





## SHORT TAKES

## Wanted criminal held after gunfight

**Noida:** A man, wanted in several criminal cases in western Uttar Pradesh districts such as Aligarh and Bulandshahr, was held after he suffered injury in a gunfight with police in Greater Noida, officials said on Tuesday. The accused, Mohit alias Kaalu, has over a dozen FIRs lodged against him at police stations in Aligarh, Bulandshahr and Gautam Buddh Nagar, Greater Noida deputy commissioner of Police Rajesh Kumar Singh said. "He was on his motorcycle along with an accomplice when they were intercepted by the local Badalpur police station team on Monday night. A gunfight ensued near the Mirzapur cut during which Mohit got hit by a bullet on his leg and was held while his partner managed to flee," Singh said. The accused has previously been booked for robbery, loots, drug trafficking among others and is among top 10 criminals wanted by the railway police in Aligarh, the officer said. — PTI

## 4 hurt in fire after cylinder explodes

**Noida:** Four people were injured on Tuesday when a fire broke out on the premises of a private company in Noida following an LPG cylinder explosion, police said. The incident took place around 11 am in Sector 4 of the city, the police said. Those injured have been hospitalised and the blaze controlled by the Fire Department, the police said in a statement. Senior police and Fire officials were at the site to review the situation, it added. — PTI

## Gambhir launches 2nd 'Jan Rasoi' canteen

**New Delhi:** BJP MP Gautam Gambhir on Tuesday inaugurated the second 'Jan Rasoi' canteen in his constituency at the national capital's New Ashok Nagar. The canteen will serve lunch at the price of a rupee. The first Jan Rasoi was started in December last year in Delhi's Gandhi Nagar that serves nearly 1,000 people every day. "This is not just a kitchen but a movement. A movement to feed those in need, a movement to end hunger. I do not have thousands of crores of taxpayers' money to spend on advertisements and personal promotion. I only have my resources with which I want to help the most vulnerable sections of the society," Gambhir said. "Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal had promised hundreds of subsidised canteens for the poor. But it was only for advertisements. Nothing is there on the ground. I have not entered politics to compete in drama and dharnas but to bring real change and that is what I am doing," Mr Gambhir added. The token amount of ₹1 is meant to pay wages to the staff members who will run the kitchen. BJP National Vice President and in-charge of the party's city unit, Baijayant Panda, and Delhi BJP chief Adesh Gupta were present as well.

## GOVT BUDGET GAME-CHANGER: MANOJ TIWARI

**New Delhi:** The Modi government has come out with a "game changer" Budget this year, something the Congress-led UPA could not do even once during its 10-year rule, BJP MP Manoj Tiwari said on Tuesday. Mr Tiwari told a press conference here the budget presented by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman imposed no new taxes and it is being termed a "game changer" by eminent economists in the country. "The Manmohan Singh government in its 10 years at the Centre failed to bring even one such budget that could reset the economy. For the first time, a Budget has been brought under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman that will reset the economy affected by the coronavirus pandemic," said the former Delhi BJP president. He said that despite the challenges posed by the pandemic and its impact on the economy, the Modi government did not impose any new taxes, which is beyond people's imagination. Another important feature of the budget is scaling down the time-limit of scrutiny of ₹50 lakh returns from six years to three years, he said. — PTI



School children pray for the victims who died in Nanda Devi glacier burst in Gurugram on Tuesday.

— PTI

## Over 12,700 people get coronavirus vaccine shots

**New Delhi, Feb. 9:** More than 12,700 beneficiaries received Covid vaccine shots in Delhi on Tuesday in the fourth week of the inoculation drive, the highest single-day turnout by numbers till date, officials said. The turnout was over 70 per cent, a marked improvement from the figures a day before — 9,740 (54 per cent turnout). Besides healthcare workers, frontline workers, who include, police, civil and defence staff, and DJB and electricity department employees, among others, are also getting jabs since the last couple of days.

Also, the number of scheduled days, from initially being four days — Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday — have now been extended to six days a week, Monday-Saturday. After a sluggish start, since the exercise was kicked off on January 16, the inoculation drive picked up pace in the past few days. The targeted number for vaccination on February 9 was 15,100, officials said. "Today, 12,717 people were administered coronavirus vaccine, and AEFI (adverse events following immunisation) was reported in seven persons. This is the highest number (of people vaccinated) achieved in a day so far," a senior official of the Delhi Health Department said. The number of people vaccinated against COVID-19 till date in Delhi, majority of them being healthcare workers, had crossed the one lakh-mark a few days ago. — PTI

## No new Covid death recorded after more than 10 months

**SANJAY KAW**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 9

After struggling with raging cases and fatalities caused by Covid-19 since March last year, Delhi has not registered any death due to the deadly virus in the last 24 hours.

With 100 fresh cases, the total number of coronavirus cases has gone up to 6,36,260. As of now, there are only 1,052 active cases in the city. The death toll due to the deadly virus stands at 10,882.

Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain congratulated the people of Delhi for following coronavirus protocol and taking precautions as well as healthcare and frontline workers who have been fighting the battle against the virus.

On Sunday, for the third time in a week, Delhi had reported only two Covid-

19 deaths. The first week of February recorded the lowest average death count since April. In the seven days, Delhi had registered a total of 26 deaths or 3.7 deaths every day on an average.

The recovery rate in the national capital is 98.12 per cent with 144 patients recovering in 24 hours. Of those still affected due to the disease, 441 are in home isolation and 511 are admitted in hospitals.

A health bulletin issued by the Aam Aadmi Party government said 56,410 Covid-19 tests were conducted in Delhi in the past 24 hours. Of these, 31,300 were RT-PCR tests while 25,110 were antigen tests. So far, Delhi has conducted 1,12,56,961 tests to detect Covid-19. Apart from this, Delhi currently has 950 containment zones.

A national serological survey has shown that 25 per cent people have been carrying coronavirus anti-bodies—a figure far below in metros like Delhi and Mumbai. In Mumbai, the figure is more than 75 per cent.

In Delhi, the last such survey had indicated that the city is rapidly moving towards herd immunity, with one in two persons carrying coronavirus antibodies, meaning that at some point they have been infected. The official number of infected people when the survey was completed was over 6.34 lakh.



Indian Youth Congress worker during the 'Sansad Gherav' protest in New Delhi on Tuesday.

— G.N. JHA

## Indian Youth Cong members protest against Farm Laws

**New Delhi, Feb. 9:** Activists of the Indian Youth Congress (IYC) on Tuesday took out a protest march to "gherao" Parliament over the farmers' issues, "rising" unemployment and hike in fuel prices.

However, the march which started from from Jantar Mantar was stopped by police on Raisina Road. Congress MP Digvijay Singh along with some

leaders of the party and activists also courted arrest, the IYC claimed.

A public meeting was also held at Jantar Mantar before the march that was attended by several senior leaders including Leader of Congress in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, MPs Deepender Singh Hooda, Mahila Congress president Sushmita Dev, Delhi Congress president Anil Kumar among others. — PTI

## 4 serological samples of bird droppings from Delhi zoo test +ve for avian influenza virus

**New Delhi, Feb. 9:** Four serological samples of bird droppings collected from Delhi zoo have been found positive for the Avian influenza virus, authorities said on Tuesday.

The National Zoological Park (NZP) in the capital said the samples found positive for the virus were collected from four different points at the zoo and sent to the National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases (NIHSAD), Bhopal, by the animal husbandry department (AHD) of Delhi on February 3.

**▶ NZP SAID** the samples found +ve for the virus were collected from four different points at the zoo and sent to the National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases, Bhopal, by the AHD of Delhi on February 3. In an official statement, the NZP said all safety measures are being taken and the zoo shall continue to remain closed

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"All safety measures and protocols of Central Zoo Authority (CZA), ministry of environment and animal husbandry department, Delhi government, related to avian influenza are strictly being adhered to and constant monitoring is being done by the field staff and a team of veterinarians in the zoo.

"Furthermore, birds in captivity and free ranging birds are behaving normal as per reports and all possible prophylactic measures and drills

related to disinfection are regularly being taken," the National Zoological Park said.

It said that surveillance will continue, and samples collected would be sent for further serological examinations.

"The zoo is already closed and will continue furthermore," it added. Earlier, six serological samples from the National Zoological Park sent to National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases, Bhopal, on January 19 were found negative for the avian influenza virus. — PTI

## House collapses in Sadar Bazaar

5 rescued so far, of which 3 in critical state

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 9

Five people were injured after a 70-year-old house collapsed in the Sadar Bazaar area of North Delhi on Tuesday. The North Delhi mayor, Jai Prakash, also visited the site and took stock of the situation.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal also expressed his concern over the incident in a tweet.

"Deeply worried to hear about the collapse of a residential building in the Sadar Bazaar area. The rescue and medical teams and district administration are present at the spot. Rescue operations are underway. I am constantly monitoring the situation," the CM said in a tweet.

According to director of Delhi Fire Services (DFS) Atul Garg, a call about the incident was received

**▶ ACCORDING TO** director of Delhi Fire Services (DFS) Atul Garg, a call about the incident was received around 10.30 am following which six fire tenders were rushed to the spot

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"On spot, five people have been rescued, of whom three are in critical condition. The injured have been shifted to the Bara Hindu Rao Hospital. The rescue operation lasted till 2.31 pm," said Mr Garg.

A senior police official, however, said two injured persons—Naseem (30) and his mother Zarima (60)—were rushed to the Bara Hindu Rao Hospital. They had suffered minor injuries and were later discharged.

Mr Jai Prakash also visited the incident site. He directed the officials to speed up the malba (debris) removal work and further asked the officials to survey old buildings which need repair or are dangerous for habitation.

"Those that need repair be asked to repair urgently and those dangerous but beyond repair be vacated and demolished so that there is no casualty. The dangerous buildings be cordoned off to isolate the property," said the mayor.

