profit, public interest journalism platform, with whom Swagata Yadavar is Principal Correspondent. The views expressed are those of *IndiaSpend*.)

## The summer of floriae

Delhi, despite all its brutality and insensitivity, is kind in its own way



**Delhi's kindness comes from nature. It does rain but seldom pours, it does shiver but does not frost, it's hot but dry sparing the unease caused by muggy weather. It's free from cyclones, landslides, floods, and droughts. Delhi must not curse nature. It should be thankful**

*Jiye to apne bageche mein gulmohar ke tale; Mare to gair ke galion mein gulmohar ke liye.* -- Dushyant

The early onset of summer has made the Gulmohars bloom. It's not yet Baisakhi, the day we did annual shopping for pitcher and water pots for birds, but the heat is already on us. Delhi is known for its scorching summers, but I love the season for hotter the city, greater the bloom on the Gulmohar trees, which line the avenues. The red flowers of Gulmohar trees in the national Capital are complemented by yellowish floriae from Amaltas trees. There are several, however, in the national Capital who miss out on the riot of colours in the city.

My friends ask me, where are Gulmohar trees in this city? I keep telling them, remove your blinds, roll down your car's window, and give nature a chance. The city is not as bad as it has been reported in the recent times. We probably have been too preoccupied with our summer purchase of air-conditioners and dry-grass for the water cooler frames to notice the remains of nature that are still there in this city.

"Some green?" exclaims Ram Khilawan, who has spent a lifetime tending the flowerbeds in NDMC's horticulture department. He has a point. The extent of greenery in the national Capital was definitely far beyond the lowly confines of 'some'. Delhi, if not 'city of gardens', as Congress grandpa Jag Pravesh Chandra would have liked to see it, could definitely pride itself to be a metro with a green shade. One doubts if South Mumbai can boast of the wooded avenues as Lutyens' Delhi does.

"Sahib why only *Nai Dilli*, you should invite people to cross the walled city to the North to enjoy the city during the summers," says Shiv Darshan, who for years did



Representational Image

not bother to look beyond the Delhi University campus. Shiv Darshan, too, had a point. The 'campuswallahs' squeak at the idea of moving out of their wooded haven. You can start your morning with a jog at Kamla Nehru ridge and take a cool evening walk on the lover's avenue besides the Post-Graduate Women's hostel.

The old-timers would tell you that marriages are not necessarily made in heaven but sometimes they get arranged while taking a stroll from Gwyer Hall to Central Institute of Education. There are many who would confess that their broken heart lay among the fallen Gulmohars on Chattr Marg of North Campus. "Our heart would rise and sink like the fizz in the 'banta' bottles, the favoured drink of cash-strapped lovers," said a senior official in the government, who too lost his heart somewhere among the Gulmohars.

They enjoyed the absolute bliss of being in love probably because they did not have the

air-conditioners in their hostel rooms. To beat the heat, they had no option but to take a walk down the wooded avenue. And more often than not you would meet somebody. And to meet her regularly, you had to be more regular with your walks. These walks and talks would sometimes bloom like the red-shot Gulmohar on the green top and sometimes fall on the pavement, dried, broken, and tattered. But those moments will always come back to you whenever you saw a Gulmohar in bloom on a hot summer afternoon.

A little southward of the University is the old seat of the city government -- the Old Secretariat, now rechristened as Vidhan Sabha. The city government can be faulted on many accounts but they should be complemented on at least one count -- for not building covered car parking. In the summer, when you shirk even at the thought of touching the hot steering wheel, you can spend hours in the cool green natural

shade of the hoary trees which line the Vidhan Sabha complex.

When former Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit shifted the seat of the Government from here to the new building on the banks of Yamuna, she, for sure, missed the monkeys peeping into her conference room in the midst of most serious of discussions. I recall her Secretary in the earlier part of her 15-year-tenure, Gyanendra D Badgaiyan often finding himself tapping at his keyboard in rhythm with the footsteps of the monkeys prowling outside. "Yes, they do give you some relief," he would say to us reporters on the prowl.

A reporter who walks down to 24, Akbar Road every afternoon in this scorching summer and then to the residences of senior politicians living in the vicinity -- from Tughlaq Road to Teen Murti, finds strength from the green top overhead across the roads, thanking Delhi for being so kind to the ordinary souls who can't afford the luxuries of four-wheelers.

Such long walks could be fatal in other cities that care less for its inhabitants -- leaving it to the mercy of skies.

Delhi, with all its brutality and insensitivity, is kind in its own way, the kindness which has been bestowed on it not by its peoples but by nature. It does rain but seldom pours, it does shiver but does not frost, it's hot but dry sparing the unease caused by muggy weather. It's free from cyclones, landslides, floods, and droughts. Delhi must not curse nature. It should be thankful. A colleague once told me that on changing residence she started to miss the sound of the cuckoo, which would wake him every morning. "I always cursed her for not allowing me that extra bit of sleep but now I miss her. I miss the riot of colours the Gulmohar outside my window would provide," she had added.

(Sidharth Mishra is President, Centre for Reforms, Development & Justice and Consulting Editor, Millennium Post. The views are personal.)

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**PRASHANT BHUSHAN**  
@pbhushan1

Ultimately it's big Corp money which controls parties & largely determines votes. With unlimited, anonymous & foreign funds now, it will increase

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**DEVDUPT PATTANAİK**  
@devduttmyth

Once, Hindus could joke about Hindu gods. Our gods laughed. Today we can't do that. Our politicians have a problem. Islam is benchmark.

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**MAMATA BANERJEE**  
@MamataOfficial

Saddened at the passing of legendary vocalist Kishori Amonkar ji. This is a great loss for Indian classical music

---

**BRAMMA CHELLANEY**  
@Chellaney

Amid Chinese threats over the Dalai Lama's Arunachal visit, Indian minister Rijju gratuitously states, "India respects 'one-China' policy"



## RUSSIA BLAST

# Kyrgyz suicide bomber behind Saint Petersburg metro blast

**BISHKEK:** The main suspect in a blast in a St Petersburg train carriage that killed 14 people and wounded 50 is a Russian citizen originally from mainly Muslim Kyrgyzstan, authorities there said on Tuesday.

The explosion on Monday in the middle of the afternoon occurred when the train was in a tunnel deep underground, amplifying the force of the blast. The carriage door was blown off, and witnesses described seeing injured passengers with bloodied and blackened bodies.

State investigative authorities said fragments of the body of the suspect had been found among the dead, indicating that he was a suicide bomber.

The National Anti-Terrorist Committee said on Monday an explosive device had been found at another station, hidden in a fire extinguisher, but it had been defused. It was unclear who had placed that device and no arrests have been made. Russia has been on alert against attacks in reprisal for its military intervention in Syria, where Moscow's forces have been supporting troops loyal to President Bashar al-Assad against Western-backed armed groups as well as the hardline Islamic State (IS) which grew out of the conflict. IS, now



Flowers are placed at a symbolic memorial at Tekhnologicheskyy Institute subway station in St. Petersburg, Russia, on Tuesday

under attack by all sides in Syria's multi-faceted war, has repeatedly threatened revenge and been linked to recent bombings elsewhere in Europe. It is confirmed that the metro bomber was linked to radical Islamists, it could provoke anger among some Russians at Moscow's decision to intervene in Syria, a year before an election which President Vladimir Putin is expected to win. Officials said they were treating the blast as an act of terrorism,

but there was no official confirmation of any link to Islamist radicals. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said it was cynical to say the bombing in St Petersburg was revenge for Russia's role in Syria. He said the attack showed that Moscow needed to press on with its fight against global terrorism. Russian officials said they did not want to reveal the suspect's identity. But a picture was starting to emerge on Tuesday of the man named by Kyrgyz

authorities. A page on social media site VKontakte, the Russian equivalent of Facebook, belonging to someone with the same name and year of birth as Jalilov, included photos of him relaxing with friends in a bar, smoking from a hookah pipe. He was dressed in jackets and a baseball cap, and showed no outward sign of any religious affiliation. A Reuters reporter visited a house in Osh, southern Kyrgyzstan, which neighbors said was the family home

of Jalilov. The home, a modest but well-maintained one-storey brick building, was empty.

Neighbors said Jalilov was from a family of ethnic Uzbeks, and that while they knew his parents they had not seen the young man for years. They said his father worked as a panel-beater in a car repair shop. Osh is part of the Fergana Valley, a fertile strip of land that straddles Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan which is mainly populated by ethnic Uzbeks. It has a tradition of Islamist radicalism and hundreds of people have set out from the area to join Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

A blast at a nightclub in Istanbul on New Year's Eve that killed 39 people involved a suspect from the same part of central Asia. The bomber in that attack said he had been acting under the direction of IS militants in Syria.

Two acquaintances of Jalilov's, contacted by Reuters via social media, said he moved to St Petersburg several years ago.

One of the acquaintances said he had worked with Jalilov in a chain of sushi restaurants in the city between late 2012 and late 2013. The second said he had seen Jalilov in the crowd at sambo matches in St Petersburg.

## Italy, UN, US condemn deadly bombing in Russia

**RUSSIA:** UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Monday condemned the bombing in St. Petersburg Metro, which killed at least 10 people, and said that those responsible for the attack should be held accountable.

"The Secretary-General condemns today's (Monday) bombing in the St. Petersburg Metro," UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said at a daily news briefing here.

"He extends his deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims and to the government and the people of the Russian Federation," Dujarric said.

"Those responsible for this appalling act must be held accountable."

The blast took place on a subway train in the Russian city of St. Petersburg Monday afternoon, killing 14 people and injuring about 50 others, a report said.

The bomb, a homemade device filled with shrapnel, exploded in the third car just after the front of the train had entered the tunnel, the report said.

Italy also "strongly condemned" the bomb attack on the metro. "I strongly condemn

and express my condolences and the Italian state's closeness to the Russian state and people for the attack a few hours ago in St Petersburg," Foreign Minister Angelino Alfano said in a statement.

"Italy will continue to support Russia in the fight against terrorism and for peace and international security," he added. The bomb blast hit a train between Sennaya Ploshchad and Tekhnologicheskyy Institut stations at about 2.30 local time. Russian President Vladimir Putin said all causes, especially terrorism, were being investigated.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump also denounced the attack. "Terrible. Terrible thing. Happening all over the world. Absolutely a terrible thing," Efe news quoted Trump as saying.

Expressing full solidarity with the Russian people and government in such hard times, Egypt offered condolences to the families of the victims and wished speedy recovery for the wounded.

Putin, who was in the city on Monday to meet the Belarusian President, said that all possible causes would be considered.

## Russia, Belarus to settle gas dispute in 10 days: Putin

**ST. PETERSBURG:** Russian President Vladimir Putin has expressed confidence that his country and Belarus will settle their ongoing gas and oil disputes in 10 days.

After meeting visiting Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko on Monday, Putin said Moscow and Minsk have agreed to find an acceptable pricing scheme for both sides, and all the disputes in oil and gas sector between the two will be settled in 10 days. Both countries will also develop rules for the common gas market by January 1, 2018, TASS news agency quoted Putin as saying. Russia and Belarus have no issues of dispute left, Putin said. The disputes between both countries lasted for over a year. "We were able to look into the future of our economies' functioning. We solved these matters. I think our governments will formalise everything and bring our economies into the normal functioning rhythm within ten days," Lukashenko said. Belarus and Russia have been negotiating a reduction in gas prices since early 2016.

## Pak suspends issuance of visa-on-arrival facility

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan has suspended issuance of visas on arrival to foreigners in a bid to streamline the visa regime and avoid any irregularities in the database.

Interior Minister Chaudry Nisar Ali Khan, during a high-level meeting on Monday, asked officials to revise and update visa rules besides introduction of online visa regime to bring in transparency and minimise discretion in the whole process, the Express Tribune reported.

Indifference to this responsibility in addressing the problems of the people will invite serious notice and action, he added. Noting that a lot of good work has been done in the issuance of visas and areas of immigration, he said a lot more still needs to be done to streamline the system and remove various lacunas in it.



With the launching of the online visa application and online visa regime, the interior minister said that any anomaly in issuance of visas would be effectively eliminated. He said a central visa database is essential as it would enable Pakistani state institutions to keep a tab on all those travelling to Pakistan on any visa category. To ensure strict surveillance

of Pakistan's land, sea and air route entry and exit points on borders, Nisar ordered speedy completion of concept paper for modern Immigration and Border Control Department (IBCD).

The minister said that as a first step, a separate body of IBCD should be set up under the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA).

## 16 militants killed in Afghanistan

**KABUL:** At least 16 militants from the Taliban and the Islamic State terror group were killed in clashes in Afghanistan, said a military statement on Tuesday. Nine militants loyal to the Islamic State (IS) group were killed and two arrested after clashes erupted in Achin district of Nangarhar province, Xinhua news agency quoted police as saying on Tuesday. A weapons cache of IS militants was also destroyed during the operations, the police said. In another incident, six militants were killed and 18 injured in fighting that erupted between security forces and Taliban militants in Chimtial district of Balkh province on Monday, an Afghan army statement said.

## WORLD BRIEFS

### 10 EGYPTIAN WOMEN, MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY HONOURED

**CAIRO:** A young scientist who turned trash into biofuel, educationists, filmmakers and humanitarian workers were among 10 distinguished women from Egypt who were honoured for their exceptional achievements and contributions in a wide array of fields by the Indian Embassy in Egypt. The 10 women and one institution - the Missionaries of Charity - were felicitated as part of the 'India by the Nile 2017' celebration of Indian music, dance, theatre, food and well-being, at a reception in the Indian Embassy here. The Missionaries of Charity was also felicitated for its humanitarian work in Egypt. It was founded by Mother Teresa on October 7, 1950 in Calcutta and is functional in Egypt since 1981.