He said that the officials have also been directed to be more vigilant in this regard.

## 30-year-old barber dies by suicide in Noida

**Noida (UP), Feb. 9:** The body of a 30-year-old barber was found hanging from a fan at his rented accommodation in Noida on Tuesday in a suspected case of suicide, police said here. The reason behind the barber taking the extreme step is yet to be ascertained but it has come to light that he was an alcoholic, they added.

"The man was from Meerut district in Uttar Pradesh and lived here with his family in Gijhod village in Sector 53. His body was found hanging from the fan at his third-floor house Tuesday morning," a police spokesperson said.

The body was sent for a post-mortem examination, and further legal proceedings were being carried out, he said.

Meanwhile, a 32-year-old woman was stabbed to death in southwest Delhi's Kishangarh area on Tuesday, police said here. The victim was identified as Taranum, alias Heena, a resident of the area, they said.

Information was received at Kishangarh police station from Fortis hospital at around 3 am that a woman having stab injury was declared brought dead, a senior police officer said. — PTI

## 25-yr-old arrested for trying to extort money from ex-boss

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 9

A 25-year-old man was arrested on Tuesday for allegedly trying to extort money from his former employer using death threats in east Delhi's Preet Vihar area, police said here.

On January 4, Jitender, who owns a popular jewellery showroom, informed police that he had received a letter demanding ₹50 lakh and threatening to kill him if he failed to pay up. He also told police that the letter was delivered to a guard of the showroom by an auto-rickshaw driver, who had brought it on behalf of another person.

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"During investigation, employees of the complainant were examined, and police zeroed in on Ajay, a former employee who had quit last year. It was found that he was under huge debt. On Tuesday, he was apprehended from near SDN hospital," deputy commissioner of police (East) Deepak Yadav said.

During interrogation, the accused, who is a resident of Tahirpur Sarai in GTB Enclave, disclosed that while work-

**▶ ON JANUARY 4,** Jitender, who owns a popular jewellery showroom, informed police that he had received a letter demanding ₹50 lakh and threatening to kill him if he failed to pay up. He also told police that the letter was delivered to a guard of the showroom by an auto-rickshaw driver, who had brought it on behalf of another person.

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ing at the showroom, he and the store manager fell in love with each other, and when the owner came to know about this, he fired the store manager. Ajay got angry at this and quit, the DCP said.

He decided to teach the owner a lesson and prepared a plan to extort money from him after this, the police added.

## SC grants protection to AAP leader Sanjay

**New Delhi, Feb. 9:** The Supreme Court on Tuesday granted protection from arrest to Aam Aadmi Party leader Sanjay Singh in connection with the first information reports filed against him in Uttar Pradesh for alleged hate speech, Live Law reported.

The cases against Singh are related to a remark that he made at a press conference in Lucknow in August last year. He had accused the Uttar Pradesh government of favouring a certain caste over the others.



Sanjay Singh

Multiple FIRs were filed against the Singh in Uttar Pradesh, which he alleged was an attempt to harass him. He approached the Supreme Court seeking the quashing of the FIRs and a

non-bailable warrant issued against him.

Though the bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan granted relief to Singh, it noted that he cannot divide the society on lines of castes and religion, PTI reported.

Mr Singh's lawyers Vivek Tankha and Sumeer Sodhi told the Supreme Court that the police did not follow procedures while filing cases against him. They added that a sanction to prosecute Singh had to be sought from the Rajya

Sabha chairperson, since he was a member of the House. However, the court noted that this does not mean no offence can be made out against Singh.

The Supreme Court said that the UP government could approach the Rajya Sabha chairperson to seek sanction to prosecute Singh. It also issued a notice to the state government on Singh's petitions to club the FIRs filed against him. The case will now be heard in March. — PTI

## Air 'very poor' across Noida, Ghaziabad, Gurgaon, Faridabad

**Noida (UP), Feb. 9:** The average air quality across Ghaziabad, Noida, Greater Noida, Gurgaon and Faridabad was "very poor", that may cause respiratory illness on prolonged exposure, according to data provided by a government agency on Tuesday.

Pollutants PM 2.5 and PM 10 also remained in the air of the five immediate neighbours of Delhi, according to the air quality index (AQI) maintained by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

An AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good", 51 and 100 "satisfactory", 101 and 200 "moderate", 201 and 300

"poor", 301 and 400 "very poor", and 401 and 500 "severe".

The average 24-hour AQI at 4 pm on Tuesday was 374 in Ghaziabad, 347 in Noida, 348 in Greater Noida, 322 in Faridabad and 313 in Gurgaon, according to CPCB's Sameer app.

On Monday it was 329 in Ghaziabad, 310 in Noida, 319 in Greater Noida, 173 in Faridabad and 298 in Gurgaon. On Sunday it was 251 in Ghaziabad, 238 in Noida, 224 in Greater Noida, 218 in Faridabad and 209 in Gurgaon.

The AQI for each city is based on the average value of all monitoring stations there. — PTI

## Dense fog shrouds Delhi, air quality poor

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 9

Delhi was enveloped in a dense cover of fog on Tuesday morning reducing visibility to zero in some parts of the city, MeT officials said.

The minimum temperature at 7.8° Celsius was one notch below the average in the season, said a MeT official.

Air quality in Delhi was poor, with index value of 300 at 9.00 am, showed the real time data of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

Delhi experienced very dense fog with visibility dropping to less than 50 metres in many parts of the city, the MeT official said.

The visibility was zero at Palam and 400 metres at Safdarjung at 5.30 am.

Further, it was 50 metres at both Palam and Safdarjung at 8.30 am, he said.

Maresh Palawat, the vice president of weather forecaster Skymet, said flight delay was possible due to dense fog.



## SHORT TAKES

## UK production unit man held for porn

**Mumna:** The Property Cell of Mumbai crime branch on Monday arrested Umesh Kamat, a representative of UK-based production house, Kenrin, in connection with a porn film production racket. With Kamat the number of arrested persons in this case has reached 7. He was produced before the court on Monday which remanded him to police custody till February 10. The police on Sunday arrested model and actor Gehena Vasisth for allegedly shooting porn videos. Now Kamat has been arrested for uploading at least seven to eight such porn videos on a social media app. According to police, during the interrogation Vasisth had told the interrogators that she had sold seven to eight movies to Kamat. The police have come to know that Kamat was working for Vasisth and used to upload pornographic videos sent by her.

## CM post: Sena slams Shah for denying offer

**Mumbai:** The Shiv Sena on Tuesday slammed Union home minister Amit Shah over his remarks that he never made any closed door promise to share Maharashtra CM's post with the Uddhav Thackeray-led party. The Sena said that the BJP leader is making such comments only because his party failed to form the government in Maharashtra. It also argued that Mr Shah had himself stated in his previous "sponsored interviews" that it is not his sanskar (culture) to reveal what was decided in the closed door meeting. In an editorial in its mouthpiece Saamna, the Shiv Sena claimed that the BJP is misleading people. It advised Mr Shah to focus on matters like the Uttarakhand flash floods and the farmers' agitation against contentious three farm laws.

## FCRA permit of 20.6K NGOs cancelled: Govt

**New Delhi:** The government on Tuesday said that it had cancelled the FCRA licences of over 20,600 NGOs in the last 10 years. Most of these cancellations were done on account of non-filing of annual returns which is a mandatory requirement under the law, Union minister of state for home Nityanand Rai said. "The registration certificates of more than 20,600 NGOs and associations have been cancelled during the period from 2011 till date, for violation of various provisions of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), 2010, and rules made thereunder," he said in a written reply in Lok Sabha. Over ₹58,000 crore foreign funds were received by NGOs registered under the FCRA between 2016-17 and 2018-19. — PTI

## Class 10, 12 exams in Jammu April 1

**Jammu:** The Jammu and Kashmir Board of School Education (JKBOSE) on Tuesday announced that the annual examinations for classes 10 and 12 will commence from April 1 in Jammu region. As per the notification issued by joint secretary of JKBOSE, the exams for class 10 will begin from April 3 and culminate on April 24 while those for class 12 will start from April 1 and end on April 29, an official said. The examination will be conducted as per standard operating procedure and Covid-19 guidelines, the official said. All students have been asked to maintain social distancing and wear masks while all examination centres will be sanitised, the official said. — PTI

## Malegaon blast: HC grills accused Col.

**Mumbai:** The Bombay high court on Tuesday asked 2008 Malegaon blast accused Lieutenant Colonel Prasad Shrikant Purohit if he had any documents to show he attended alleged conspiracy meetings for the blast as part of his official duty for the Army. A bench of Justices S.S. Shinde and Manish Pitale asked Purohit about a meeting that he had attended on January 26, 2008. As per the National Investigation Agency (NIA), this meeting was organised by a group called Abhinav Bharat and the conspiracy for the blast was hatched here. — PTI

## Safety audit ordered for all hill infrastructure projects

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 9

In view of the Uttarakhand glacier tragedy home ministry's National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) will conduct a fresh "safety and security audit" of all major infrastructure projects in high altitude and hilly areas and suggest corrective measures.

Home ministry sources said there was considerable concern with the government regarding the safety of infrastructure being carried in hilly terrain particularly after the Uttarakhand glacier burst. So this incident is being used as an opportunity to do an in-depth safety audit.

Officials said all projects being carried in States like



NDRF personnel carry the body of a victim who died after a glacier broke off at Joshimath in the Dhauri Ganga river near Raini village in Chamoli on Tuesday. — PTI

Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and the North-Eastern States would be thoroughly reviewed. A detailed report and analysis would be submitted within the next two months and suggest if any

corrective measures were required to be taken.

"As of now this survey would be conducted in hilly States as they are more vulnerable to such disasters as was witnessed in Uttarakhand," a senior ministry official said.

Experts from NDRF and even external agencies like IIT, Indian Institute of Science and others would be roped in for this exercise. A number of power projects, dams, roads and bridges are being constructed in these States which would be examined. Ministry sources said NDRF teams with assistance from the SDRF would be deployed close to these infrastructure projects so that immediate relief and rescue operations can be carried out in case of any future disasters.

Meanwhile, large-scale operation is currently going on in Uttarakhand to trace the missing person. As of now 197 people are still missing while 20 are confirmed dead.

## #MeToo: Delhi court verdict likely today in MJ Akbar case

**New Delhi:** A Delhi Court is likely to pronounce verdict on Wednesday in M.J. Akbar's criminal defamation case against journalist Priya Ramani for her allegations of sexual harassment against him.

Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Ravindra Kumar had on February 1 reserved the judgment after Akbar as well as Ramani completed their arguments.

Ms Ramani had made allegation of sexual misconduct against Akbar in the wake of #MeToo movement in 2018.

Mr Akbar had filed the complaint against Ms Ramani on October 15, 2018 for allegedly defaming him by accusing him of sexual misconduct decades ago when he was a journalist. He resigned as Union minister on October 17, 2018. He has denied all the allegations of sexual harassment by all the women.

Mr Akbar, while advancing her final argument had questioned Journalist Priya Ramani and said she has destroyed evidence in the defamation case against her by deleting her Twitter account, which is a criminal offence. — PTI



M.J. Akbar



Woman activists of different left organisations break the barricades during their law violation programme outside Kolkata Municipal Corporation headquarters in Kolkata on Tuesday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

## Sunny moves Kerala HC seeking bail in cheating case

**Kochi, Feb. 9:** Bollywood actor Sunny Leone on Tuesday moved the Kerala high court seeking anticipatory bail in a cheating complaint filed by an event management firm which alleged she had failed to appear for their Valentine Day event here in 2019 after accepting payment of around ₹29 lakh.

The petition is likely to come up on Wednesday. The petitioners — Leone alias Karenjit Kaur Vohra along with her husband Daniel Weber, and another person — submitted they were innocent, ready to cooperate with the investigation and no manner of criminality can be attributed against them. It was also submitted that "if arrested and remanded, it will cause irreparable loss and injury" to them.

Leone, who was questioned by Kochi crime branch officials on February 3 at Thiruvananthapuram, said it was only then she realised that an FIR had been registered against them under various sections of IPC including 406 (criminal breach of trust) and 420 (cheating).

They submitted they have fully cooperated with the officers and apprised them of the facts and circumstances, handed over documents substantiating the transactions that transpired between them and the complainant.



Sunny Leone

## R-Day violence: SC stays arrest of Tharoor, others

**New Delhi, Feb. 9:** In a major relief to Congress MP Shashi Tharoor and six journalists including Rajdeep Sardesai, the Supreme Court on Tuesday stayed their arrest in connection with the FIRs lodged against them for their allegedly "misleading" tweets on the violence during the farmers' tractor rally here on the Republic Day.

The apex court, in the proceedings lasting five minutes, granted protection from any possible coercive action by police of states like Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Karnataka to Tharoor as also Sardesai, Mrinal Pande, Zafar Agha, Paresh Nath, Vinod K Jose and Anant Nath.

Issue notice returnable in two weeks. In the meantime, there shall be stay of arrest of the petitioners, the bench headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde noted in its order after senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the lawmaker from Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala, expressed the looming danger of danger arrest.

When the bench said it was issuing notice in the matter, Sibal vehemently pleaded that an order with an effect that no coercive action be taken against them in the meantime be also passed.

Nothing is going to



Shashi Tharoor

happen. Where is the danger, said the bench, also comprising Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian.

Mr Sibal objected and said Solicitor General Tuhsar Mehta is appearing for Delhi Police and the cops of other states might knock at my doors and arrest me in the meantime.

"Kindly protect us in the meanwhile," Sibal said, prompting the bench to ask the law officer whether the police were planning to arrest Mr Tharoor and others. Mr Mehta, seeking to argue the case on Wednesday, alleged: Horrendous tweets have been made, the law officer said, adding, I can show you what horrendous effect these tweets have with such lakhs of followers.

The bench asked Mehta, Are you going to arrest them?

The solicitor general said, I am before your lordships. Please hear it tomorrow. — PTI

## PM expresses concerns as India vows 2nd Afghan dam

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 9

India will build a second Dam in Afghanistan—the Lalandar (Shatoot) Dam—to meet the drinking water needs of the Afghan Capital Kabul, it was announced on Tuesday, even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed concern over the increasing violence in the war-torn nation. Speaking on the occasion of the inking of an MoU between the two countries for construction of the Dam, PM Modi called for a ceasefire and an immediate end to violence in Afghanistan, adding that both nations wanted the region to be free from the menace of terrorism and that peace and violence cannot co-exist. He reiterated New Delhi's stand in favour of a peace process that is Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled, while pointing out how innocent citizens, journalists and activists are being targeted in a cowardly manner in the strife-torn nation.



Narendra Modi

He added, "It is very important to strengthen internal solidarity among the people of Afghanistan. I believe that a united Afghanistan is capable of facing any challenge."

The MoU for the construction of the Lalandar Dam was inked in the Virtual format by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Afghan Foreign Minister Hanif Atmar in the presence of PM Modi and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. As PM Modi put it, "Its foundation will not be built only on bricks and mortar, but hinges on the strength of Indo-Afghan friendship. Kabul city is etched in the hearts and minds of the people of India."

"This is the second major dam being built by

India in Afghanistan, after the India-Afghanistan Friendship Dam [Salma Dam], which was inaugurated by the Prime Minister and the (Afghan) President in June 2016," New Delhi stated.

In a statement, the MEA said, "The (Lalandar) project is a part of the New Development Partnership between India and Afghanistan. The Lalandar [Shatoot] Dam would meet the safe drinking water needs of Kabul City, provide irrigation water to nearby areas, rehabilitate the existing irrigation and drainage network, aid in flood protection and management efforts in the area, and also provide electricity to the region."

PM Modi also recounted the previous development works carried out by India including in the fields of power transmission lines and road connectivity projects. It may be noted that Tuesday's pact comes soon after India gifted five lakh doses of India-manufactured Covid vaccine to Afghanistan.

## Pak govt should not buy Dilip Kumar's home, says lawyer

**Peshawar, Feb. 9:** The lawyer representing the owner of Indian film legend Dilip Kumar's ancestral home in Peshawar has advised the provincial government to not buy the 100-year-old haveli, as it is in a dilapidated condition and repairing it would be as costly as acquiring it.

Earlier in the month, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government had approved the release of Rs 80.56 lakh for Kumar's ancestral home, with the aim to turn it into a museum in honour of the movie star.

Gul Rahman Mohmand, the lawyer of the present building owners, in a chat with a private news channel on Tuesday, said the haveli is in an extremely dilapidated condition due to years of neglect, comparing the premises to a "heap of garbage".

Mohmand said the reconstruction cost of the



Dilip Kumar

building would be double the cost of acquiring it.

If the KPK government is still interested in buying it, then it must do so at the market rate, which is around ₹35 crore, the advocate said.

Mohmand defended his estimation, saying the haveli is located in an upscale locality, where the property rate is around ₹7 crore per marla.

Marla, a traditional unit of area used in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, is considered as equal to 272.25 square feet or 25.2929 square metres.

When contacted, director Archaeology, Abdus Samad Khan, said the provincial government has decided, in principle, to convert the birthplace of Bollywood's tragedy king into a museum. — PTI

## CIC refuses to disclose details of selection panel meet on Lokpal

**New Delhi, Feb. 9:** The CIC has refused to allow disclosure of minutes of selection committee meetings to choose the chairperson and members of anti-graft body Lokpal.

Over two years since an application seeking records pertaining to the selection of the country's Lokpal and other members was filed, the CIC rejected it citing two SC judgments on contempt petitions regarding all the details of the selection committee and its meetings, hence the question of lack of transparency does not hold ground. Moreover, having taken cognizance of the averred dictum of the apex court, the commission does not find it appropriate to intervene in the decision of the CPIO.

Information Commissioner Sarioj Punhani said.

Transparency and anti-corruption activist Anjali Bhardwaj had filed the RTI

application in November 2018 with the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), demanding records related to the selection process of the chairperson and members of the Lokpal.

The request included information about the number of meetings held, the dates of the meetings, copies of minutes or proceedings of the meetings and details of the attendees. The ministry refused the minutes of the selection committee meetings, saying, "As regards the minutes of the meetings, it is submitted that the authorship of such documents, which include three to five high-level dignitaries, does not vest in the Department of Personnel and Training and the same have been shared as secret documents. — PTI

## 'Hyper nationalism subverting core values of democracy'

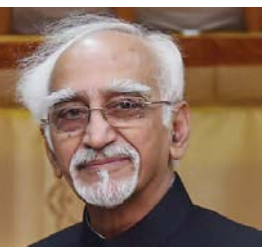
AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 9

Former vice-president Mr Hamid Ansari on Tuesday said that a new version of nationalism that places cultural commitments at its centre and promotes intolerance and arrogant patriotism has taken over the political and cultural landscape. Terming this as "hyper-nationalism" and "strident nationalism", Mr Ansari said one of the outcomes of this "hyper-nationalism" is "a subversion of core values" of Indian democracy.

In an interview to journalist Karan Thapar for the news portal The Wire,

Mr Ansari said "hyper-nationalism" and "strident nationalism" threaten dissent and are making the country insecure about its place in the world. According to him this means commitment to the principles and core values of Indian Constitution is weakening and diminishing and this mindset is also making India intolerant, arrogant and insecure.