### PAKISTANI MAN KNOWN TO DAWOOD JAILED IN US

**KARACHI:** A Pakistani money changer known for his ties with Indian don Dawood Ibrahim has been jailed for 68 months in the US for conspiring to commit money laundering, it was reported on Tuesday. Altaf Khanani, who has already spent over a year in a Miami jail, was also fined \$250,000 by a Florida court, Dawn online reported. He was sentenced on March 29. The remaining 13 counts of committing money laundering were dismissed at the request of the prosecution for Khanani's cooperation in the probe. According to the US Treasury Department, his clientele included Chinese, Mexican and Colombian crime groups and designated terrorist organisations. "Khanani is known to have had relationships with Lashkar-e-Taiba, Dawood Ibrahim, Al Qaeda and Jaish-e-Mohammed," the Treasury Department said in November 2015, a few months after his arrest in the US.

### N KOREA SLAMS JAPAN FOR DISTORTING HISTORY IN TEXTBOOKS

**PYONGYANG:** North Korea on Tuesday denounced Japan for distorting history and instilling false ideas in Japanese children's minds through textbooks for school students. The daily Minju Joson (Democratic Korea) said Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology "opened to public the results of screening of textbooks for high schools", which said Tok Islets of Korea are part of the territory of Japan and that they were illegally occupied by others.

### PAKISTANI SHRINES HAVE 10 DAYS TO ENHANCE SECURITY

**ISLAMABAD:** In the wake of terror attacks across Pakistan, the Punjab government has given a 10-day deadline to improve the security of Sufi shrines. The order was issued to the representatives of the shrines and the Auqaf Department in Rawalpindi on Monday by Deputy Commissioner Talat Mehmood Gondal, Dawn online reported on Tuesday. There are more than 70 shrines in Rawalpindi and most are run by private organisations or individuals.

## Theresa May defends UK ties with Saudi Arabia



**LONDON:** British Prime Minister Theresa May has defended her trip to Saudi Arabia, saying its ties with the UK are important for security and prosperity, a media report said on Tuesday.

The Premier is facing questions about the UK's support for the Saudi-led coalition which is fighting rebels in Yemen, the BBC reported. Speaking to the media as she travelled to Jordan, which she is visiting before travelling to Saudi Arabia, May said humanitarian aid was one of the issues she would be discussing on her trip.

"We are concerned about the humanitarian situation -- that's why the UK last year was the fourth largest donor to the Yemen in terms of humanitarian aid (\$128 million). We will be continuing with that," she said. "And yes, we will be raising the humanitarian issue. We believe it is important that we recognise the threat that there is in terms of people's lives." May said she would also be raising human rights issues with the Saudi Arabian officials, adding that "if we have the relationship we are able to do that". She also defended the drive to strike new trade links, saying the UK had "long-term and historic relationships" with Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Opposition Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn said UK-made weapons were contributing to a "humanitarian catastrophe" and called for the immediate suspension of Britain's arms exports to Saudi Arabia. "The Saudi-led coalition bombing in Yemen, backed by the British government, has left thousands dead, 21 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and three million refugees uprooted from their homes," he said.

## Colombia starts to bury 273 landslide victims, search continues



**MOCOA:** Scores of decomposing cadavers were being released for burial on Monday as rescuers continued to search for victims of weekend flooding and landslides that devastated a city in southern Colombia, killing at least 273 people.

Desperate families queued for blocks in the heat to search a morgue for loved ones who died when several rivers burst their banks in the early hours of Saturday, sending water, mud and debris crashing down streets and into houses as people slept. Bodies wrapped in white sheets lay on the concrete floor of the morgue as officials sought to bury them as soon as possible to avoid the spread of disease. The government has begun vaccination against infection. "Please speed up delivery of the bodies because they are decomposing," said Yadira Andrea Munoz, a 45-year-old housewife who expected to receive the remains of two relatives who died in the tragedy. But officials asked for families to be patient.

"We don't want bodies to be delivered wrongly," said Carlos Eduardo Valdes, head of the forensic science institute. The death toll has ticked up during the day as rescuers searched with dogs and machinery in the

mud-choked rubble. Many families in Mocoa have spent days and nights digging through the debris with their hands despite a lack of food, clean water and electricity.

President Juan Manuel Santos, who made a third visit to the area on Monday, blamed climate change for the disaster, saying Mocoa had received one-third of its usual monthly rain in just one night, causing the rivers to burst their banks. Others said deforestation in surrounding mountains meant there were few trees to prevent water washing down bare slopes. More than 500 people were staying in emergency housing and social services had helped 10 lost children find their parents. As many as 43 children were killed. Families of the dead will receive about \$6,400 in aid and the government will cover hospital and funeral costs.

Even in a country where heavy rains, a mountainous landscape and informal construction combine to make landslides a common occurrence, the scale of the Mocoa disaster was daunting compared with recent tragedies, including a 2015 landslide that killed nearly 100 people.

## Dieselgate: EU Parliament urges new checks to stop emissions cheating

**STRASBOURG:** EU lawmakers on Tuesday urged European authorities to quickly establish new checks to prevent automakers from cheating on emissions testing following the Volkswagen "dieselgate" scandal.

In a non-binding resolution, the European Parliament called on the European Commission, the 28-nation EU executive, and the member states to set up new controls, a decision welcomed by a major consumer organisation.

"They should now act swiftly to improve tests and checks on new cars on EU roads," MEPs recommended based on a report from the



committee that launched a probe into the scandal last July. The dieselgate scandal blew open when Volkswagen admitted in September 2015 that it

vehicle was undergoing tests. The EU parliament said the commission and member states had known for 10 years that emissions were much higher on the road than on laboratory simulators, and yet had failed to act.

It recommended that future emissions legislative proposals be handled by the office of a single European commissioner to boost oversight. "EU legislation on real driving emissions should be adopted swiftly," the parliament added.

It also called for manufacturers to compensate car buyers hurt by the scandal and urged the commission to propose rules for a collective and har-

monised EU redress system. The parliament also recommended centralising car-type approvals in Europe.

The recommendations would also boost the role of the commission by giving it more oversight and sanctions powers.

The European consumer organisation BEUC said the parliament heeded its call to fix a flawed testing system and put tougher measures in place.

"Today's (Tuesday) vote shows the parliament has drawn the right lessons from the emissions scandal and is standing on the consumer's side," BEUC Director General Monique Goyens said.



## 'Not natural friends': Trump, Xi will be 'odd couple' at first summit



WASHINGTON/BEIJING:

When US President Donald Trump meets Chinese President Xi Jinping this week, their summit will be marked not only by deep policy divisions but a clash of personalities between America's brash "tweeter-in-chief" and Beijing's cautious, calculating leader.

They may have one thing in common: their rhetoric about restoring their nations to greatness. But the two men differ in almost every other respect, from their political styles to their diplomatic experience, adding uncertainty to what has been called the world's most important bilateral relationship. Five months after his election on a stridently anti-China platform, Trump appears to have set himself on a course for collision rather than conciliation with Xi, raising doubts as to whether the world's two biggest economies can find common ground. Topping the agenda at Trump's Mar-

Lago resort in Florida will be whether he will make good on his threat to use crucial US-China trade ties to pressure Beijing to do more to rein in its nuclear-armed neighbor North Korea, which is working to develop missiles capable of hitting the United States. Trump, a 70-year-old former real estate magnate with no foreign policy experience before entering the White House, has tweeted that it will be a "very difficult" meeting with the veteran Communist Party leader seven years his junior, given Chinese trade practices he says are killing US jobs. He has also demanded that Beijing do more to "solve" the North Korean problem his biggest national security challenge - or he will act alone to deal with Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs.

Some White House aides believe Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner could be an influential moderating voice. AGENCIES

## Xi leaves for his first summit with Donald Trump

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping on Tuesday left for Finland from where he would travel to the US for his first summit with US President Donald Trump during which the two leaders are expected to discuss a range of global issues, including N Korea's nuclear ambitions. Xi will hold talks with President of Finland Sauli Niinisto during his visit to Helsinki and will meet Trump on April 6 at his luxurious home in Mar-a-Lago in Florida. Ahead of the summit, Chinese and US officials held talks to ensure that the first summit is a complete success amid tough assertions by Trump that Washington will act alone if Beijing failed to take a tougher stand against N Korea's nuclear weapons programme. Chinese State Councillor Yang Jiechi said "hope both sides can make efforts." AGENCIES

## Blackwater founder held 'secret meeting' with Putin official on Trump's behalf

WASHINGTON: The United Arab Emirates arranged a secret meeting in January between Blackwater founder Erik Prince and a Russian close to President Vladimir Putin as part of an apparent effort to establish a back-channel line of communication between Moscow and President Donald Trump, according to U.S., European and Arab officials.

The meeting took place around Jan 11 - nine days before Trump's inauguration - in the Seychelles islands in the Indian Ocean, officials said. Though the full agenda remains unclear, the UAE agreed to broker the meeting in part to explore whether Russia could be persuaded to curtail its relationship with Iran, including in Syria, a Trump administration objective that would likely require major concessions to Moscow on US sanctions.

Though Prince had no formal role with the Trump campaign or transition team, he presented himself as an unofficial envoy for Trump to high-ranking Emiratis involved in setting up his meeting with the Putin confidant, according to the officials, who did not identify the Russian.



Erik Prince is the founder of Blackwater Worldwide

Prince was an avid supporter of Trump who gave \$250,000 last year to support the GOP nominee's campaign, records show. He has ties to people in Trump's circle, including Stephen K Bannon, now serving as the president's chief strategist and senior counselor. Prince's sister Betsy DeVos serves as education secretary in the Trump administration. And Prince was seen in the Trump transition offices in New York in December.

US officials said the FBI has been scrutinizing the Sey-

## Don't 'misuse' H-1B visas: US issues stern warning to firms

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration has issued a stern warning to companies not to discriminate against American workers by "misusing" the H-1B work visas programme, the most sought after by Indian IT firms and professionals.

"The Justice Department will not tolerate employers misusing the H-1B visa process to discriminate against US workers," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Tom Wheeler of the Civil Rights Division.

The warning came as the government began accepting employers' H-1B visa petitions for the next fiscal year beginning October 1, 2017. The US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) yesterday also announced multiple measures to "deter and detect" what it described as "fraud and abuse" of the H-1B work visas.

The USCIS announcement indicated that the US government is going to be tough and stringent in approval of H-1B visas this year.

The USCIS has a Congressional mandate to issue 65,000 H-1B visas in general category. AGENCIES

## Russia 'deliberately' caused plane crash that killed President: Poland

WARSAW: Prosecutors in Poland have accused Russia of "deliberately" causing a plane crash which killed the Polish President and 95 others, claiming they have "proof", media reports said.

Poland's national prosecutor Marek Kuczyński said there is "no doubt" that one of the causes of the 2010 crash, which happened in Smolensk, Russia, was due to the behaviour of a Russian official in the control tower, *DailyMail online* reported.

Deputy prosecutor Marek Pasionek added two air traffic controllers were guilty of "deliberately causing an air traffic catastrophe" and said the third Russian official present was guilty of "assisting" in the deliberately caused accident. Polish investigators have said they want to question the men but cannot reveal details about the evidence until that happens.

The plane crash, which took place on April 10, 2010, killed President Lech Kaczyński and 95 people, many of who were top Polish state and military leaders.

There were two major investigations into the crash separately carried out by Poland and Russia. While the Polish investigation blamed the disaster on a combination of factors, including bad weather and errors made by a pilot who was not adequately trained on the plane he was flying, the Russian investigation at the time put all blame on the Polish side, finding no fault with the Russian air traffic controllers. AGENCIES

# Future tense: Computer programmers to feel the heat

CHANGED H-1B VISA NORMS

WASHINGTON: Just a few days before the new season for H-1B visas for skilled workers started, the US authorities have tightened the norms for hiring computer programmers, putting a squeeze on Indian IT companies.

On March 31, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) issued a clarification that computer programmers, to be eligible under the H-1B visa norms, must prove that theirs is a speciality occupation. Merely obtaining a computer degree may not be enough.

In its policy memorandum USCIS has mentioned: "Based on the current version of the Handbook, the fact that a person may be employed as a computer programmer and may use information technology skills and knowledge to help an enterprise achieve its goals in the course of his or her job is not sufficient to establish the position as a speciality occupation. US Embassies around the world started accepting next year's H-1B visa petitions



from April 3. Indian techies are the biggest beneficiaries of the H-1B visas - obtaining around 70 percent of such visas - with companies posting thousands of employees to the US. The visas allow work in the particular area for six years, extendable after that. It's also the route to a US permanent residency or US Green Card. The memorandum says that "a petitioner may not rely solely on the Handbook to meet its bur-

den when seeking to sponsor a beneficiary for a computer programmer position. Instead, a petitioner must provide other evidence to establish that the particular position is one in a speciality occupation..."

The US Congress has set a cap of 65,000 H-1B visas per fiscal year.

Additionally, 20,000 such visas are given to those with master's or higher degrees from the US. At the same time, the

immigration services have moved to detect H-1B visa frauds in the US by taking a "more targeted approach" on site visits across the country aimed at finding out if employers were evading their obligations to make a good faith effort to recruit US workers.