The former vice-president, who has also served as a diplomat, felt that a worrying consequence of this cultural hyper-nationalism is that it has made "the fault lines in the society more visible" and



M. Hamid Ansari

made India "more fragile".

"The term secularism itself has almost disappeared from the government's official vocabulary. In its place the politico-ideological effort now is to superimpose the primacy of a religious majority," he

said while adding this is pushing India from being a secular nation to becoming a Hindu country.

"Another consequence of this cultural hyper-nationalism is that our commitment to the Rule of Law seems to be under serious threat. We have lapsed into arbitrary decision-making and even mob rule," he further said while adding that a "noticeable decline in the efficacy of the institutions of state" has occurred.

The interview was in connection to recently released autobiography — *By Many A Happy Accident: Recollections of a Life*.

In his interview Mr. Ansari said the process leading towards this hyper-nationalism or strident nationalism began with the 2014 general election results but reached its fulfilment with the 2019 results and was a real turning point for India. "The 2019 results represent the success of populism ... assisted by authoritarianism, nationalism and majoritarianism," he said.

Talking about the superior judiciary, Mr. Ansari said: "The approach of the superior judiciary ... does little credit to an iconic institution and damages public confidence".

COMMERCIAL SITE (CAR PARKING) ON RENT FOR 03 YEARS (EXTENDABLE FOR 02 YEARS) AT ISBT - 17, CHANDIGARH.

No. 1147/CT/CTU/2020,  
Dated : 09-02-2021

Chandigarh Transport Undertaking invites e-tenders (online tenders) from the individuals / Companies / firms / Contractor / Agency / Joint Venture / Consortium for the allotment of Car Parking site at ISBT, Sector 17, Chandigarh. The interested parties can apply for the bidding on or before 24/02/2021 upto 14.00 hrs. The terms and conditions of the bidding can be seen on the website of Chandigarh i.e. <http://etenders.chd.nic/nicgep/app> or <http://chandigarh.gov.in> or <http://chdctu.gov.in>

Director Transport  
U.T., Chandigarh



## SHORT TAKES

### ED CONDUCT RAIDS ON PREMISES OF NEWS PORTAL

New Delhi, Feb. 9: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday conducted searches on the premises of a news portal and its promoters here on charges of alleged money laundering, official sources said. They said the premises of the website — *Newslick* — and its promoters in South Delhi's Saidullajab and some other areas are being searched.

The action is being undertaken to collect additional information to probe money laundering charges against the news company and its promoters, the sources said.

They said the probe is linked to some suspect foreign funding.

## JAGAN'S SISTER HINTS AT T'GANA POLITICAL ENTRY

Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh chief minister Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy's sister, Y.S. Sharmila, is likely to float a separate political outfit in Telangana, parting ways with her brother who is not supportive of her move. Andhra government officials, however, maintain that there is "no personal rift" between the two.

Ms Sharmila came out of near political hibernation Tuesday to hold a meeting with a hundred-odd party workers from Nalgonda district at the office of Jagan-led YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) in Hyderabad.

"My intention is to speak to leaders and the cadre from all the districts and understand the ground realities," Sharmila told the media after the meeting. "There is no Rajanna Rajyam (YSR rule) in Telangana and we want to understand why... We will bring back YSR rule here."

This is the first time that Ms Sharmila has held a political meeting since the 2019 assembly polls in Andhra Pradesh when she campaigned for her brother.

What has puzzled political observers is the fact that the YSRCP was hardly involved in organising the meeting. Jagan's picture was also conspicuously absent from the posters.

Andhra government officials, however, insist that the siblings have not fallen out. "There is no personal rift between the chief minister and his sister — they are family. That being said, there could have been ideological differences between both," Andhra government advisor Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy said Tuesday.

## DEEP SIDHU HELD OVER JAN. 26 ROLE; 7-DAY REMAND

Continued from Page 1 "Sidhu was wanted in connection with the case of instigating the crowd at the Red Fort on Republic Day. The Crime Branch will investigate his role in detail," said the DCP.

Asked where he was hiding after the January 26 violence, Yadav said the investigation was in an initial stage.

A source said Sidhu was waiting for someone on the road when he was nabbed. "Meanwhile, it was also revealed that Sidhu was in contact with a woman friend who lives in California. He used to make videos and send it to her, and she used to upload them on his Facebook account," said the source. Sidhu kept changing his locations to evade arrest, he added. The police had announced a cash reward of Rs 1 lakh for information leading to Sidhu's arrest. After the Republic Day 26 violence that had left over 500 security personnel injured and one protester dead, Sidhu was posting videos on the social media. On January 26, thousands of protesting farmers who reached ITO from the Ghazipur border clashed with the police. Many of them driving tractors reached the Red Fort and entered the monument, where a religious flag was also hoisted.

In the FIR registered in connection with the Red Fort violence, the police said two magazines with 20 live cartridges were snatched from two constables by protesters who also damaged vehicles and robbed anti-riot gear. "The mob later hoisted different flags there. They also started creating a nuisance on the ramparts. The unruly mob was asked to come down. They went to the Meena Bazar area to enter the into Red Fort. When the police tried to take them out of Lahore Gate, the mob became violent and attacked personnel. The mob thrashed the police personnel and threw them in the wells," the police had said in the FIR.



West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee during a public rally at Kalna in Burdwan district on Tuesday.

- PTI

# BJP has turned the country into crematorium: Mamata

2 more rath yatras flagged off, Nadda calls Didi's nephew a 'spoilt child'

RAJIB CHOWDHURI & PRANMOY BRAHMACHARI  
KOLKATA/BERHAMPORE, FEB. 9

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday mocked the BJP's much-hyped Rath Yatra in the poll-bound state as "outsiders' tour in a vehicle, housing a hotel, for five-star babus" hours before saffron party president J.P. Nadda flagged off two more Rath Yatras, slammed the Trinamul Congress supreme's rule and called her MP nephew Abhishek Banerjee a *bigraill beta* (spoilt child). At a TMC rally in Kalna of Burdwan East, Ms Banerjee alleged, "Some outsiders and goonda, who do not live here, think that they will spread lies to the poor and click photos of having lunch at their home in exchange of money. They tour in a vehicle which houses a hotel for five-star babus. They also have their lunch, which is

## Former top cop Kabir joins TMC ahead of elections

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA, FEB. 9

Close on the heels of taking voluntary retirement from the Indian Police Service as inspector general, former Chanda-nagar police commissioner Humayun Kabir on Tuesday joined the ruling Trinamul Congress in presence of party supremo Mamata Banerjee during her rally at Kalna in Burdwan East.

Ms Banerjee has plans to field Mr Kabir, who took

the VRS on January 29 though his superannuation was due in April, as a TMC candidate from a minority dominated seat in the polls to woo the Muslim votebank, according to sources.

Hailing the CM, Mr Kabir said, "In the last ten years, development has ushered in the state under the leadership of Ms Banerjee as the CM. While in service, I have seen her tireless work with dedication to many projects for the people apart from pan-

demic or natural disaster like Amphan or flood."

He added, "My experience of working with her is very good. I am overwhelmed by her inspiration. Today a party from outside is trying to create a division among the cultural people of Bengal to grab power. But the people of Bengal will give them a reply soon. It is our firm belief that our Chief Minister will return to power. We are taking a pledge to be with Ms Banerjee."

cooked at a five-star hotel, on a gold plate." She later claimed at Maati Utsob in the same district, "The BJP has turned the

country into a crematorium. But we will not let that happen in Bengal." At her next rally in Berhampore in Murshidabad, Ms Banerjee

Seeking him to prove his allegations she vowed to "live like a Royal Bengal tiger."

Lashing out at Ms Banerjee, Mr Nadda said, "Two days ago what did you say in the name of Shubhendu Adhikari's respected father? I can not even utter it here. Bhaipo has stigmatized Bengal through his culture. He is upto Tustikaran, Tanashahi and Tolabaji only. Remember, in May people will remove you from power. Did I do anything wrong in visiting Diamond Harbour and Bhowanipore? Are these places someone's property? Bhaipo, I will visit Diamond Harbour not once but many times and I will show you how people stand up. *Sarkar Aate Hain, Jate Hain. Par Zaban toh Sambhal Ke Rakho! Par Bigre Beto Ka Toh Haal Aisa Hi Hota Hai. Yeh Bigraill Bete Hain.* He has got power without responsibility. That is why he does not respect power."

## No new death in Delhi, Covid on decline

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 9

National Capital Delhi on Tuesday had zero deaths due to Covid-19 in the last 24 hours. This is the first time in 10 months when no fatality has been reported. The number of fresh cases in Delhi too are on a decline and on Tuesday just 100 tested positive to the virus out 56, 410 tests conducted. The city had recorded 96 coronavirus cases on January 27, the lowest in over nine months.

While Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain said the collective will of the people is gradually winning over the infection, NITI Aayog Member (Health) Dr V.K. Paul

accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of lying on the payment of salary to the state government employees during his last state visit.

termed this as "remarkable."

"Today no death has been reported due to Covid infection. Delhi's collective will is gradually winning over the infection. I congratulate the people of Delhi for taking proper precautions and our healthcare and frontline workers who have fought this battle tooth and nail," Mr Jain said.

Nationwide, only 78 deaths were reported while the fresh cases were 9,110. Delhi is one of the 15

States and Union Territories that have not reported Covid related deaths in the last 24 hours. Besides, there are seven states and UTs that have not reported deaths in last three weeks. Union health secretary said 55 per cent decline in average daily Covid-19 deaths have been reported in the last five weeks.

With overall decline in daily cases and deaths due to Covid-29, Mr Paul said the pandemic situation in the country is now satisfactory. "Cases are coming down. Deaths are consistently under 100 and there have been no deaths in Delhi in the last 24 hours. This is truly remarkable. We have made consistent gains," said Mr Paul.

At the same time he underlined that there is need for immunization and a herd immunity against the deadly virus can be gained through vaccination. He said experience of vaccination by the beneficiaries are being appreciated and there are very few cases of Adverse Effect. From Immunisation (AEFI). "We can confidently say that the strategy to implement vaccination programme and the experience of vaccination is now consistently, very highly rated by the people. Very few have adverse effect which is reassuring that the vaccines are safe. The vaccine hesitancy too is now going away," said Mr Paul.

## Will take stir to far corners of country: Tikait

Continued from Page 1 will also try to divide us on the basis of khaps but we have to rise above such differences and stand united. We have forged a unity this time and have to keep it intact. I congratulate the 40-member committee of farmers' leaders for speaking in one voice against the new laws."

Hailing the arrest of Punjabi actor Deep Singh Sindhu over the Republic Day violence, Mr Tikait accused the government of hatching a conspiracy for hoisting a Sikh flag at the Red Fort to defame the protesters. "Let me make it clear we will not allow our bread to become a market item. Nor we will allow our grains to be stored in the lockers (of corporates)."

As the protests against the agricultural laws entered Day 76, a 28-year-old farmer died of serious head injuries as he fell off a tractor trolley.

## AGE IMPACT

# Naga students body takes exception to Naga gov's directive

Babus against posting social media posts

MANOJ ANAND  
GUWAHATI, FEB. 9

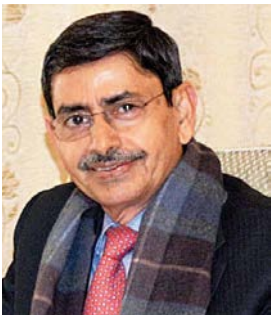
The Naga Students' Federation has taken exception to the Nagaland Governor R.N. Ravi's directive to state government employees to refrain from indulging in seditious and subversive writings challenging the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country and posting them on social media platforms.

Reacting to a report published in this newspaper, the Naga Students Federation in a written press statement said, "The federation has taken a serious note of the impugned directive and views the same as another attempt by the Governor to undo the peace and understanding brought about by his predecessors."

"The federation is dismayed at the recent attempt of the governor to silence the voice of Naga people and suppress our rights through his recent directive to the chief secretary of Nagaland."

Referring one such specific instance of Dr H Inato Jimomi Naga, serving under the department of animal husbandry and veterinary department, Government of Nagaland, the commissioner and secretary to the governor T. Mahabemo Yanthan had asked the state chief secretary to initiate criminal proceedings against the officer while pointing out, "Such act of government servant constitutes serious offences under the penal laws and also gross misconduct under the service conduct rules inviting criminal prosecution and disciplinary action including dismissal from service."

The governor had also directed all the heads of the departments to sensitise the state government employees in the regard, the commissioner and



R.N. Ravi

THE NAGA Students' Federation has taken exception to the Nagaland Governor R.N. Ravi's directive to state government employees to refrain from indulging in seditious and subversive writings challenging the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country and posting them on social media platforms.

THE FEDERATION is dismayed at the recent attempt of the governor to silence the voice of Naga people and suppress our rights through Mr Ravi's recent directive

secretary to governor in his letter to the state chief secretary said, "I have been directed to request the state government to take serious cognizance of such misconducts and initiate appropriate legal and disciplinary action against the delinquent government servants."

The federation in the statement signed by its general secretary Liremo Kikon said, "The federation would like to remind him that Naga peoples' struggle for self-determination can in no way be treated as another secessionist movement. Instead it is merely a collective assertion of the Naga people to live as a people free from any illegal occupational forces based on historical facts. Therefore, not a single soul should be persecuted for voicing out the truth."

## Army dogs gets training to find out Covid cases

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 9

Indian Army has trained its dogs for quick detection of Covid-19 cases by smelling urine and sweat samples.

Three Indian army dogs — Jaya and Mani (both indigenous 'Chippiparai' breed from Tamil Nadu) and Casper ('Cocker Spaniel') — on Tuesday showed their capability to detect Covid-19 samples. One-year-old Mani is still undergoing training.

These dogs have been trained to sit next to a sample kept in a container if it is positive for the disease and move forward after sniffing if it is negative.

After their training in September, Jaya and Casper were deployed at the Army's transit camp in Delhi in November. Since December, they are being deployed at the transit camp in Chandigarh from where troops move to large areas, including the Ladakh sector.

A dog can screen around 100 samples in an hour with a rest of 5 minutes after every 15 minutes.

"Besides these two dogs, eight other dogs, including four labradors, are also undergoing training," said Lt Col Surinder Saini, instructor at the Dog Training Facility of the Remount Veterinary Corps (RVC) Centre in Meerut. It takes 12-16 weeks of intensive training to train these dogs with exposure to positive and negative samples.

## Azad true friend, hard to replace in RS, says Modi

Continued from Page 1 ending on February 10.

Recalling conversations with the two PDP MPs in his Parliament room, Mr Modi said the sessions with them were always "enlightening" and that he is personally thankful to the information on Kashmir's specifics that they used to engage during their conversations. Mr Modi said he had personal relations with both PDP members. Describing Mr Manhas as soft-spoken, Mr Modi said he had known him for many years and had worked along with him during his organisational days in J&K. While Mr Laway, in his farewell speech, requested that Jammu and Kashmir's statehood be restored, Mr Fayaz parished the Modi government's Ujwala

scheme and said whenever they reached out to the government for help, they always received support from it.

"One thing I would like to say about Mr Azad that the next LoP will have a difficult time in matching his work because he was not only concerned about his party but also about the country and the House," said the PM, and revealed how it was the Congress leader who had suggested to him to call a meeting of all party leaders during the Covid-19 pandemic, when the PM was holding a meeting of the floor leaders.

Mr Modi had tears as he recalled the 2007 terrorist attack on a tourist bus carrying Gujaratis in J&K when both him and Mr Azad were chief ministers of their respective states.

## Glacier toll 32, race to save 30+

Continued from Page 1

assistance were being sent to these villages through helicopters. Earlier on Tuesday, Uttarakhand CM Trivendra Singh Rawat conducted an aerial survey of the areas affected by the glacier burst and took stock of the situation. The CM visited the ITBP hospital in Joshimath, about 300 km from Dehradun, and met

the 12 workers who were rescued from a small tunnel in Tapovan on Sunday evening. He also visited Lata and Raini to meet residents of the disaster-hit villages.

Mr Rawat said that the priority was to get to those trapped inside the tunnel and save as many lives as possible, he said. More heavy machines could be pressed into service to expedite the

process of clearing the tonnes of debris inside the tunnel, blocking the path of rescue personnel.

Some family members of the missing workers are also camping at Tapovan, waiting for some news about them. About 70 missing workers are from Uttarakhand, an official said in Lucknow. Of them, 34 are from Lakhimpur Kheri district alone.

## Shahnawaz in Nitish Cabinet

Continued from Page 1

As per one assessment, both parties (JD-U and BJP) had taken caste and regional representation into consideration in the selection of ministers. "Whenever there is Cabinet expansion, we try and consider the representation of every section of society. I would urge all ministers to work for the development of Bihar", chief minister Nitish Kumar said in a statement

after the oath-taking ceremony.

This was the first expansion of the Nitish Kumar ministry after it came back to power in November 2020. Last year, Mr Kumar took the oath as Bihar CM along with 14 ministers.

The BJP, with 74 seats, is the largest party in the Bihar assembly while its partner, the JD(U), has gone down to the third position after it could win only 43 seats. Two other

NDA partners — Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM) and Vikasheel Insaan Party (VIP) — got four each in the Assembly elections.

However, political analysts note that despite its reduced tally, the JD(U) managed to retain key portfolios like home, personnel and education. After the expansion on Tuesday, the BJP now has 16 ministers and the JD(U) has 13 ministers.



# THE ASIAN AGE

10 FEBRUARY 2021

## Sasikala the ‘X’ factor in TN’s soap opera politics

The red carpet reception was more like those given to pop singers in star-struck declarations of adulation. Ex-convict V.K. Sasikala, who came home after serving a four-year jail sentence under the Prevention of Corruption Act, was elevated to demigod status in a 22-hour car journey that was more a procession pandering to the blind loyalty of lumpen political party elements. As a social phenomenon, it defies decoding; as a person convicted of stealing from the government treasury is elevated to the status of a neta who can bring deliverance to the people. This is not restricted to cinema-obsessed Tamil Nadu as the phenomenon encompasses Lalu Prasad Yadav and many a charismatic netas suspected of being as corrupt.

Ms Sasikala’s impact on Tamil Nadu politics is not to be dismissed though she is ineligible to stand for election. Her nephew T.T.V. Dhinakaran’s disinformation campaign cannot change the law. Her role as a backroom manipulator in Jayalalithaa’s regime when she virtually picked people for plum Cabinet posts and even made or unmade chief ministers had made her a force to be reckoned within the AIADMK

The Dravidian major AIADMK, which has alternated in power after breaking away from the DMK in 1972, is feeling anxious about the return of the power of Poes Garden, which had housed two misanthropes who manoeuvred adroitly in a domain that was a distinctly male preserve before Jayalalithaa broke the chain. The party MGR founded and Jayalalithaa nurtured may face the biggest threat with Ms Sasikala claiming it as her own despite having been summarily removed on her going to jail in

Bengaluru. Lengthy legal challenges to her being stripped of the post of general secretary may be in the offing but that does not change the electoral scene except that an AIADMK split by loyalty calls may be playing right into the hands of DMK, which pollsters are favouring to emerge victorious in the summer of 2021.