"Too many American workers who are as qualified, willing and deserving to work in these fields have been ignored or unfairly disadvantaged,"

**The immigration services warned employers that they would not be allowed to 'abuse the H-1B program' which it said affects US workers negatively**

says a press release issued by the USCIS on Monday adding that "protecting American workers by combating fraud in our employment based immigration programs is a priority of USCIS."

The immigration services warned employers that they would not be allowed to "abuse the H-1B program" which it said affects US workers negatively, decreasing wages and job opportunities.

A position that US President Donald Trump has often endorsed. AGENCIES

## Malala Yousafzai to address Canadian Parliament

OTTAWA: Malala Yousafzai, the youngest Nobel Prize laureate, will on April 12 address Canada's parliament and officially receive the honorary Canadian citizenship bestowed upon her in 2014, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said.

Trudeau, in a statement on Monday, said: "I am pleased to announce Malala Yousafzai's upcoming visit to Canada. Yousafzai's courageous response to those who threatened her life, and her advocacy for girls' education, has inspired many millions of people around the world."

"Her story is one of determination and dignity, and Canada is proud to call her an honorary citizen of this great country. I look forward to attending the upcoming ceremony and witnessing the historic moment when she becomes the youngest person to address the Parliament of Canada."

Trudeau will meet Malala to discuss girls' empowerment through education and how they can actively contribute to the sustainable development of their communities and countries. AGENCIES

## Pink diamond auctioned for record \$71.2mn in Hong Kong

ZURICH: Sotheby's sold a 59.6 carat pink diamond for about \$71 million in Hong Kong, setting the world record for the top auction price for any gem. The stone has an unusual distinction: it has attracted even higher bids in the past.

The Pink Star sold for HK\$553 million after about five minutes of bidding Tuesday. The oval-shaped diamond dethroned the Oppenheimer Blue, which fetched \$58 million in May at Christie's.

In a quirk of auction history, the record price for the Pink Star is some \$12 million lower than the \$83 million offer Sotheby's adjudicated it for in 2013. That sale collapsed because the buyer, diamond-cutter Isaac Wolf, never paid, and Sotheby's had to reclaim the stone.

The sale gives the auction house some respite after it failed to sell other major gems last year, including the biggest rough diamond found in more than 100 years and a blue diamond ring that once belonged to Hollywood actress Shirley



Temple. The Pink Star was estimated to be worth more than \$60 million. It's the largest internally flawless diamond of its kind that the Gemological Institute of America has ever graded. The colour is fancy pink, the highest grade, and the purity of its crystals ranks among the top 2% in the world.

Steinmetz Diamonds, owned by Israeli billionaire Beny Steinmetz, spent two years cutting and polishing the stone, which was mined by De Beers in Botswana. The stone was then worn by Danish model Helena Christensen around her neck to exhibit it to the public for the first time in Monaco in 2003. Pink diamonds get their colour from a process known as plastic deformation, whereby pressure changes create structural anomalies in the crystals. Sotheby's didn't change its practices for accepting bids in this auction as buyer defaults are "extremely rare," said Catherine Allen, a spokeswoman. AGENCIES

## IS commanders killed in Iraq's Mosul

BAGHDAD: The US-led international coalition on Tuesday bombed Islamic State (IS) positions in Iraq's Mosul city, killing four key commanders, military officials said.

According to a statement issued by the Military Intelligence, the coalition airstrikes hit several positions in the al-Tanak neighbourhood in western Mosul, *Efe news* reported.

The warplanes of the international coalition resumed bombings on Tuesday after a 16-hour suspension of operations due to bad weather.

On February 19, Iraqi security forces began an offensive in western Mosul, two weeks after concluding operations to expel IS from the eastern section of the city.

The IS seized Mosul in 2014. AGENCIES

**WEST BENGAL STATE LOTTERY**

Results of 234<sup>th</sup> Bangasree Super Draw held on 04.04.2017 at Tarapada Memorial Hall, 37, G. C. Avenue, Kolkata-13.

**JUDGES PRESENT**  
Sri Narayan Banerjee  
Smt. Mousumi Pramanik

1<sup>st</sup> Prize: One: ₹ 25,00,000/- 0231793  
2<sup>nd</sup> Prize: One: ₹ 1,00,000/- A-289967  
3<sup>rd</sup> Prize: One: ₹ 25,000/- C-174256

4<sup>th</sup> Prize: ₹ 5,000/- (Sold Tickets ending with)  
3467 8352 3879 9884  
5<sup>th</sup> Prize: ₹ 1,000/- (Sold Tickets ending with)  
1688 5585 8457 8901  
6<sup>th</sup> Prize: ₹ 500/- (Sold Tickets ending with)  
8196 8513 4391 6955  
7<sup>th</sup> Prize: ₹ 300/- (Sold Tickets ending with)  
1598 1977 5224 8628  
8<sup>th</sup> Prize: ₹ 100/- each (Sold Tickets ending with)  
4825 8275 8777 3192 3297  
8416 5869 3148 1347 3475  
5886 4139 6493 8499 0296  
6478 4373 4584 4418 7918

Claim by 03.05.2017. Claim for prizes above ₹ 5,000/- shall be received and paid through Nationalized Bank by the Directorate of State Lotteries, Govt. of West Bengal, 89, Ganesh Chandra Avenue, Kolkata-700013 (Phone No. 225-4680/89). Rest by the Distributor. Official Result Sheet is FINAL. Terms & Conditions apply.

Sd/- Deputy Director, State Lotteries, ICA-5715/2017 Government of West Bengal.

Next Attraction: 497<sup>th</sup> Bangalokshmi Draw on 11.04.2017. Nababarshe Bumper, 2017 Draw on 18.04.2017.

**ASANSOL DURGAPUR DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY.**  
(A Statutory body of the Govt. of West Bengal)  
City Centre, Durgapur-16. Ph:0343-2546716/6815

N.I.Q. (Online) No. - ADDA/DGP/ED/Q-21/16-17

Exe. Engg., ADDA, Durgapur invites Sealed Quotation (Two-Cover Bid e-tendering System) for the works (1) Supply and delivery of 350 mm & 400 mm dia. Socket & Spigot (Class K-9) pipes for water supply conforming to Specification IS:8329/2000 (3<sup>rd</sup> Revision) with Amendment No. - 1 with ISI marked in slanted red, suitable for push-on type jointing with internal cement mortar lining & external protection by Metallic Zinc Coating with finished layer of synthetic resin (Blue Epoxy) compatible with Zinc coating including free supply of Polyethylene Sleeves with Rubber gasket as per IS:5382 for at various sites in ADDA, Durgapur Dist - Burdwan as and when required from time to time; Tender ID No. - ADDA\_107538\_1. For other details visit our website [www.addaonline.in](http://www.addaonline.in) or <http://wbenders.gov.in> or contact Sd/- Exe. Engg., ADDA, Durgapur.

**CALCUTTA STATE TRANSPORT CORPORATION**  
ENGINEERING UNIT (CIVIL)  
45, Ganesh Chandra Avenue, Kolkata-13

**NOTICE INVITING ELECTRONIC TENDER NO. 15 OF 2016-2017**

Sl. No.	Name of work	Estimated Amount
1.	Repair and renovation of Rooms, Corridor etc. alongwith roof treatment works of Central Store Building at Central Workshop Complex, Belghoria, CSTC.	Rs. 12,34,501.22

For detailed Notice, please visit [www.wbtenders.gov.in](http://www.wbtenders.gov.in) and [www.cstc.org.in](http://www.cstc.org.in)

Sr. Engineer(Civil)-In-charge  
C.S.T.C.

## UN: Up to 7 million people in critical need of food in Syria

BRUSSELS: Up to seven million people are in critical need of food in Syria and the situation is getting worse every day as the war drags on, a senior official at the United Nations' food program said on Tuesday. The war in Syria, which has entered its seventh year, has killed some 320,000 people, displaced millions and thrown civilians into dire living conditions.

"The number of people who are in need of food assistance in Syria has exceeded six-seven million, people who are in critical food need," Muhammad Hadi, the UN World Food Program's regional director told *Reuters*. "As days pass, as months and weeks pass, the number of people who are in need is increasing. And the situation

on the ground is not improving at all... In crisis like Syria, the ones who suffer the most are definitely the children." Hadi, in Brussels for an international conference on Syria organized by the European Union, said WFP delivers food parcels to four million people in Syria and feeds nearly two million people in the neighboring states every month. The EU contributes funding to the WFP Syria program, which, according to Hadi, is mostly restrained by the problems of reaching many parts of Syria. According to the UN, food production has dropped to an all-time low in Syria. Many farmers have had to abandon their land, unable to afford the soaring costs of seeds, fertilizers and tractor fuel. AGENCIES

**PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION, WEST BENGAL**  
161A, S.P. Mukherjee Road, Kolkata - 700 026

**IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT**  
**Schedule of Interview**

Advertisement No.	Name of the Post	Date of Interview	Date of downloading E-Interview Call Letter & Website Name
19/2016 & 12(2)/2015	Principal, Ekabya Model Residential Schools (English Medium Higher Secondary Co-Ed) under the Tribal Development Department, Govt of West Bengal	7 <sup>th</sup> April, 2017 (Friday)	4 <sup>th</sup> April, 2017 (Tuesday) from <a href="http://www.pscwbonline.gov.in">www.pscwbonline.gov.in</a>

List of eligible candidates is available in the Commission's Enquiry counter and also in the Commission's website at [www.pscwb.org.in](http://www.pscwb.org.in) & [www.pscwbonline.gov.in](http://www.pscwbonline.gov.in) for information of all concerned. Eligible candidates are requested to download the e-interview call letter from the Commission's respective website on and from the date given in the table. In case, any candidate fails to download his/her own call letter, he/she may download the complete list of the eligible candidates where his/her name is featuring and appear at the Commission's office in time with all original testimonials along with self attested copies of relevant documents relating to essential qualifications, experience etc. and a copy of own photograph on the day of interview.

ICA/654(6)2017

**KMDA KOLKATA METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**  
NIT No. 10/EE/ED-V/E&M/KMDA of 2016-2017

Sealed tenders are invited by the Executive Engineer, Electrical Division-V, E&M Sector, KMDA from resourceful reputed agencies for the following works: **Name of works; Estimated Cost; Earnest Money:** (1) Display of Signage Aluminium Composite Panel Board at Gayeshpur Clear Water Booster Pumping Station; Rs. 4,54,090/-; Rs. 9,082/- (2) Supply, installation & commissioning of Mechanical Vertical Water Level Indicator at Naihahi Clear Water Booster Pumping Station; Rs. 1,27,462/-; Rs. 2,549/- (3) Withdrawal, Dismantling, Repairing & Installation of Jyoti Make Vertical Turbine Pump Set No. 2 at Lake Town Clear Water Booster Pumping Station; Rs. 3,30,068/-; Rs. 6,601/-; **Cost of Tender Documents:** Rs. 850/- for SI. No. 1 to 3 each. **Time of Completion:** 15 Days for SI. No. 1 to 3 each; **Last date & time of receipt of application:** 10.04.2017 up to 04.00 PM. For details contact the above office or visit KMDA website.

KMDA/T-889A-Contd(2)/2016-17  
Visit Website : [www.kmdaonline.org](http://www.kmdaonline.org)



# House panel asks banks to find means to detect NPAs early

**NEW DELHI:** Concerned over high level of bad loans in the banking system, a parliamentary panel has asked PSU banks to devise a mechanism to detect stressed assets early so that urgent corrective steps can be taken.

"The Committee intends to caution the management of PSBs (public sector banks) to professionally manage the sanctioning of loans and devise all the requisite whereabouts to notice early signs of stress on the loans disbursed by them for taking urgent corrective measures," a report of the Parliamentary panel said.

Gross NPAs of public sector banks increased to Rs 6,06,911 crore while total stressed assets (gross non-performing assets and restructured standard advances) of scheduled commercial banks stood at Rs 9.64 lakh crore as on December 31, 2016.

As of September-end, the banks' total stressed loans were Rs 8,97,000 crore.

"The Committee is also of the firm view that there is an urgent need for PSBs to reduce their stressed assets and clean up their balance sheets - which would increase their abil-



Beleaguered Vijay Mallya who owes ₹9,000 cr to different banks

ity as also their credibility to raise capital in the future," the report submitted to Parliament recently said.

The panel also asked the Finance Ministry to amend banking laws, including SBI Act, to provide for disclosure of names of loan defaulters by banks to tackle the menace of mounting NPAs.

Section 44 of the State Bank of India Act, 1955 as well as some other clauses of confidentiality in the relevant laws invariably prohibit disclosing the names of individuals who owe money to banks or are responsible for bad loans on account of their failure to repay. According to the report of the Committee, the

## 'Mallya matter sub-judice, no comment,' says UK minister

**NEW DELHI:** British Finance Minister Philip Hammond on Tuesday refused to comment on the extradition of embattled liquor tycoon Vijay Mallya saying the matter is sub-judice. The British Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is here for the 9th UK-India Economic and Financial Dialogue, said the extradition request by India is before a court and so he would not like to comment on the issue.

names of defaulters are, however, shared with the Reserve Bank of India and the Credit Information Bureau Limited (CIBIL). The report also takes note of the averments made by the Finance Ministry (Department of Financial Services) that there is no proposal to amend the relevant provisions of law to disclose the names of defaulters and publish the same in public domain.