The people of a state, who were in such a thrall of cinema that they allowed it to play a larger-than-life role in the making of netas, are far more forgiving of corruption, which has historically been rampant in the 54 years of Dravidian regimes. Ms Sasikala, who has never been in electoral politics, can be expected to play only the role of a disruptor as she seeks the Jayalalithaa legacy and her party. Time is not on her side in her emergence too close to the Assembly polls to build anew her nephew’s breakout AMMK party. Her journey to Chennai that occupied nearly 24 hours was stretched out to play to a television gallery in the highest traditions of the state’s soap opera politics. What happens from here is in the people’s court.

## Pay heed to ex-judge’s plea

Justice Madan Lokur, who retired as a judge of the Supreme Court just over two years ago, has in public remarks expressed his “disappointment” with the manner the top court has conducted itself in the discharge of its constitutional functions, and has recently even called upon the apex court to adopt an “interventionist” approach to check the “rampant misuse (even abuse) of the country’s criminal justice system.

A hands-off approach by the Supreme Court in the matter of a spate of FIRs for the same presumed violation encourages those who take advantage of the law to trouble fellow citizens, the retired judge observed.

Making a direct reference in this regard to the growing tendency on the part of some to file multiple FIRs, Justice Lokur drew attention to the case of prominent journalists, including several well-regarded editors, and an MP, Shashi Tharoor, being subjected to harassment through the filing of near-identical FIRs in several states, accusing them of sedition and causing social harmony. In the case of Mr Tharoor and the journalists, their initial tweets on the cause of the death of a farmer in the course of the recent agitation had led to the spate of FIRs being lodged — clearly by the people of the same motivation or persuasion.

Justice Lokur contrasted the above case with those of two television anchors — Arnab Goswami and Amish Devgan. The case of the first was heard within 15 hours of the top court being approached. His prayer to club the FIRs was instantly heeded. The other anchor was also given some relief. But the senior journalists charged with sedition, and Mr Tharoor, have not had the same luck. The former judge has, therefore, urged the Supreme Court to be “interventionist” and “lay down the law” in the case of multiple FIRs with the same content.

Criticisms of Supreme Court judgments by retired members of the top judiciary are not unknown. Nor is the failure of the top court to take action, as in constitutional matters concerning Kashmir, CAA, and habeas corpus — issues on which Justice Lokur has also expressed himself. But urgings to be “interventionist” from a retired member of the top court bench do appear novel. In this lies their freshness and historical value.

### THE ASIAN AGE

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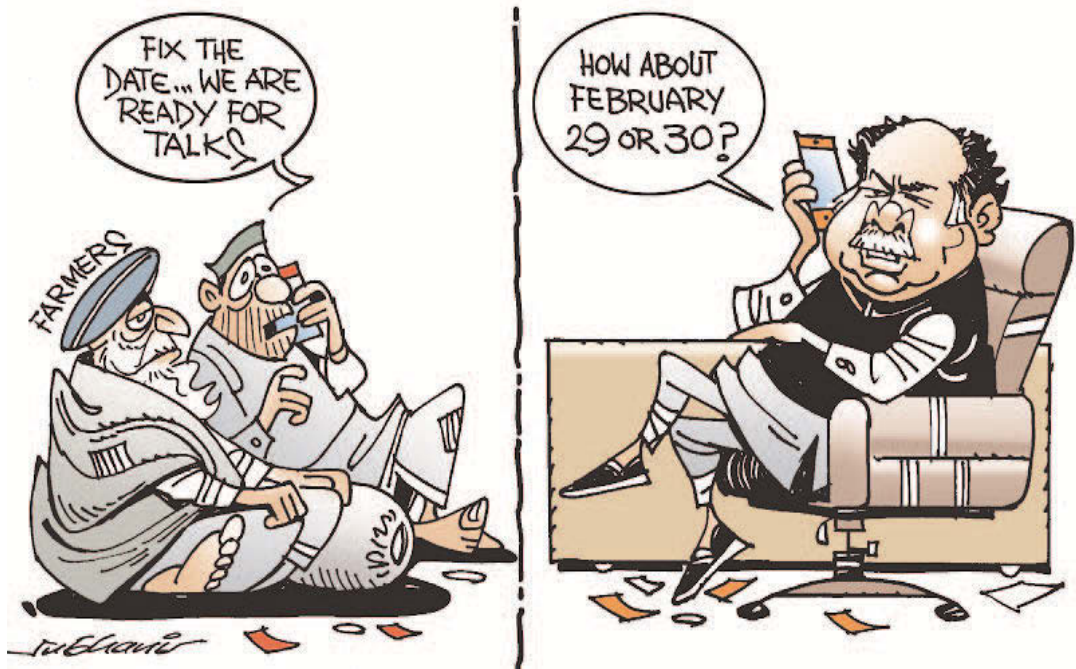
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Subhani



## Playing with God’s world: ‘Growth’ has a high price



Sanjeev Ahluwalia

Senior BJP leader Uma Bharati’s first reaction to the terrible news of the Chamoli glacier break/avalanche disaster on Sunday — “I told you so” — fully aligns with the reservations of all those who put a higher value on conservation than on the development of natural resources for economic growth.

On Sunday, a part of the Nanda Devi glacier broke off and avalanched down, causing a flash flood in the Rishiganga and Dhauli-ganga — the upper riverine stretches of the Alakananda, which feeds into the mighty Ganga — washing away back-to-back dams diverting water into a privately-owned hydro project on the Rishiganga stretch and seriously damaging an under-construction government-owned power generation project at Tapovan.

As minister for water resources in the first BJP government of Narendra Modi, Ms Bharati had dragged her feet on the development of the upper reaches of the Ganga in Uttarakhand — much to the dismay of gung-ho advocates of development and growth. Conservationists cite the “fragile” structure of the Himalayas to caution against over-exploitation of the riverine system for electricity generation.

Others go so far as to blame the recent much-publicised widening of the highways connecting the Char Dham — the four pilgrimage shrines in Garhwal — Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamotri. Construction of roads is still done the old way, by simply carving additional road width out from the mountain side, causing significant soil erosion both above and below the road. Measures to bind the exposed mountainside using nets or by planting fast-growing

ground cover are only a sideshow, rarely given prominence, in already overloaded road construction budgets.

But then, isn’t it always “the growth-wallahs” who stick their necks out by measuring risk versus rewards, even in the playground of the gods — as the Himalayas are believed to be. On the other hand, it is “safe” to be a conservationist, simply because there are so few downsides to the belief that only the sparing use of natural resources is sustainable. Multiple alternative sources of growth do remain unexploited, like higher productivity in the use of existing resources or the use of alternative “clean” technologies for power generation, like solar or offshore wind.

At times like the present one, in the immediate aftermath of a human tragedy, calculating the trade-off between lives cruelly snatched away from loved ones and the potential economic gains from development seems particularly pointless.

It is also unclear to what extent the disaster is the outcome of over-exploitation of resources in the back-to-back construction of dams to divert water into tunnels to run turbines for electricity generation. The shearing-off of glaciers, causing an avalanche and a flash flood in downstream riverine systems, is a natural calamity. After all, avalanches do happen, and lives are lost.

Doubtless, lessons must and will be learnt, with respect to continuous monitoring of the higher reaches for signs of fragility. Assessing the geological safety of hill development — extending road access, urban sprawl and related projects — is no longer a choice. Coupled with the depredations of climate change, already fragile ecosystems could tumble over the edge much faster if the rate and style of

intrusive development is not carefully regulated.

How much of a say should local communities have in large projects being created in their midst is another vexed question — on which there are no clear answers. The “wisdom and public interest orientation” of NIMBY (not in my backyard) communities varies and is often romanticised. In comparison, centralised planning is easy to vilify as representing the cruel, uncaring impositions of rules made by “outsiders”. Ultimately, help must come from science in guiding the government on project site selection and regulations for risk minimisation and occupational safety for project workers.

In 2013, PM Narendra Modi made history as chief minister of Gujarat by arranging transport for Gujarati pilgrims stranded in the Kedarnath flash floods. In a similar vein, within a day of the incident, R.K. Singh, Union minister for power, visited the damaged NTPC-owned Tapovan hydro generation project.

VIP visits are a tradition, albeit a much-reviled, device for speeding up the release of funds for relief work and energising those engaged in the onerous on-site task of rescue, relief distribution and rehabilitation. But it is a tradition that a politician ignores only at his peril — after all “we are like that only”. Happily, the minister, previously a civil servant who retired as India’s home secretary — did more than just that. He was on the button when he commented that the structural safety of glacier formations around large project construction sites in mountainous regions should be monitored for geological stress, much more so than they are done now. Early advance warnings of incipient

trouble can enable the evacuation of workers, at the very least.

Adroit operational steps to minimise the downstream damage also mitigated the scale of the disaster. Reportedly, emergency measures to release water stored in downstream dams at Rishikesh and Srinagar helped create the required space to absorb the upstream water shock. All these actions speak to our improving capacity for the safe operation of large water systems. To the credit of the civil administration, households along the affected stretch of the river, potentially under threat from flood waters, were reportedly evacuated as a precaution, though the waters subsided subsequently.

National Disaster Management Authority personnel were also visibly in attendance, although it is unclear whether more boots on the ground, in an area chock-a-block with the security forces, is of additional value. The NDMA, sadly, remains a neglected cousin of the military and the police in terms of their technical capacity, rescue equipment and surge capacity for assisting the local civil authorities.

The bulk of the casualties are of on-site contract workers — mostly migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Hopefully, once these two hydro projects are completed, the memories of those who laid down their lives during their completion will be commemorated in a suitable manner.

The CM of Uttarakhand announced ₹4 lakhs as relief for the families of each of the victims. An additional ₹2 lakhs each would be given from the Prime Minister’s Relief Fund.

The question which remains unanswered, however, goes far beyond the welfare of the families of the deceased. The jury is still out on what is an acceptable societal trade-off between the risk of mortality and morbidity and the compulsions of economic development.