The Committee on Petitions said that in view of serious magnitude of the problem of bad loans, wilful defaulters should be dealt with sternly and the amount due from them should be recovered

within a specified time frame. The Committee on Petitions asked the Finance Ministry to apprise it of the final outcome within three months of presentation of its report.

"With a view to containing the burgeoning NPAs in banks, the Committee, therefore, strongly recommends that the government should make appropriate amendments in the archaic provisions of the SBI Act and other relevant laws to disclose the names of individuals who owe money to the banks or are responsible for bad loans on account of their default to repay," it said.

# Gionee partners RCB and KKR; Hero Cycles sponsors Kings XI

**NEW DELHI:** Mobile handset maker Gionee India on Tuesday announced its association with Royal Challengers Bangalore, while Kings XI Punjab has roped in bicycle maker Hero Cycles as principal sponsor.

Gionee is already the principal sponsor of the Kolkata Knight Riders.

Announcing the partnership, Gionee India CEO and Managing Director Arvind R Vohra said: "This partnership puts us at the forefront in the IPL with the Gionee brand being visible in 26 of the 56 games till the knockouts."

The company had spent close to Rs 500 crore in marketing last year, and in 2017-18, they plan to increase the same by almost 50 per cent, Gionee India said in a statement.

Hero Cycles is banking on IPL viewership to reach out to youth through its partnership with Kings XI Punjab.

"Through this partnership, our objective is to reach out to the millions of cricket fans, particularly the youth," Hero Cycles Chairman and Managing Director Pankaj Munjal said. IPL is without doubt India's most popular sporting event, and is watched by millions of people not just in India but across the globe, he added. Already, LUX Industries



## Jaitley invited to IPL matches

**NEW DELHI:** Senior BCCI vice-president C K Khanna today met Finance Minister Arun Jaitley and invited him for the Indian Premier League matches, to be held at the Feroz Shah Kotla stadium here. Feroz Shah Kotla is scheduled to host seven matches during the 10th edition of the IPL, starting tomorrow at Hyderabad. IPL gets underway with match between defending champions Sunrisers Hyderabad and Royal Challengers Bangalore. Jaitley was the former President of the DDCA.

has announced that its flagship brand Lux Cozi will be one of the official sponsors of Kolkata Knight Riders for two consecutive years. Similarly, Usha International has taken forward its on-going associ-

ation with Mumbai Indians team for the fourth consecutive year as official partner. Sunrisers Hyderabad have also roped in sponsors such as Ultratech, Reliance Jio, Canara Bank, and Red FM, among others.

## Aditya Birla Group gets RBI licence to start payments bank

**NEW DELHI:** The Aditya Birla Group on Tuesday said it has received licence from the Reserve Bank of India to start payments bank.

Headed by Kumar Mangalam Birla, the group's outfit Aditya Birla Nuvo had set up a 51:49 joint venture -- Aditya Birla Idea Payments Bank Ltd -- with telecom major Idea Cellular to launch payments bank services in the country.

"... the Reserve Bank of India... has granted licence to Aditya Birla Idea Payments Bank Ltd to carry on the business of payments bank in India," Aditya Birla Nuvo said in a BSE filing.

At present, Airtel and India Post are offering payments bank services in the country. Idea Cellular Chief Corporate Affairs Officer Rajat

Mukarji had earlier said the Aditya Birla Idea Payments Bank will be launched in the first half of 2017.

With the objective of deepening financial inclusion, RBI kicked off an era of differentiated banking by allowing SFBs (small finance banks) and PBs (payments banks) to start services. A total of 21 entities were given in-principle nod, including 11 for payments banks.

Later, three entities -- Tech Mahindra, Cholamandalam Investment and Finance Company and a consortium of Dilip Shanghvi, IDFC Bank and Telenor Financial Services -- backed out of the payments bank licensing. Payments banks can accept deposits from individuals and small businesses up to a maximum of Rs 1 lakh per account.

# H-1B visa memo to have hardly any impact on Indian IT cos: Nasscom

**NEW DELHI:** IT industry body Nasscom today said the US' latest memo on H-1B visas would have "little impact" on Indian IT firms as they have already started applying for visas for higher-level specialised professionals this year.

The US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has recently come out with a policy memorandum saying companies applying for visas must provide "evidence to establish that the particular position is one in a specialty occupation". The new H-1B guideline rescinds a memorandum issued in December, 2000.

Seeking to play down the impact on outsourcing companies, Nasscom said the memorandum "reinforces existing practice by adjudicators and clarifies requirements for certain computer professionals". "The clarifying guidance

should have little impact on Nasscom members as this has been the adjudicatory practice for years and also as several of our member executives have noted recently, they are applying for visas for higher level professionals this year," Nasscom said in a statement.

Nasscom counts IT outsourcing firms like TCS, Infosys, Wipro as well as American firms like Cognizant, Microsoft, IBM and Accenture as members. The demand for additional evidence showing that the said job is complex/specialised and requires professional degrees mentioned in the memo has been the de facto requirement for years.

India accounts for a significant portion of the H-1B visas, which are non-immigrant visas used by American firms to employ foreign workers that require specific expertise.

USCIS -- a government agency that oversees lawful immigration to the US -- has emphasised that the H-1B visa programme should help US companies recruit highly-skilled foreign nationals when there is a shortage of qualified workers in the country.

USCIS issues about 65,000 H-1B visas in general category and another 20,000 for those applicants having higher education (Masters and above) from US universities in the field of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Nasscom said the H-1B visa system exists specifically because of the "persistent shortage" of highly-skilled domestic IT talent in the US.

The US accounts for over 60 per cent of the export revenues of the Indian IT industry. "Nasscom member companies have and will continue

to provide skilled talent and solutions to fill that gap and keep US companies competitive globally," it added.

However, industry watchers believe that coupled with immigration pushbacks being seen in other geographies like the UK and Singapore, the overall impact would make movement of labour difficult and operation costlier in the short term. During his election campaign, US President Donald Trump had promised stricter immigration laws and protection of local jobs.

An US legislation (Lofgren Bill) was introduced that proposed doubling of the minimum wages of H-1B visa holders to \$130,000. Indian firms like TCS, Infosys and Wipro -- on their part -- have been reducing their dependence on H-1B visas, ramping up local hiring.

## AERA exempts RCS flights from landing and parking charges

**MUMBAI:** Tariff regulator AERA has ordered all major airport operators, including those run under the defence ministry, to exempt flights operated under the Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) from landing and parking charges. Airfares for all passenger seats operated on flights under the regional connectivity scheme, will also not be subjected to any levy or charge imposed by the airport operators, Airports Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA) said in its latest order.

Under the regional connectivity scheme UDAN, kick-started last week, fares have

been capped at Rs 2,500 for one-hour flights.

The scheme also provides for various benefits including no airport charges and three-year exclusivity on the routes. After the first round of bidding for the RCS routes, five airlines including Air India's regional arm Alliance Air, Deccan Aviation, SpiceJet and Air Odisha have been awarded 128 routes connecting over 30 unserved airports.

It also said that airfares for all passenger seats on RCS flights will not be subject to any charges such as passengers service fee, development fee as well as user development fee.

## Gem & jewellery exports surge by 9.5% in April-Jan period

**NEW DELHI:** Exports of gems and jewellery grew 9.5 per cent to about \$29 billion during April-January 2016-17, driven largely by demand in India's major markets like the US.

In April-January period of the previous fiscal, exports from the sector stood at \$26.5 billion, according to the data from Gems and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC).

Gems and jewellery contribute about 14 per cent to the country's overall exports.

# Kamov copter-making joint venture awaits Putin's nod

**NEW DELHI:** Russian President Vladimir Putin is yet to give the final approval for setting up an Indo-Russia joint venture to manufacture 200 Kamov military helicopters in India under a \$1 billion deal inked in 2015.

Both India and Russia had finalised the broad agreement for the JV last year following which Hindustan Aeronautics Limited and two Russian defence majors decided to set up the joint venture to produce the multi-role 'Kamov 226T' helicopters in India.

However, a final presidential clearance from Moscow for moving ahead is yet to come, causing delay in the ambitious



Russian President Vladimir Putin

project.

As per the original plan, the first Kamov helicopter was to roll out in 2021 but due to the delay in getting clearance, there is now uncertainty over the production schedule.

"While we have obtained all other clearances for the JV, the Russian presidential clearance is yet to come. The moment it comes, we will move ahead in the project," a top government official involved in the project said. He said once the joint venture is set up, the Indian government can start interaction with the board members of the new entity on the "depth of technology", technology transfer, exact number of choppers to be produced in India and other key issues.

The inter-government agreement was signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Russia in December, 2015.

# FPI net inflows at ₹49K cr in FY'17

**NEW DELHI:** Foreign investors pumped in a little over Rs 49,000 crore in the Indian capital markets in 2016-17 after pulling out a hefty sum in the preceding fiscal. Equities attracted net inflows during the just concluded financial year. Debt instruments, on the other hand, took a big hit after remaining preferred investment avenue for foreign funds in recent years.

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) purchased stocks worth about Rs 56,123 crore in 2016-17, but sold bonds to the tune of Rs 7,029 crore, resulting in net inflows of Rs 49,095 crore, according to depositories data.

FPIs had started the year on a positive note and pumped in close to Rs 47,000 crore in equities in the first six months on hopes that the Reserve Bank would bring down the monetary policy rate at its first pol-

icy meet of 2016-17 as well as on expectations of a good monsoon.

The overall inflows last fiscal followed a net outflow of Rs 18,175 crore from the capital markets (equity and debt) in 2015-16. That included a withdrawal of Rs 14,171 crore from equities and Rs 4,004 crore from the debt markets.

The capital poured in by FPIs is often called 'hot money' because of its unpredictability, but these overseas entities have still been among the most important drivers of Indian stock markets.

FPIs' cumulative net investment in the Indian equity market, since being allowed over two decades ago in November 1992, has now reached Rs 8.65 lakh crore.

The cumulative figure for debt securities has also grown to about Rs 3 lakh crore -- tak-

**FPIs purchased stocks worth about ₹56,123 crore in 2016-17 but sold bonds to the tune of ₹7,029 crore, resulting in net inflows of ₹49,095 crore. FPIs had started the year on a positive note and pumped in close to ₹47,000 crore in equities in the first six months on hopes that the RBI would bring down the monetary policy rate at its first policy meet of 2016-17**

ing the total for both debt and equities to Rs 11.65 lakh crore (\$232 billion).

The equity market kept overseas institutional investors enthralled last fiscal with its relatively steadier return, according to experts.

They had, however, reversed the inflow trend in October and the withdrawal continued till

January on uncertainty over the outcome of the US presidential elections, expectations of a rate hike by the US Federal Reserve and the government's demonetisation drive back home.

"Capital outflows started in Indian markets from October over the uncertainty of US election results. This event was soon followed by the demon-

etisation drive that created a domestic cash crunch and sparked intense selling pressure in the capital markets," Dinesh Rohira CEO at 5nance.com said.

Thereafter, they had poured in a over Rs 41,000 crore in stocks in February and March.

In March alone, FPIs had infused a net sum of Rs 31,327 crore in equities buoyed by expectations that BJP's victory in assembly polls is a precursor to more "bold, reformist policies". With regard to the debt market, FPIs had started the year on a positive note, but for most part of the year, they pulled out. From October onwards, overseas investors had been withdrawing money from the debt market and the trend continued till January. However, they had infused money in February and March.

# Jan-March PE investments gallop by 36% to \$5.4 billion

**NEW DELHI:** Private equity firms invested about \$5.4 billion across 117 deals during the quarter ended March 2017, 36 per cent higher than the year ago period even as the number of transactions declined, says a survey. According to early data from Venture Intelligence, private equity investments in the first quarter of this year rose 36 per cent on a year-on-year basis and 23 per cent over the previous quarter (October-December 2016).

However, the number of investments was lower by 41 per cent compared to last year and 35 per cent lower than the previous quarter.

"Interestingly, almost \$3.6 billion, or 2/3rds of the total value of the investments during the period, were announced/

reported in just March," noted Arun Natarajan, CEO of Venture Intelligence. The surge in deal value was driven by big ticket deals. The latest quarter witnessed 11 PE investments worth \$100 million or more compared to 12 such transactions in the same period last year and eight during the immediate previous quarter. Many of the larger deals during January-March this year involved secondary sales by either promoters or existing PE investors, the report noted.

Telecom tower firm Bharti Infratel saw parent firm Bharti Airtel sell a 10.3 per cent stake to KKR and Canadian pension fund CPPIB for almost \$952 million.

CPPIB also invested \$720 million in IT services firm

GlobalLogic, providing an exit route for existing PE investor Apex Partners. True North (formerly India Value Fund) exited one hospital chain (Manipal Health via a \$215 million sale to Temasek) and entered a new one (KIMS Group via a \$200 million investment that gave an exit to Ascent Capital and OrbiMed).

Sector-wise, IT and ITES companies accounted for 53 per cent of the PE investment value pie in January-March quarter of this year, attracting almost \$2.9 billion across 64 deals. Meanwhile, BFSI companies attracted \$498 million across 17 PE investments, followed closely by healthcare and life sciences companies which attracted \$496 million, the report added.



# India, UK may explore FTA after Brexit formalisation

NEW DELHI: India and the UK may look at a free trade agreement (FTA) after Britain formally leaves European Union, the 27-nation trading bloc.

The possibility of FTA came up during discussions between Finance Minister Arun Jaitley and UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond at the 9th UK-India economic and financial dialogue wherein Britain pitched for increased trade engagement with India.

On its part, India said that a formal dialogue on a possible bilateral trade agreement can start only after the completion of Brexit, which is expected to take about two years.

British Parliament last month approved the Brexit Bill, paving the way for exit of the United Kingdom from the EU.

Jaitley said India in its communication with the UK government has stated that post Brexit it will look for more open trade, and more trade arrangements. "Obviously this can be formally discussed after the Brexit takes place but it is probably going to imply a far wider and a far higher engagement between the two countries. "What shape it is going to take can only be formalised post Brexit negotiation," Jaitley told reporters.

Hammond said the two



Finance Minister Arun Jaitley welcomes the United Kingdom's Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond prior to their delegation-level talks in New Delhi on Tuesday

nations have very significant trade and investment relationship and Britain is the largest G20 investor in India in the last 10 years, while India is the 3rd largest investor in the UK.

"We have continued to consolidate past success and to identify new areas where we can work together over the next couple of years, preparing for the point where Britain leaves the EU and is able to engage with Indian colleagues

in a deep discussion about a future FTA between the UK and India," he said.

The UK is among India's major trading partners and in 2014-15, it ranked 18th in the list of India's top 25 trading partners.

As per the Department of Commerce data, two-way merchandise trade during 2014-15 was \$14.33 billion, marking a decrease of 9.39 per cent as compared to 2013-14.

## ... Decide to set up £500 million fund to finance green energy

NEW DELHI: India and the UK Tuesday decided to set up a 500 million pound fund, with both governments together investing 240 million pound, to finance clean energy projects here. The fund will be set up as a sub-fund of the Rs 40,000 crore National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF), which was formed in 2015 to finance greenfield as well as brownfield projects. While India and the UK will be the anchor investors to the 'Green Growth Equity Fund' and invest 120 million pound each, the remaining 260 million pound has to come in from private investors. "Both governments reaffirmed their commitment to anchor invest up to 120 million pound each in the joint fund which aims to raise around 500 million pound and has the potential to unlock much more in future," said a joint statement issued after the 9th UK-India Economic and Financial Dialogue here. The fund will focus initial investments on India's rapidly growing energy and renewable market and a fund manager is expected "to be selected by the autumn", which is by the middle of 2017. "Our first major step in the fund (NIIF) has been taken and there is going to be a sub-fund," Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said after a meeting with UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond.

# ONGC eyes 17% jump in crude output, 66% in gas by 2022

NEW DELHI: State-owned ONGC has projected 17 per cent rise in its crude oil production and 66 per cent in natural gas by March 2022 as it looks to boost domestic output to help achieve the government target of 10 per cent reduction in import of these items.

The nation's biggest oil and gas producer has prepared 'Roadmap' for Import Reduction, two years after Prime Minister Narendra Modi set a target for reducing oil import dependence by 10 per cent, from 77 per cent in 2013-14.

ONGC sees crude oil output rising from 22.6 million tonne in 2017-18 to 26.42 million tonne in 2021-22. Gas output is projected to rise from 25.011 billion cubic meters in 2017-18 to 41.536 bcm in 2021-22.

"ONGC management is keen to ensure that the Prime Minister's vision of 10 per cent import reduction is met," the company has said in the document that estimates oil and gas supplies from all past discoveries, ongoing development as well as potential projects slated for development.

As on October 1, 2016, ONGC had 577 hydrocarbon discoveries. Most of them were either in production or action had been initiated to monetise them.

Output from the currently producing fields is projected to fall from 18.5 million tonne in



ONGC Chairman D K Sarraf

## OVL seeks to invest \$3 billion in Iran's Farzad-B gas block

MUMBAI: National oil & gas explorer ONGC is planning to invest over \$3 billion in the Farzad-B natural gas block in Iran, a top company official said on Tuesday. The proposed investment will be driven through a consortium of state-run oil companies led by its overseas arm ONGC Videsh (OVL). The statement comes amid media reports that government is threatening to massively reduce crude intake from Iran as Tehran delays clearing the investment plan in the block.

current fiscal which began this month to 12.66 million tons in 2021-22. About 5.3 million tonne is expected from fields where investment approval has already been given and another 8.45 million tonne

from the fields that are under conceptualisation or investment approval is under process.

For natural gas, the output is projected to drop from 19.73 bcm from current fields to 11.9 bcm in 2021-22.

## NHPC POWERS INDIA AHEAD



The first unit of the 4x200 mw Parbati Hydro Electricity Project, Stage-II, in Kullu District, Himachal Pradesh, was successfully spun at 3 pm on March 31 and further tests of the unit are in progress. The water of JiwanaNallah has been diverted into the main Head Race Tunnel through a Drop Shaft for this task. Subsequently, spinning and testing of other units are also to be achieved in a similar manner

## DVC energises electricity generation by 21% in FY17

KOLKATA: Loss-making Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) has outpaced the national average in electricity generation, registering a growth of 20.8 per cent in FY17. "DVC has generated 33581 million units in FY17 from thermal and hydel capacities, growing at 20.8 per cent over 2015-16 with generation of 27,778 million units. The national average generation growth is just 4.72 per cent, NTPC generation has expanded by 3.32 per cent while, eastern region growth is 7.34 per cent," a DVC official said. Revenue also jumped by 12.2 per cent to Rs 14,700 crore for the year under review compared to Rs 13,096 crore registered in 2015-16.

"Beside, overall better operational efficiency there had been high exchange power trading and more short term power sale were major factors for such performance," DVC chairman Andrew WK Lang-

stieh said. DVC's merchant power sale (through power exchange) had tripled to 582 million units in 2016-17 compared to 171 million units in 2015-16.

The long term debt had also got reduced to Rs 19,500 crore (as on March 31, 2017) from Rs 21,560 crore in FY16 with debt restructuring, DVC said.

The corporation will be at a loss at net level due to high interest burden due to unsustainable long term debt, they declined to share the details.

Sources said, once Raghunathpur thermal power plant is successfully hived-off in a joint venture soon after West Bengal's nod is received, the corporation will be back in black.

DVC during the year commissioned long-delayed thermal power projects totalling 1700 MW, one unit of 500 MW at Bokaro at Jharkhand and two units of 600 MW each at Raghunathpur TPS in Bengal.

# MTNL mulls selling surplus land, buildings to pare debt

NEW DELHI: Loss making state-owned telecom firm MTNL has approached the government with a proposal to monetise surplus land and reduce debt.

The debt laden company says it has up to Rs 5,000 crore worth of real estate that can be monetised readily. "We have real estate available with us, which is not being effectively utilised. So, we have submitted a proposal that some of that real estate we would like to redevelop, or sell land and building... The proceeds can be utilised for debt reduction," MTNL Chairman and Managing Director P K Purwar said.

MTNL had a total debt of over Rs 19,000 crore at the end of December 31, 2016. The corporation - which offers land-line and mobile telephony services in Delhi and Mumbai - has been hit hard by debt and it is borrowing money to meet its day-to-day requirements, Telecom Minister Manoj Sinha had said in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha in February this year.

Purwar said that in the first tranche nearly Rs 3,000-5,000 crore worth of land is "readily available" for the monetisation

## The PSU telco is already earning from renting out space and expects such rentals in Delhi and Mumbai to yield close to ₹180 crore in the financial year that ended on March 31, 2017

plan but did not share the overall value of the assets it has.

"If the government allows us and if the market is favourably inclined, MTNL has the ability to raise the resources," he said.

It is already earning from renting out space and expects such rentals in Delhi and Mumbai to yield close to Rs 180 crore last financial year ended March 31.

"Many of the buildings are near the metro stations, and have a huge commercial potential. In case where the land comes with certain restrictions and clauses,

we can work with the government and developmental agencies to fully utilise the potential of the buildings," he said.

MTNL, he said, is open an outright sale of land where no such restrictive clauses apply. It had approached the Telecom Department with the proposal 3-4 months back but is yet to hear from the government. Asked if the telecom corporation is rolling over debt or has started repaying part of the borrowings, Purwar said, "No, unless the monetisation falls in place we will not be able to reduce our debt."

"At this stage, we don't have other plans. We think this is the way... We have certain assets which are not giving us high returns. So it makes business sense to part with the land and buildings, that we don't require," he pointed out.

MTNL's losses narrowed to Rs 2,005.74 crore in 2015-16, from Rs 2,893.39 crore in 2014-15. In 2013-14, the company had logged profit of Rs 7,825.13 crore, mainly on account of write-back of amortisation of broadband wireless access (BWA) spectrum amounting to Rs 11,620.9 crore.

# RIL gets green nod for ₹13,250-cr Dahej unit expansion project

NEW DELHI: Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) has received environment clearance for expansion and debottlenecking of its Dahej petrochemical facility in Gujarat at a cost of Rs 13,250 crore.

The Mukesh Ambani-led firm wants to expand its Dahej facility located in Bharuch district in view of erratic supply of feed stock, change in the government's policy to prioritise domestic supply over industrial sector, adequate supply of Shale gas ethane from the US, besides meeting demand-supply gap of petrochemicals in India.

"Based on the recommendations of the Expert Appraisal Committee (Industry), the

Environment Ministry has given the environmental clearance for RIL's expansion project yesterday," a senior government official said.

The green nod to the proposed project, which will be carried out within the existing plant area of 700 hectare, is subject to some conditions, the official said.

The estimated cost of the project is Rs 13,250 crore. A budget of Rs 400 crore will be kept aside for environment protection and conservation.

The fuel used for the proposed project would largely be ethane, lean gas and off gas. The power required for the project will be met from the existing captive power plant.

As per the proposal, RIL Dahej facility presently utilises a mixture of ethane and propane to produce downstream products and by-products.

Dahej facility proposes to modify its feedstock ratio of ethane and propane in the gas cracker plant owing to the availability of shale gas ethane imported from the US.

This change in feedstock mixture will result in higher production of ethylene.

The RIL's proposal also include setting up of new plants including Chlorinated Poly Vinyl Chloride (CPVC), Vinyl Chloride Monomer (VCM), Poly Vinyl Chloride (PVC) and a dedicated Ethane storage tank.



## CORPORATE KALEIDOSCOPE



As part of National Pulse Polio Programme, NLC India Ltd General Manager (Finance & Technical) and Secretary to the CMD V Chandrasekar administers polio drops to a child at the Block 6 Health Centre at Neyveli





**DETERMINED TO CONTRIBUTE IN DEATH OVERS, SAYS BHUVNESHWAR**

**HYDERABAD:** Bhuvneshwar Kumar, who played a vital role in Sunrisers Hyderabad's success last IPL, is determined to contribute in the upcoming edition, particularly in death overs. "This year is going to be a challenge because we have done so well last year. So, there is going to be expectations from us," the seamer said.

**MICHAEL CLARKE JOINS KEVIN PIETERSEN IN IPL COMMENTARY PANEL**

**NEW DELHI:** Former Australia captain Michael Clarke will be joining an elite panel commentators comprising Kevin Pieteresen, Sunil Gavaskar for the upcoming 10th edition of Indian Premier League. As many as 20 commentators will be travelling across the country to lend their perspective on the game over the course of 47 days across 10 different venues.

**AFTER AUCTION SNUB, ISHANT GETS PICKED BY KINGS XI PUNJAB**

**NEW DELHI:** Senior Indian speedster Ishant Sharma was on Tuesday picked by Kings XI Punjab for the 10th Indian Premier League, a massive boost to his Twenty20 career after the setback of going unsold in the players' auction. Currently, India's senior-most pacer in the Test squad (77 matches), Ishant went unsold at the IPL Players' auction in February.



# IPL 10 kicks off with some notable absentees



A clutch of Indian stars led by Kohli are out of this edition — either partially or fully. It will only be known next week when exactly Kohli will start playing. Another big name to miss the early action is South African swashbuckler AB de Villiers who is nursing a back injury

**NEW DELHI:** Virat Kohli's colossal presence is sure to be missed when the 10th Indian Premier League (IPL) takes off on Wednesday after a build-up mired in administrative tug-of-war over funds. A clutch of Indian stars led by Kohli are out of this edition — either partially or fully, which certainly lessens the novelty factor for all the star gazers. Even off the field, the run-up to the tournament has been far from smooth. Several state units had expressed their inability to conduct matches, citing lack of funds, before the Supreme Court-appointed Committee of Administrators stepped in to resolve the matter.