The writer is adviser, Observer Research Foundation

Some go so far as to blame the recent much-publicised widening of the highways connecting the Char Dham — the four pilgrimage shrines in Garhwal

### LETTERS

#### FINAL WARNING

Apropos your editorial, “An ecological tragedy of Himalayan proportions” (Feb. 9), Uttarakhand has suffered another disaster after the one in the Kedarnath valley in June 2013.

Environmentalists have been persistently warning against disturbing the delicate ecology of the Himalayan region. It is being said that the people of the area had been protesting against the two hydel projects which have now been destroyed in the Nandadevi glacier burst. It’s high time we abandon the business-as-usual approach and rethink the development model.

M.C. Joshi  
Lucknow

#### NEEDLESS JIBE

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi clarification call to farmers to resume talks and give reforms a chance, has had a positive effect. The farmer leaders responded to the invite favourably by asking the government to fix a date for the next round of talks. Mr Modi also praised the Sikhs and castigated those who belittled the community. But Modi’s “Andolanjeet” (professional protesters) and “Foreign Destructive Ideology” jibes will be viewed with scepticism.

N.J. Ravi Chander  
Bengaluru

#### RAY OF HOPE

A COMMITTEE appointed by the Supreme Court recently published guidelines on how to monetise a tree. The committee valued a tree at ₹74,500 multiplied by its age. This received the admiration of environmentalists. It will help curb deforestation. The guidelines came after the West Bengal government sought permission for cutting down 365 trees for a development project. The five-member committee stated that a heritage tree might even be valued over ₹1 crore.

Kavya Shah  
Ujjain

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Skand Tayal



## US-Russia ties, already rocky, get worse after Navalny jailing

The fraught relationship between the United States and Russia has come under further strain after the alleged poisoning and recent sentencing of prominent Russian Opposition leader Alexei Navalny. On Feb. 4, US President Joe Biden, in his first articulation of foreign policy after assuming office, had some harsh words for President Vladimir Putin. Mr Biden “made it clear that the days of the US rolling over in the face of Russia’s aggressive actions — interfering with our elections, cyberattacks, poisoning its citizens — are over”. Castigating Russia for “the politically motivated jailing of Alexei Navalny”, President Biden cautioned Moscow that the US “will not hesitate to raise the cost on Russia”, alluding to possible additional sanctions.

Ignoring diplomatic niceties, President Biden said: “The politically motivated jailing of Alexei Navalny and the Russian efforts to suppress freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are a matter of deep concern. He should be released, immediately and without conditions.”

On February 2, after Mr Navalny was sentenced to more than two years in prison on rather flimsy charges, new US secretary of state Anthony Blinken tweeted: “We reiterate our

call for the Russian government to immediately and unconditionally release Mr Navalny, as well as hundreds of other Russian citizens wrongfully detained in recent weeks for exercising the rights.”

Such public criticism is likely to deeply offend Mr Putin, the strong leader of a proud country. Russia would be loath to taking any action under outside pressure and the chances of the Russian State showing any leniency towards a high-profile dissident may have simply vanished.

Besides the persecution of Mr Navalny, the Biden administration takes office with a deep-rooted suspicion towards Mr Putin’s Russia. The Democratic Party holds Russia’s involvement in the leaking of presidential candidate Hillary Clinton’s emails responsible for her defeat in 2016 by Donald Trump. In a signed *Foreign Affairs* article in March 2020, Joe Biden had declared solidarity with “Russian civil society, that has stood up against President Vladimir Putin’s kleptocratic authoritarian system”. Laying down his future policy, candidate Biden wrote that “to counter Russian aggression, we must keep (Nato’s) military capabilities sharp”, and threatened to “impose real costs on Russia for its violation of interna-

tional norms”.

Incoming national security adviser Jake Sullivan added to the chorus by declaring that “unlike the previous administration, we will be taking steps to hold Russia accountable for the range of malign actions Russia has taken”.

America’s penchant for conducting critical bilateral relations in the full glare of media publicity may win the Biden establishment accolades from internal constituencies but are unlikely to lead to effective outcomes.

The United States is no longer the world’s undisputed economic and military power, with China snapping at its heels. Its grip on alliances like Nato has also weakened. In the backdrop of the Covid-linked economic downturn, much of the democratic world puts national interests first. In this dynamic and uncertain international environment, it is doubtful that other key powers will stand by the US if it tries to impose more punitive sanctions on Russia. The US, however, certainly has the capacity to impose unilateral sanctions isolating Russia from the global financial and banking network, that would adversely hit the Russian economy.

In his February 4 address at the state department, Mr Biden assured a wary

world that the US will act “not to meet yesterday’s challenges, but today’s and tomorrow’s” and to “take on directly the challenges posed... by our most serious competitor China”. Mr Biden declared that “we will confront China’s economic abuses; counter its aggressive, coercive actions; to push back on China’s attack on human rights, intellectual property and global governance.”

At his confirmation hearing, Mr Blinken had also clearly identified China as “posing the most significant challenge of any nation-state in the world for the United States”.

The Biden administration would be well advised to take a hard look at America’s declining influence in the world and prioritise adversaries and challenges. Russia now has a shrinking footprint on the global strategic map. It’s no longer an expansionist power. In 2008, Russia was severely provoked by Nato’s offer of membership to Ukraine and Georgia. Mr Putin had clearly warned at that time that Nato’s expansion towards Russia “would be taken in Russia as a direct threat to the security of our country”. Russia’s annexation of Crimea and action in Donbas, South Ossetia and Abkhazia were a riposte to the aggressive intentions of Nato.

President Putin had a career in the KGB in the days of the Soviet empire. He has firm control over all the levers of power in Russia and is popular among citizens. With Mr Putin at the helm, Russia is not an ideology-driven country, like the erstwhile Soviet Union. Russia is now obsessed with internal stability and external security. Outside support to vocal Opposition leaders is seen by the Kremlin as a West-inspired attempt to destabilise the country.

Russia poses no future challenge to the United States or the West, be it economic or technological. The West lacks any levers to soften the harsh internal system in Russia. Public criticism of a proud nation will only harden positions and genuine concerns are best conveyed behind closed doors. For America’s own future primacy, the real challenge is from China and its demonising of Russia will only push the Kremlin into the Dragon’s embrace, immeasurably adding to China’s clout and aggression. The Biden administration needs a pragmatic foreign policy, overcome its prejudices and arrest the slide of US-Russia ties on this slippery slope.

The writer is a retired Indian diplomat and a former ambassador



## SHORT TAKES

MILITANT ATTACK  
KILLS FOUR GOVT  
STAFF IN AFGHAN

**Kabul, Feb. 9:** Militants shot dead four government employees in central Kabul on Tuesday, police said, in the latest rush-hour violence to rock the capital as Afghanistan's spy agency said it had busted a "terrorist cell" involved in targeted killings.

The Afghan capital has seen near-daily attacks during the busy morning commute, targeting prominent figures including politicians, journalists, activists, judges, and religious scholars.

Kabul police spokesman Ferdaws Faramarz told reporters that gunmen had opened fire on a vehicle carrying staff from the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, killing four.

SUPREMES  
SINGER MARY  
WILSON DIES

**Washington, Feb. 9:** Motown singer and the Supremes co-founder Mary Wilson has died, US media reported on Tuesday. She was 76.

She founded the US group aged 15 while living in a Detroit housing project, according to Variety, and continued with the band long after lead singer Diana Ross' departure, eventually going on to be inducted into the 1988 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

"Mary Wilson was extremely special to me. She was a trail-blazer, a diva and will be deeply missed," said Berry Gordy, founder of Motown records who were behind many of the band's hits.

She died at her Las Vegas home on February 8, her publicist Jay Schwartz told ET News.

Only two days ago Wilson uploaded a short clip to YouTube celebrating Black history month and announcing: "exciting news about The Supremes, Florence Ballard and unreleased materials." The circumstances around her death have not been released, her publicist said.

UK'S WINCHESTER  
COLLEGE TO ADMIT  
GIRLS FOR 1st TIME

**London, Feb. 9:** Winchester College, one of Britain's oldest and most prestigious private schools, will open its ancient doors to girls for the first time in its six-century history, it announced on Tuesday.

The school, founded in 1382 in Hampshire, southern England, said the move was part of "a new vision and significant programme of change".

Britain's other famous top fee-paying schools such as Eton and Harrow still only admit boys and have faced calls to change the policy.

Winchester, which counts finance minister Rishi Sunak among its former students, currently educates around 700 students who are so-called "boarders" living on-site.

Girls will only be admitted to the sixth form — the final two years of school, for 16 to 18-year-olds. They will be able to choose between sleeping on site or attending as day pupils.

The first female day pupils will arrive by September 2022, with boarders following by 2024.

NAVALNY AIDES  
PUSH EU FOR NEW  
RUSSIA SANCTIONS

**Moscow, Feb. 9:** Aides of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny said they have pushed the EU to sanction prominent members of President Vladimir Putin's circle including business tycoons to ramp up pressure on Russia.

The move comes after the tit-for-tat expulsion of several European and Russian diplomats as tensions run high over the Navalny affair.

The head of Navalny's regional network Leonid Volkov and another associate, Vladimir Ashurkov, made the calls on Monday during a video conference with EU states dedicated to the bloc's "next steps" on Russia.

The call was hosted by Poland and included envoys from the United States, Canada, Britain and Ukraine, Poland's mission in the EU wrote on Twitter.

Volkov wrote on the Telegram messenger late Monday that he and Ashurkov had discussed "personal sanctions" against billionaires Roman Abramovich, the owner of Chelsea football club, and Alisher Usmanov.