The COA will have the onerous job of continuing to keep an eye on officials to ensure that no such teething troubles crop up during the tournament. On to the cricketing issues, it will only be known next week when exactly Kohli will start playing in the league for Royal Challengers Bangalore as he continues to recover from a shoulder injury. The dashing India captain, known as much for his feisty persona as for his peerless batting, would undoubtedly be missed the most when action kicks off on Wednesday in Hyderabad. Kohli had accumulated nearly 1000 runs last time and each of his four hundreds were T20 master-

classes. Another big name set to be missing from early action would be South African swashbuckler AB de Villiers. Nursing a back injury, there is no clarity on his availability just yet. Till the likes of Kohli and de Villiers come back, the onus of providing perfect "cricketainment" will lie with someone who responds to the name of Christopher Henry Gayle. If Gayle just stands and delivers, RCB will again have a feast. There will be curiosity regarding what T20 specialist Tymal Mills —bought for Rs 12 crore — will bring to the table and how stand-in captain Shane Watson uses him. Off-spinner Ravichandran

Ashwin's absence from Rising Pune Supergiants (RPS) means there would be a bit less colour on the field. A combative cricketer like Ashwin, whose multi-dimensional ability makes him special even though there were doubts about how much he could have contributed after bowling nearly 740 overs. But all eyes will be on Ben Stokes, bought for Rs 14.5 crore by Pune. Each ball that the 'Big Ben' bowls and each run he scores will be equated with his pay package. Mahendra Singh Dhoni has no such worries apart from proving a point with his blazing blade — a fitting reply for being stripped off captaincy. AGENCIES

## Injury-hit RCB takes on holders Sunrisers Hyderabad in IPL opener

**HYDERABAD:** Hampered by injuries to some of their biggest stars, Royal Challengers Bangalore will have their task cut out when they take on defending champions Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL lung-opener on Wednesday. Captain Virat Kohli and star batsman AB de Villiers will be unavailable for Wednesday's match due to injuries. While Kohli is ruled out because of a shoulder injury, de Villiers is nursing a back problem. As Kohli is likely to miss the first few matches in the tournament, the team has named Shane Watson as its captain in the interim. They have also lost star batsman KL Rahul for the whole tournament owing to injury. In addition, RCB's young batsman Sarfaraz Khan will most likely be unavailable for the entire season after hurting himself on the field during a practice match in Bengaluru. Sarfaraz Khan was expected to partner Chris Gayle in the absence of Kohli. RCB can still bank on Gayle and Watson who are both capable of destroying any opposition on their day. Kedar Jadhav, a rising Indian star, can rise to the occasion and fill the gap caused by Rahul's absence. Australian Twenty20 star Travis Head, Indian players Sachin Baby and Mandeeep Singh, who have previous experience of playing in the IPL, are also valuable assets in the batting order. RCB boasts of some deadly bowlers in English paceman Tymal Mills, an expensive buy at the IPL 2017 auction, and Yuzvendra Chahal. Chahal's six-wicket haul had helped India clinch last year's series against England. West Indies' Twenty20 specialist leg-spinner Samuel Badree, Kiwi pacer Adam Milne

Indian Premier League 2017					
Date	Match	Venue	Date	Match	Venue
April 5	SH vs RCB	Hyderabad	April 25	RCB vs SH	Bengaluru
April 6	RPS vs MI	Pune	April 26	RPS vs KKR	Pune
April 7	GL vs KKR	Rajkot	April 27	RCB vs GL	Bengaluru
April 8	KXIP vs RPS	Indore	April 28	KKR vs DD	Kolkata
	RCB vs DD	Bengaluru		KXIP vs SH	Mohali
April 9	SH vs GL	Hyderabad	April 29	RPS vs RCB	Pune
	MI vs KKR	Mumbai		GL vs MI	Rajkot
April 10	KXIP vs RCB	Indore	April 30	KXIP vs DD	Mohali
April 11	RPS vs DD	Pune		SH vs KKR	Hyderabad
April 12	MI vs SH	Mumbai	May 1	MI vs RCB	Mumbai
April 13	KKR vs KXIP	Kolkata		RPS vs GL	Pune
April 14	RCB vs MI	Bengaluru	May 2	DD vs SH	Delhi
	GL vs RPS	Rajkot	May 3	KKR vs RPS	Kolkata
April 15	KKR vs SH	Kolkata	May 4	DD vs GL	Delhi
	DD vs KXIP	Delhi	May 5	RCB vs KXIP	Bengaluru
April 16	MI vs GL	Mumbai	May 6	SH vs RPS	Hyderabad
	RCB vs RPS	Bengaluru		DD vs MI	Delhi
April 17	DD vs KKR	Delhi	May 7	RCB vs KKR	Bengaluru
	SH vs KXIP	Hyderabad		KXIP vs GL	Mohali
April 18	GL vs RCB	Rajkot	May 8	SH vs MI	Hyderabad
April 19	SH vs DD	Hyderabad	May 9	KXIP vs KKR	Mohali
April 20	KXIP vs MI	Indore	May 10	GL vs DD	Kanpur
April 21	KKR vs GL	Kolkata	May 11	MI vs KXIP	Mumbai
April 22	RPS vs SH	Pune	May 12	DD vs RPS	Delhi
	MI vs DD	Mumbai	May 13	GL vs SH	Kanpur
April 23	GL vs KXIP	Rajkot	May 14	RPS vs KXIP	Pune
	KKR vs RCB	Kolkata		DD vs RCB	Delhi
April 24	MI vs RPS	Mumbai			

and left-arm seamer Aniket Choudhary add to the bowling strength of the Bangalore outfit. Indian players like Sreenath Aravind, Stuart Binny and all-rounder Pawan Negi are also expected to help the team's cause. AGENCIES

**DIESEL LOCOMOTIVE WORKS, VARANASI-221004**  
 No.GT/T/NOTICE/IREPS/2017-18/01 Global Tender Notice Date: 03.04.2017  
 E-tenders are invited for and on behalf of the President of India for the supply of following items: S.No.1. Tender No.:091610312, Due Date: 04.05.2017, Description: (i) Heat Shrink Tube reference chart No. 40027278 Alt-AKa WDG4/EL/PS/11 Rev. 3.0, Drg. No. 40055770, Alt-Nil. This is a safety item. (PL No. 18530278), Quantity: 3174 Nos., (ii) Heat Shrink Tube reference Chart No. 40027278 Alt-Aka, WDG4/EL/PS/11 Rev.3.0, Drg. No. 40055771, Alt-Nil (PL No. 18530280), Quantity: 9937 Nos. NOTE: For complete details of Tender Cost/EMD and downloading of Tender Documents, please visit Website: www.ireps.gov.in. PRO/DLWS-01 Controllor of Stores "Serving Customers With a Smile"

EASTERN RAILWAY				
E-Tender Notice No. NIT/02/17/16 Dated: 30.03.2017				
Controllor of Stores, Eastern Railway invites e-tenders for supply of the following items:				
Sl No.	Tender No.	Description	EMD (Rs)	
Tender Opening Date: 19.04.2017, Time: 13.30 hrs.				
1.	10161100	Procurement of Rubber Joint for Side Wall Roof etc.	0	
Tender Opening Date: 28.04.2017, Time: 13.30 hrs.				
2.	10175017	Procurement of main compressor1750 LPM etc.	3,35,400	
3.	14166701	Procurement of Railway Signalling Cable of size 12 core x 1.5 sq. mm. etc.	10,00,000	
Tender Opening Date: 02.05.2017, Time: 13.30 hrs.				
4.	05161008A	Paint Enamel Synthetic Exterior Finishing Black	1,67,500	
5.	05165604	Procurement of Transformer Oil for WAG-9 or WAP-7 (3 Phase) etc.	33,400	
6.	06151076	Cloth Cotton Drill Sulphur Blue	57,200	
7.	07151070A	ISI marked plywood for general purpose synthetic resin bonded GR. BWR, Type 'AA' to IS : 303/1989 with Amd. Nos. 1 to 6, treated with preservative for service condition as at Sl. No. VIII in Appnd. 'A' of IS : 5539/1969 etc. with Amd. Nos. 1 to 3, Size: 2400 mm x 1200 mm x 6 mm x 5 ply	34,200	
8.	11161471	Procurement of Lavatory Pan (Stainless Steel) complete etc.	48,200	
9.	11161474	Procurement of Door Lock complete with powder coated etc.	37,500	
10.	11175002	Procurement of supply, installation and commissioning of stainless steel dustbins etc.	76,800	
11.	15175003	Diesel Fork Lift Truck 10 ton with Jib Crane	1,31,300	
12.	16161060	Procurement of Porcelain 9 tonne insulators (R16020-I) (1050 mm CD) as per RDSO's Specification No. T/SPCO/OHE/INS/0070 (04/07)	29,000	
Tender Opening Date: 03.05.2017, Time: 13.30 hrs.				
13.	05161030B	Oil lube. medium to IS : 1628/1986 or similar etc.	1,89,300	
Tender Opening Date: 04.05.2017, Time: 13.30 hrs.				
14.	05161056A	Inhibited Mineral Insulating Oil for Transformer etc.	3,66,800	
15.	11161472	Procurement of Wash Hand Sink 'D' type (stainless steel) etc.	51,800	
Tender Opening Date: 05.05.2017, Time: 13.30 hrs.				
16.	07161084	Procurement of manual metal arc welding electrodes, Class E1 etc.	35,500	
17.	07169013A	Procurement of Submerged Arc Welding Wire, Class W4 etc.	47,800	
18.	11161233	Procurement of Bush for stay arrangements etc.	36,200	
19.	11161469	Natural Fibre Thermoset Composite etc.	2,66,300	
20.	11161473	Procurement of wall protector complete for lavatory pan etc.	59,600	
21.	11161761	Procurement of Brake Head Bolt Assembly etc.	62,300	
Tender Opening Date: 08.05.2017, Time: 13.30 hrs.				
22.	20165436A	Procurement of Buchholz relay etc.	0	

**CORRIGENDUMS:** Please visit www.ireps.gov.in for corrigendums issued to following tenders: 21151059E due on 25.04.2017; 11151200B due on 05.05.2017. Note: All above mentioned tenders are e-tenders and all tenders are requested to submit their bids on-line through the IREPS website at https://www.ireps.gov.in For more details regarding the above mentioned tenders and other supply tenders please visit IREPS website. EXP/SSO STORES-147/2016-17 Tender Notices are also available at Eastern Railway's website: www.er.indianrailways.gov.in

ONE FOR THE ALBUM



## 'Sehwag's inputs helped me grow as a cricketer'

**NEW DELHI:** High on confidence after a commendable run in international cricket, Wriddhiman Saha is now gearing up for a productive Indian Premier League with "priceless inputs" from Kings XI Punjab's chief of cricket operations Virender Sehwag. "I am hopeful that with Viru bhai's inputs, I will have a much better season than the last time. He has obviously helped me a lot from the time I entered the Indian team's dressing room. I have tried to inculcate the positive intent while batting across formats," Wriddhiman said during an interaction on Tuesday. Asked if he has got any specific input from Sehwag, Wriddhiman said: "Viru bhai tells me that my job is to rotate the strike. His primary advice has always been that avoid playing dot balls after big shots as it breaks the momentum in T20s. He tells me that if I have the belief, I should be able to hit good balls for big shots." Having scored 441 runs in



Tests this home season with an average of 44 plus, Wriddhiman said that should translate into some good performances in the IPL. "Obviously, if you have done well at the Test arena against quality oppositions, you want to carry that confidence into the T20 mould as well. But, at the end of the day, it's about performing out there in the middle," he said. "Like, we have a very good team on paper I believe. We have bowlers like T Natarajan, who have done well and earned a call-up. But talent needs to be transformed into performance and I am confident that will happen," the Test specialist said. Murali Vijay's absence will be a factor as he has been a consistent performer in IPL over the years. "We can't just fret over Vijay's absence. Each player has to pull in and do their bit. It's a collective responsibility to ensure that Kings XI Punjab are the title contenders this time around," said the Bengal stumper. AGENCIES

## Afghans ready for Test status, says Lalchand Rajput

**NEW DELHI:** Afghanistan chief coach Lalchand Rajput on Tuesday said the country's fast-improving cricket team is ready for Test status and will become a top-six side in another 2-3 years' time. "...Afghanistan is ready for Test cricket and our performances have shown it as we are winning consistently after I have taken over as head coach. We are waiting for the ICC meeting which will be held in April," Rajput said. "We are all hopeful that Afghanistan get the Test status as we are ready for it. Afghanistan will become a force in Test cricket in the years to come. The way they are progressing, I believe they will come in the top-six in 2-3 years' time," he added. Afghanistan have come a long way since making their World T20 debut in 2010, having qualified for the last 50-over World Cup in Australia. They recently hammered Ireland across the three formats (ODIs, T20 Internationals, First-Class) in a series played at their adopted home ground in Greater Noida. Rajput, who was manager of the Indian team when it won the inaugural World T20 in 2007, has been Afghanistan's head coach since June last year and considers the job his toughest challenge yet. AGENCIES

## Hard for any side to replace Jadeja, says Brad Hodge



**RAJKOT:** Describing Indian all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja as a three-dimensional player, Gujarat Lions' head coach Brad Hodge said it was very difficult for any cricketing side to replace him. "We are all hopeful that Afghanistan get the Test status as we are ready for it. Afghanistan will become a force in Test cricket in the years to come. The way they are progressing, I believe they will come in the top-six in 2-3 years' time," he added. "I am sure KKR is looking to bounce back. We played very well both the times last year but KKR is a very dangerous side having players like Gautam Gambhir, Robin Utthappa, Manish Pandey.. all are very good players. They have got some skills in bowling too having players like Sunil Narayan and Umesh Yadav. "Yadav is not going to be part of this game, but the match is going to be a good contest, as KKR is a skillful side and you have to play good cricket to beat them," he said. Talking about last year's performance as well as the current squad, Hodge said: "We had a wonderful season last year. I think the team was very well led by Raina and we have a lovely combination of youth and experience. We have bought some fresh faces to keep the energy level up in the group and the side is looking very strong." "The squad is good combination of youth and experience. Experience is very important. I think more important in T20 and we have got some superb players but anything can happen on a day in T20," he added. AGENCIES

## Chicken pox rules Shreyas out for a week

**NEW DELHI:** The Delhi Daredevils on Tuesday suffered a setback ahead of their IPL season as flamboyant batsman Shreyas Iyer has been ruled out for at least a week due to chicken pox. Iyer is now back in Mumbai recuperating from illness. AGENCIES



# Bagan beat Abahani to earn cross-Bangla bragging rights

**KOLKATA:** Mohun Bagan struck twice in a space of two minutes on either side of the break to bounce back and defeat Bangladeshi outfit Abahani Limited 3-1 for their first win in the AFC Cup on Tuesday.

Welshman Jonathan Brown (21st) put the five-time Bangladesh Premier League champions ahead following a flurry of attacks that resulted in six corners in the first 11 minutes.

But the visitors failed to keep the momentum as Mohun Bagan stepped up near the half time with goals from Jeje Lalpekhlua (45+1st) and Balwant Singh (48th). The Mohun Bagan forward, Singh, was in his element as he also brilliantly assisted their ace Haitian player Sony Norde (87th) to complete a fine win at the Rabindra Sarobar Stadium. Having suffered a 1-2 defeat to leaders Bengaluru FC (6 points) in an away fixture, Mohun Bagan (3) opened their account in group E after two matches, while Abahani are still to open their account. The win has given some much-needed momentum to Mohun Bagan ahead of the return leg I-League derby against East Bengal in Siliguri on Sunday. In title contention for the I-League title, Mohun Bagan were expected to bench their top players, but Sanjoy Sen surprised everyone by starting with both Katsumi Yusa and Norde. Playing



Mohun Bagan and Abahani Limited Dhaka footballers vie for the ball during AFC Cup match in Kolkata on Tuesday

PIC/PTI

with two foreigners in Brown and forward Emeka Darlington, the Sky Blues started off the block with a flurry of attacks but they could not capitalise till Brown put them ahead. It was an easy goal as Mohammad Ziban darted in from the right and crossed to an unmarked Brown who put it past Debjit Majumder

without much fuss. Balwant set up the goal playing a pass to Norde before Jeje took the possession and scored with a left-footer. Minutes after the changeover, Katsumi got past his marker with a diagonal run into the box and released Balwant, who ran in and scored with a powerful left-footer that went over Moham-

mad Sahidul Alam's head. Mohun Bagan also missed two opportunities, first in the 66th minute following a fine run by substitute Prabir Das but his shot missed the target and hit the side-net. In the 77th minute Sahidul thwarted a fine effort from Balwant but it did not take long for Mohun Bagan

to bring the third goal as 10 minutes later Norde made full use of Balwant's pass inside the box to complete the tally with a solo effort.

Mohun Bagan take on Maldives Premier League champions Maziya Sports & Recreation in their next AFC Cup encounter at home on April 19.

AGENCIES

## Johnson wins it for Bengaluru in Mal

**MAL:** A John Johnson goal from what was to be the last chance of the game meant Bengaluru came away with all three points in a dominant show against Maziya Sports and Recreation Club in the AFC Cup on Tuesday. A humid afternoon saw the Blues outplay their opponents, creating multiple chances without a goal to show for, only for the defender to score in the dying moments to come away with a 1-0 result. Four changes were made to the Blues' side that took on Mohun Bagan last weekend with skipper Sunil Chhetri, Eugeneson Lyngdoh, Lenny Rodrigues handed starts while Salim Ranjan Singh replaced Nishu Kumar in defence.

The Blues started well from kick-off, with Udanta's early swipe sailing over the bar before another shot from the 21-year-old, this time set up by skipper Sunil Chhetri, went inches high. Udanta was in the thick of things once again when, in the 17th minute, his shot from the edge of the area was saved by

Maziya keeper Pavel Matias. Defender Juanan then took a shot on the volley but it was wayward.

Daniel Lalhimpuia then combined with Chhetri to enter the Maziya area but the final pass was found wanting as Pavel collected. Maziya striker Imaz Ahmed was at the end of the home side's best chance of the half but Amrinder was equal to the shot from distance as both sides headed back into the tunnel with the scores unchanged. For all their dominance throughout the game, it was the final chance that had Bengaluru nick the points. A long punt forward from a free-kick taken by Amrinder was spilled by Matias who should have punched instead of attempting to collect. The ball fell to Jugovic who hooked the ball towards the goal and Johnson leapt high to divert the ball in with his foot. The Blues return to league duties next as they face Aizawl FC, at the Kanteerava Stadium, on Sunday.

AGENCIES

## India ranked 3rd for third year in row in WADA doping charts

**NEW DELHI:** Sporting minnows India has been ranked third for the third year in a row in a doping violation report published by World Anti-Doping Agency for 2015 with 117 athletes from the country being punished after testing positive for banned substances.

India followed Russian Federation (176) and Italy (129) at third spot in the doping violation chart released by the WADA, the same position as in the reports of 2013 and 2014.

All the dope violations by the Indians came from urine samples. The dope violations were committed during 2015 and the WADA chart was prepared after compiling information of analytical findings and sanctions rendered till January 31 this year by various accredited anti-doping bodies.

This is the first set of Anti-Doping Rule Violation statistics under the revised WADA Code and third such report in its history since 2013. The worrying sign for India is that the number of dope offenders has been increasing in the

last three years. India had 91 and 96 Anti-doping Rule Violations (ADRVs) in 2013 and 2014 respectively.

An ADRV is a doping offence committed by an athlete or athlete support person, which results in certain consequences or sanctions. It is derived from adverse analytical findings (AAFs), commonly known as 'positive' results.

Of the 117 Indian dope offenders of 2015, two are non-analytical ADRVs, which refer to cases that do not involve detection of a prohibited substance by a WADA-accredited laboratory but instances like failure to submit to a test, possession, use or trafficking of a prohibited substance by athletes and support personnel.

Out of the 115 analytical ADRVs, 78 are committed by male athletes while 37 are by female. Among individual sports, weightlifting has taken over athletics as the dirtiest with a whopping 56 Indian lifters (32 male and 24 female) punished for doping. Athletics contributed the second high-

est number of dope offenders with 21 (14 male and 7 female), followed by boxing (8), wrestling (8), cycling (4), kabaddi (4), aquatics (3), powerlifting (3), judo (2), wushu (2), rowing, bodybuilding (1), hockey (1), football (1) and street and ball hockey (1). Among the NADOs, India's National Anti-Doping Agency recorded 109 ADRVs, the second highest behind Russia's (127). The NADA took 5162 samples during 2015 out of which 110 tested positive for banned substances (AAFs = Adverse Analytical Findings).

But there was no sanction in one case. A total of 229,412 samples were received and analysed in 2015 by WADA-accredited laboratories worldwide. Out of these, 2,522 samples were reported as AAFs. There were a total of 1,929 ADRVs (1,901 from athletes and 28 from athlete support personnel) out of which 1,649 are analytical findings and 280 from 'evidence-based intelligence' non-analytical findings.

AGENCIES

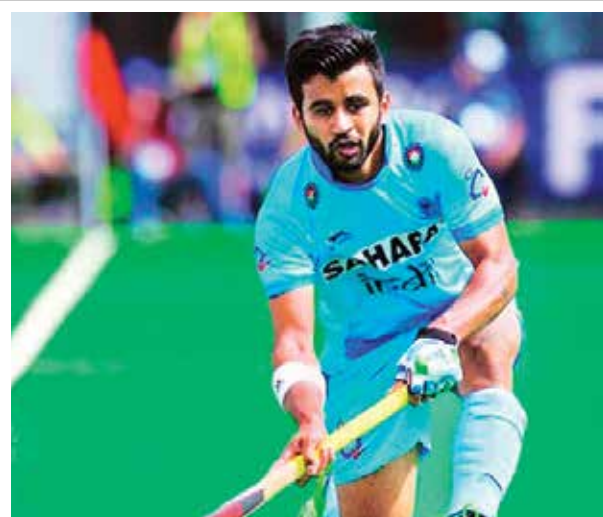
## 'Azlan Shah great chance for youngsters to shine'

**BENGALURU:** The upcoming Sultan Azlan Shah Cup is a great opportunity for youngsters to showcase their mettle ahead of the men's Hockey World League Semi-final to be held in London in June this year, says India hockey team midfielder Manpreet Singh.

With the senior men's team for the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup scheduled to be announced next week, Manpreet feels the tournament in Ipoh, Malaysia is a great platform to see where the side stands ahead of the HWL Semi-final.

"Teams like England and Australia will play with a young squad. We are awaiting the final team selection but I feel this is a great tournament for the youngsters. The atmosphere is good with lots of spectators and top teams play here so there is tough competition," Manpreet said. "Since this is the first tournament we play this year, we can see where we stand and what are the changes that need to be made moving forward," stated the midfielder, who was recently appointed as Deputy Superintendent of Police by the Punjab government.

In this year's edition of Azlan Shah Cup, defending champions Australia, England, New Zealand, Malaysia, Japan and Korea will vie for top



Manpreet Singh

honours along side runners-up India. After having missed the top spot last year, India players are determined to return with a gold this time around.

"Last time we lost in the final but this time definitely the aim is to win the title. We have had really good sessions in the national camp and with youngsters in the mix, there are options to try out different combinations," Manpreet said.

"Our results will be based on how well we execute our plans," he added. Manpreet feels the Azlan Shah Cup will be a big learning curve for the

youngsters. "Players like Manpreet Singh, Harjeet Singh and Harmanpreet Singh have played in Sultan Azlan Shah Cup before. They could also understand the demands of senior level hockey."

"Likewise, I feel some of the other youngsters too can learn a lot from this tournament if they are selected and also if they perform well then it's great for the team as we can have a fresh approach and outlook in the upcoming tournaments like men's Hockey World League Semi-final and Asia Cup," he added.

AGENCIES

## Bhuttia reinstated as AIFF advisor



**KOLKATA:** Former India captain Bhaichung Bhuttia has been reinstated as advisor to the All India Football Federation (AIFF) for a one year term.

Bhuttia's contract as advisor was not renewed after December. In March he was also removed from the technical committee of the AIFF and was replaced by former India legend Shyam Thapa.

"Yes I have agreed to a one year contract extension as the advisor to the AIFF," Bhuttia confirmed on Tuesday when asked about it.

"When I took charge as advisor for the first time, India were ranked in the region of 160. When I left in December, they were around 130. Now the aim will be to take things forward."

"We will also be focusing more on grassroots programme. During my first stint, I had put a lot of emphasis on grassroots as that is the way forward. Also state licensing is an aspect I want to train my eyes on this time," the iconic Sikkimese footballer added.

Asked about the U-17 World Cup India is going to host for the first time later this year, Bhuttia said the team has been given the best possible exposure and the AIFF has left no stone unturned in their preparations for the youth showpiece.

"We have given them ample exposure trips to all parts of the world. I don't think even countries like England and

**Bhuttia's contract as advisor was not renewed after December. In March he was also removed from the technical committee of the AIFF and was replaced by former India legend Shyam Thapa**

other European countries do so much in terms of preparing the boys. They have been looked after well and I hope we do well in the World Cup," the former Mohun Bagan and East Bengal star asserted.

Bhuttia said Kolkata is the perfect stage to host the final on October 28 and that the football crazy state will get to witness future "Lionel Messis" and "Cristiano Ronaldos" before their eyes.

"The football on show will be superb. The quality of the teams and the level at which they will play will be something the country has never witnessed before live."

"Kolkata has always been very passionate about football and it is the perfect stage for the final of India's first World Cup," Bhuttia added.

## Dipa Karmakar undergoes knee surgery, to miss Asian C'ship

**NEW DELHI:** Star Indian gymnast Dipa Karmakar has undergone a knee surgery, ruling her out of the Asian Championships next month.

Karmakar underwent an Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) surgery in Mumbai and will not participate in the Thailand meet scheduled from May 18. "Hi everyone, there is an update. I recently got injured during practice and underwent an ACL surgery. Rehabilitation has started and I will be back soon," Karmakar posted on Twitter.

The 23-year-old is reportedly being attended to by renowned Dr Anant Joshi, who has treated Indian cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar in the past.

Karmakar shot to fame by becoming the first Indian woman gymnast to qualify for the Olympics. She finished fourth in her pet event of vault at the Rio Games.

She had first come into the spotlight after winning a bronze medal at the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, becoming the first Indian female gymnast to do so.

AGENCIES

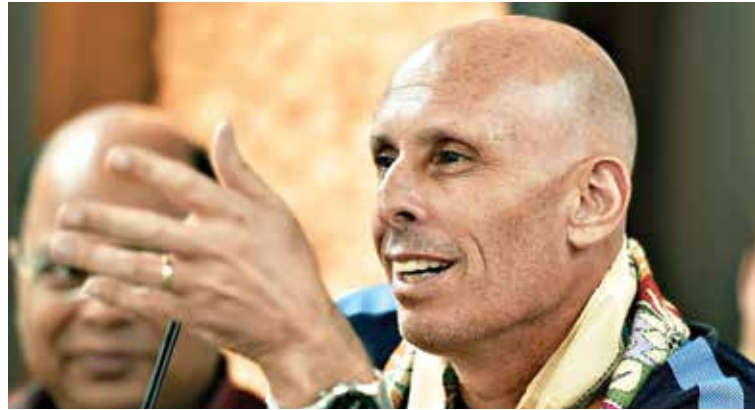
## ISL has made India universal, says Constantine

**KOLKATA:** Chief coach Stephen Constantine on Tuesday credited the Indian Super League for the national team's progress in recent times, saying it has made the country "universal".

"The ISL has made us universal. It has told everybody in the world that Indians not only play football but we're not bad either, and we have some good players," the head coach said on the conclusion of AIFF's two-day workshop for scouting for coaches.

Five successful away wins during a 10-month unbeaten streak could take India's ranking to 101 in the next FIFA rankings, which will be updated on Thursday.

"I would be a little beat happier if Bolivia didn't beat Argentina, because then we would have been 97. Having



said that, yes I'm happy and we can absolutely do better."

The Englishman cleverly dodged the contentious issue of the ISL and

I-League merger and quipped: "That's above my pay scale... but it's a nice question. "All I am interested in that there are games with Indian players, so that

I can select them for the national team. I've said quite a bit about a lot of things. We don't need to be talking about that today," Constantine said. Indian football was on the right track without depending too much on captain Sunil Chhetri and the competition for spots is fierce.

"I don't think we are dependent on Sunil Chhetri. He happens to be in the right place at the right time which is why we play him. There's fierce competition for all places. Now at the senior national team they are killing themselves (for places in the starting XI)."

"We have three or four who can play leftback. We have four-five for right back. No one is guaranteed. This is the competition we want. There's no complacency in our national team at the moment," he added.

## Stormy greeting in Augusta as favourites abound at Masters

V KRISHNASWAMY

**AUGUSTA:** Augusta, which figures in few conversations for most of the year, but is a reference point almost all the time in golf, greeted its visitors with wind gusts up to 49 miles per hour in certain parts of the town.

The severe lashing accompanied by heavy rain in the town was what Monday was all about as the first practice round was stopped twice before it was finally suspended at 2.30 pm as weather conditions were expected to worsen; and they did.

After the first storm passed through, players were allowed

to return to the practice area after 1.30 pm and the course was opened at 1.45 pm. But just before 2.30 pm, the officials announced they had received new information about a fast-approaching storm and play was suspended for good and the course closed at 2.30 pm.

The severe weather resulted in more than 20 massive tree falls around the city; traffic lights were knocked out and power outages lasted more than a few hours in more than 80 locations as very strong winds were reported on the north side of Augusta and Lake Thurmond Dam.

Tuesday was expected to be perfect for golf, but weather

fury was expected to return with thunderstorms and rain on Wednesday.

Thursday and Friday are predicted to be nice, but very breezy to windy. However, the weekend suggests good golfing weather.

For long, it has been whispered in golf circles that of the four Majors, the Masters is the Major with 'fewest' players, who have a real chance of winning. It has the fewest starters - 94 in 2017 - and they include a bunch of former champions, who have a lifetime's privilege of teeing up at the year's first Major. Yet favourites abound in each field.

Dustin Johnson's name

pops up most when you talk of favourites - and why not. He has won each of three previous starts coming into Augusta, but that will may be one of the reasons, why he may not win. Merely, because no one since Jimmy Demaret in 1940 made it four-in-four with the Masters. Ben Hogan, too, came with three-in-three to 1940 Masters, but Demaret beat him to it.

Then, there is another jinx to take care of - no Number 1 since Tiger Woods in 2005 won the Masters as the top-ranked player. But Johnson is not losing sleep over either jinx; He may not even know them. He is the hottest player with a mon-

strous drive, great iron play and a short game that is beginning to look divine. "I'm hitting it good and feel confident about my game," Johnson said.

Among others Jordan Spieth needs to get over his 'melt-down of 2016' when he blew a five-shot lead last year and lost by three after a second-nine 41. He hit twice into the water and Danny Willett emerged winner. But, Spieth eager to get over 2016, at least knows he has a Green Jacket from 2015.

If ever there is a rookie, who can win it, it has to be Jon Rahm of Spain.

In just 22 PGA Tour events, he already has a win and five

top-five finishes this season. Rahm was a lowly 551st when he turned pro last June, but is now No. 12 and touted as the most likely Masters debutant, since Fuzzy Zoeller in 1979, to win here.

That should be a boost for young guys as 23-year-old Spieth has already won once this season and another 23-year-old Justin Thomas has three victories. Hideki Matsuyama, 25, has two wins and 27-year-old Harris English and 28-year-old Rickie Fowler have one each. Matsuyama is fourth ranked, Spieth sixth, Thomas seventh and Fowler is eighth.

And then keep that name Rahm for ready reference.

## PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED (See Section 82 Cr.PC.)

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person Manoj Kumar Shastri, S/o Shri Sita Ram Shastri, R/o A-6/56, Sector-17, Rohini, Delhi has committed the offence in case FIR No. 23/08 dated 23.01.08, U/S 419/420/467/468/471/120-B/34 IPC PS Lodhi Colony (Crime Branch), New Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused Manoj Kumar Shastri can not be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused Manoj Kumar Shastri has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).

Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused person Manoj Kumar Shastri of case FIR No. 23/08 dated 23.01.08 PS Lodhi Colony (Crime Branch), New Delhi is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on 19.05.17.

By Order  
Shri Surya Malik Grover  
Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (South)  
Room No. 216, 2nd Floor  
Saket Court Complex, New Delhi

DP/9503/OD/17



# I've made a career out of flop films: Manoj Bajpayee



MUMBAI: Actor Manoj Bajpayee says the credit for his success in the film industry goes to his "so called" flop movies. The actor says he has faced a lot of rejection and the failures have made him what he is. "Success doesn't teach you anything. Failures, rejections, they make you the man that you are. In my life, I've mostly seen rejections and failures and flops. I am

a living example of an actor making a career out of flops," Bajpayee said. "You can count my hit films on your fingertips. But if you count the number of flops that I am proud of, they are several in numbers," he adds.

The actor, best known for featuring in critically acclaimed films like *Satya*, *Shool* and *Gangs of Wasseypur*, says movies which do not work at the

box office, are often the ones which have longer shelf life. "I am here because of those 'so called' flop films as they were appreciated the most. They take me all around the world. *Aligarh* and *Budhia Singh* are still running in some pockets of the world." The actor, meanwhile, is relieved that his latest *Naam Shabana* is a success and says the team is extremely happy as it was an important film. The action-thriller features Taapsee Pannu in the lead role.

"For a film like this, the public appreciation matters a lot. It is very important for people to go to a theatre and watch the film. A girl is leading the film so it becomes exciting if people appreciate cinema like this.

"It sets an amazing precedent for all the films where women will be playing a pivotal role in the future. We want the momentum to keep going and are really proud and happy with the success," he says. P11

## Golmaal 4 will be a nice break for me: Parineeti



MUMBAI: Actor Parineeti Chopra has said working with filmmaker Rohit Shetty in *Golmaal 4* is an honour as the film will be a refreshing change for her as well as the audience. The film also features Ajay Devgn, Tabu, Arshad Warsi, Tusshar Kapoor, Kunal Khemu and Shreyas Talpade. The team recently wrapped up the first schedule of the movie. They will soon be flying to Hyderabad for the next schedule.

"I don't think I have a genre at all. I'm just trying to do all kinds of films. It's an honour for me to work with Rohit Shetty, he is the biggest commercial director of the country, making the biggest franchise *Golmaal*," Parineeti told reporters.

"I am enjoying it very much. It's a lot of fun. After *Meri Pyaari Bindu*, *Golmaal*

will be a nice change for me as well as the audiences," she added.

The actor, who will also be seen with Ayushmann Khurrana in *Meri Pyaari Bindu*, recently went to promote their romance drama on 'The Kapil Sharma Show.' Talking about her experience, she said, "Kapil and we sang around 10-15 songs. I told them initially that this will be a musical episode not a comedy episode. It was a lot of fun."

When asked if she missed any cast members of the show, in an apparent reference to Sunil Grover and others who have stopped shooting for the show, Parineeti said, "We were enough. No one else was needed. Kapil, Ayushmann and I killed it. You all should catch the episode." P11

## Chris says his contract is over for 'Captain America'



LOS ANGELES: Actor Chris Evans says his contract with Marvel Studios will be over once he is done filming for *Avengers 4*.

The 35-year-old has a deal with Marvel Studios to play Steve Rogers and his heroic alter ego in two more movies, which will be the two *Avengers* sequels. But he is free to walk away from the Marvel Cinematic Universe if he wishes or if Marvel no longer wants him, reports *femalefirst.co.uk*.

In an appearance on 'The Ellen Degeneres Show' on Monday, Evans said, "My contract is up. I have 'Avengers 3' and 4, we do 'Avengers 3' now and 4 is the latter part of the year, then after that, that is the end of my contract..." "They've been filming since February, I don't start until May, there are so many people involved."

Last year, Evans mentioned that he planned to retire from acting once his contract finished so he can focus on directing. In a recent interview with *Gay Times Magazine*, however, he suggests he's amenable to staying in the MCU.

Evans first featured as the superhero in 2011 *Captain America: The First Avenger* and he has followed that up with appearances in *The Avengers* and *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* and *Captain America: Civil War*. P11



## 'Avatar 2' shooting to begin this fall

LOS ANGELES: Actor Sigourney Weaver says that the shooting for the much-awaited *Avatar 2* is all set to begin in the fall of this year.

At a screening of *The Assignment*, the 67-year-old actor, who played Grace Augustine in the 2009 sci-fi film, says she is excited to start filming the second part of the James Cameron magnum opus soon, according to *The Hollywood Reporter*.

"We're starting training, and we're starting hmm, I probably can't say anything. We will be actually shooting it by the fall," says Weaver. She admits she is a little "worried" about turning such ambitious scripts into a reality on the screen, but says the sequel will not disappoint her fans.

"I'm telling you, these scripts are so amazing, I'm not worried about (disappointing fans) at all. Am I worried about how we're going to bring them to life? Yes, because they're so ambitious. They're so worth it. They're well worth waiting for. I'm not worried about that at all. We're trying to get it done as quickly as possible," the actor says.

Sam Worthington and Zoe Saldana will reprise their roles, alongside Weaver in *Avatar 2*. P11



# I find it difficult to

# DIGEST a failure: Taapsee

'You get confidence from success so you move ahead confidently. But if you have a failure, you start doubting yourself but it only lasts for a few days' says the *Naam Shabana* actor

MUMBAI: Having worked in nearly 20 movies in less than a decade, actor Taapsee Pannu says she has realised that she cannot digest failures easily as it puts her in self-doubt. "For me, it's difficult to handle failures. You get confidence from success so you move ahead confidently. But if you have a failure, you start doubting yourself."

"You start questioning your decisions; there are doubts which haunt you for a few days after failure. For me, it is quite difficult to digest a failure. But, it is only a matter of few days then you get back," Taapsee said. Though Taapsee has featured in last year's big hit *Pink*, the actor says she is always stressed about the box office figures.

"From my first film till now, I always have this stress about numbers, I don't know why. I'm not saying it's right or wrong. I am always very conscious about the numbers my film is making, which is as important as how good my performance is," she says. Taapsee is happy that her latest outing *Naam Shabana* is doing good business at the box office.

"I've seen the side where no matter how great you perform, if the film doesn't do well people don't talk about it, all your efforts go down the drain. But, if the film does well no matter if you play a small part in it, you'll be benefited. Directed by Shivam Nair, *Naam Shabana* released last week and also features Akshay Kumar in an extended cameo. P11

## Ian McKellen reveals why he turned down to play Dumbledore



LONDON: Veteran actor Ian McKellen has revealed the reason behind turning down the role of Professor Albus Dumbledore in the *Harry Potter* series after actor Richard Harris passed away in 2002. The 77-year-old star said he declined the popular part because he did not want to fill in for the actor who dismissed his talent as a performer,

reported *The Independent*.

"When he died - he played Dumbledore, the wizard - I played the real wizard (Gandalf in the 'Lord Of The Rings' trilogy) of course - but when they called me up and said would I be interested in being in the 'Harry Potter' films, they didn't say what part. "I worked out what they were thinking and I couldn't. I couldn't take over the part from



an actor who I'd known hadn't approved of me," McKellen said in an interview with *BBC Hardline*.

The "LOTR" star recalled that Harris had called him and fellow thespians Derek Jacobi and Kenneth Branagh as "technically brilliant, but passionless". Harris passed away after *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* and actor Michael Gambon eventually took up the part. P11

## Spider-Man will get his own JARVIS

LOS ANGELES: Superhero Spider-Man will have his own digital assistant like JARVIS (Just A Rather Very Intelligent System) in the forthcoming film *Spider-Man: Homecoming*. Actor Tom Holland's character is confirmed to have his own digital assistant just like character Tony Stark from *Iron Man* has, reports *aceshowbiz.com*.

"He (Spider-Man) does. Which surprises him, because he doesn't until Tony deactivates that... deactivates the Training Wheels protocol. So the suit starts doing a bunch of stuff. You know, it does a holographic interface, and things like that," producer Eric Carroll said on *YouTube* channel, *ScreenRant*.

"Most notably, it starts talking to him, and he goes, 'Oh, this is weird.' And he starts asking it stuff, but he's not super slick or Tony Stark smart, who invented the OS

and did all this. He is a kid. So he's like, 'Um, how do I get to where that thing is?'"

"And it's like, 'Um, I don't know. Pretty much drive? How are you going to get there?' And he's like, 'Um, if I didn't have a car, let's just say, how would I get there?' And it's like, 'Well, if you walk...' And he's like, 'No, OK, alright ... I guess just give me directions and I'll figure out the HOW I'm getting there.'" Carroll said. Directed by Jon Watts, the remake will see Robert Downey Jr reprising his roles as Tony Stark. Rounding up the main cast is Michael Keaton as the evil Vulture. IANS