## WHO fails to find source of Covid-19

## Mission rules out Donald Trump's propagated Wuhan lab-leak theory

## AstraZeneca shot should not be dismissed: WHO

**Wuhan, Feb. 9:** The WHO mission to China to uncover the origins of the Coronavirus has failed to identify the source of the pandemic but the team on on Tuesday ruled out the Wuhan lab-leak theory propagated by Donald Trump.

Experts believe the disease — which has killed more than 2.3 million people worldwide — originated in bats and could have been transmitted to humans via another mammal.

World Health Organisation foreign expert Peter Ben Embarek said identifying the animal pathway remains a "work in progress", and the absence of bats in the Wuhan area dimmed the likelihood of direct transmission.

It was "most likely" to have come from an intermediary species, he said. He also backed up China's position that there was no evidence of "large outbreaks" in Wuhan before December when the first official cases were recorded.

Animals such as rabbits, ferrets and bamboo rats could be the intermediary,

**Geneva, Feb. 9:** The World Health Organisation insisted that the AstraZeneca vaccine was still a vital tool in the global fight against the coronavirus pandemic, after South Africa delayed the start of its inoculation program over concerns about the drug's efficacy against a virus variant.

As concerns rose over the AstraZeneca shot, the United States said it had lost its first sitting member of Congress to the virus, 67-year-old Texas Republican Ron Wright, who had also been battling cancer.

another team member Marion Koopmans added, saying they might be an "entry point" for further investigations.

Liang Wannian, head of the China side of the joint mission, said animal

President Joe Biden called Wright a "fighter who battled bravely against both cancer and Covid-19." His death came after a 41-year-old Republican House member-elect lost his life to the disease in December, just days before he was to be sworn in.

In South Africa, alarm was raised when a trial at Johannesburg's University of Witwatersrand concluded the AstraZeneca vaccine provided only "minimal" protection against mild to moderate Covid-19 caused

by the variant first detected in South Africa.

That was bad news for many poorer nations counting on the logistical advantages offered by the AstraZeneca shot.

But Richard Hatchett, head of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), said it was "vastly too early to be dismissing this vaccine." "It is absolutely crucial to use the tools that we have as effectively as we possibly can," he said, speaking at the WHO's regular bi-weekly press briefing on the pandemic. — AFP

demic.

"The laboratory incident hypothesis is extremely unlikely," he said. It "is not in the hypotheses that we will suggest for future studies".

The mission was a diplo-

■ **AS NEW**, more transmissible variants of the coronavirus spread, experts say it's time to consider using a medical-grade respirator, or wearing a surgical and cloth mask together.

matically knotty one — presaged by fears of a whitewash — with the US demanding a "robust" probe and China firing back with a warning not to "politicise" the investigation.

The WHO experts spent a month in China including two weeks in quarantine. Liang said studies showed the virus could be "carried long-distance on cold chain products", appearing to nudge towards the theory the virus was imported — an idea that has abounded in China in recent months.

Ben Embarek said "the virus can persist and survive in conditions that are found in these cold and frozen environments".

"But we don't really understand if the virus can then transmit to humans and under which

conditions this could happen," he said.

Beijing is desperate to defang criticism of its handling of the chaotic early stages of the outbreak. It has tried to refocus attention on its handling and recovery while floating the theory that the virus emerged abroad and was brought into China possibly via frozen foods.

Koopmans said the next steps could include searching for "earlier circulation" of the virus.

Reporters were largely kept at arms' length from the experts during their closely-monitored visit, but snippets of their findings crept out via Twitter and interviews.

Questions have been asked about the relevance of some of their activities to their stated aim of finding the virus source — including a visit to a propaganda exhibition celebrating China's recovery from the pandemic.

The group spent just an hour at the seafood market where many of the first reported clusters of infections emerged over a year ago. — AFP

FRANCE PATROLS  
SCS, LIKELY TO  
ANGER BEIJING

**Paris, Feb. 9:** A French nuclear attack submarine was among two navy ships that recently conducted a patrol through the South China Sea, its defence minister announced, in a move likely to anger Beijing, which claims most of the strategic waters as its territory.

The SNA Emeraude was accompanied by support ship BSAM Seine for the passage, Defence Minister Florence Parly said on Twitter.

"This extraordinary patrol has just completed a passage in the South China Sea. A striking proof of the capacity of our French Navy to deploy far away and for a long time together with our Australian, American and Japanese strategic partners," she tweeted along with a picture of the two vessels at sea.

China lays claim to nearly all of the South China Sea while Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam all also claim parts of the region, believed to hold valuable oil and gas deposits. — AFP

## Snow brings chaos to Germany



A man pulls his child on a sled in the gardens of the Charlottenburg Palace in Berlin on Tuesday. Freezing drivers were stranded for hours in traffic jams in Germany and Covid-19 vaccination centres were shut in Britain on Tuesday as Europe was pummeled by the heaviest snow in years. Some parts of Germany were cloaked in up to 50 centimetres (20 inches) of snow by Tuesday afternoon, according to local media reports.

## Trump's impeachment trial begins

**Washington, Feb. 9:** The US Senate puts Donald Trump on trial for inciting insurrection on Tuesday, charging into unprecedented constitutional territory and laying bare the national trauma inflicted in the former president's attempt to overturn his re-election defeat.

The gavel will come down at 1:00 pm (1800 GMT) in the Senate, opening a trial expected to rivet much of the nation.

Inside the ornate building, Democratic prosecutors will lay out a case heavily supported by video evidence that Trump deliberately stoked rage over his election loss to Joe Biden in November, fed the country lies that the vote was rigged, then incited a mob to storm Congress on January 6.

It will make uncomfort-



Donald Trump

able viewing for senators, including the many Republicans making clear they will not convict Trump, but who had to flee to safety when the violent crowd surged through the Capitol that day.

Outside, thousands of National Guard troops deployed in the aftermath of the January 6 debacle

■ **DEMOCRATS HOLD 50 of the 100 Senate seats and Vice President Kamala Harris is able to cast votes to end tiebreaks. But it would take a two-thirds majority for a conviction, meaning at least 17 Republican senators would have to join.**

continue to patrol, while hastily thrown up fences barricade the area from ordinary Americans — visible proof that the aftershocks of the Trump era continue to rumble.

Trump becomes the first president ever to face two impeachment trials — he was acquitted in 2020 of abuse of office — as well as the first in history to be tried after leaving office.

For Democrats leading the case against the pop-

ulist real estate tycoon, Trump's crime is also a first — the "most grievous constitutional crime" in US history.

But his legal team is resting its case largely on the procedural argument that a former president cannot be tried, calling the Senate trial "absurd."

A second acquittal is all but certain for Trump, who is holed up in his luxury Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida and, after being barred from Twitter, has spent the weeks since leaving office in near silence.

Democrats hold 50 of the 100 Senate seats and Vice President Kamala Harris is able to cast votes to end tiebreaks. But it would take a two-thirds majority for a conviction, meaning at least 17 Republican senators would have to join.

— AFP

## Worldwide, air pollution shortens lives by more than two years on average

## Fossil fuel causes one in five deaths globally

**Paris, Feb. 9:** Fossil fuel pollution caused more than eight million premature deaths in 2018, accounting for nearly 20 percent of adult mortality worldwide, researchers reported Tuesday.

Half of that grim tally was split across China and India, with another million deaths equally distributed among Bangladesh, Indonesia, Japan and the United States, they reported in the journal Environmental Research.

The toxic cocktail of tiny particles cast off by burning oil, gas and especially

coal was responsible for a quarter or more of the mortality in half a dozen nations, all in Asia.

"We often discuss the dangers of fossil fuel combustion in the context of CO2 and climate change and overlook the potential health impacts," co-author Joel Schwartz, a professor of environmental epidemiology at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, said in a statement.

The potential to avoid millions of premature deaths should be a powerful additional incentive for

policymakers to drive down greenhouse gas emissions and hasten the global shift from brown to green energy, he said.

Worldwide, air pollution shortens lives by more than two years on average, earlier research has shown. Worst-hit is Asia, where average lifespan is cut 4.1 years in China, 3.9 years in India, and 3.8 years in Pakistan. In some regions of these countries, life expectancy is reduced by twice as much.

In Europe, it is shortened by eight months on average.

■ **HALF OF that grim tally was split across China and India, with another million deaths equally distributed among Bangladesh, Indonesia, Japan and the United States, they reported in the journal Environmental Research.**

The new study nearly doubles previous estimates of the number of people killed by fossil fuel pollution.

The World Health Organisation says that air pollution — including indoors — kills seven mil-

lion people per year, with 4.2 million of those deaths due to ambient, or outdoor, pollution.

The most recent Global Burden of Disease study — the most comprehensive catalogue of why people die — advances roughly the same numbers.

Both of these estimates relied on satellite data and surface observations to determine concentrations of the smallest — and most deadly — calibre of pollution, known as PM2.5.

But they cannot determine whether these microparticles come from

burning fossil fuels or, say, dust and wildfire smoke, according to co-author Loretta Mickley, an expert in chemistry-climate interactions at Harvard.

"With satellite data, you're seeing only pieces of the puzzle," she said.

To get a more fine-grained picture of where particle pollution comes from and its health impacts, Mickley and colleagues used a 3-D model of atmospheric chemistry, known as GEOS-Chem, that divides Earth's surface into 50-by-60-kilometre (30-by-36-mile) blocks. — AFP





## quick BITES

| INDICATORS             |            | %      |
|------------------------|------------|--------|
| Sensex                 | 51,329.08  | -0.04  |
| Nifty 50               | 15,109.30  | -0.04  |
| S&P 500*               | 3,915.38   | -0.01  |
| Dollar (₹)             | 72.89      | 0.10   |
| Pound Sterling (₹)     | 100.41     | -0.39  |
| Euro (₹)               | 87.99      | -0.26  |
| Gold (10gm)* (₹)       | 47,559▲495 | 0.00   |
| Brent crude (\$/bbl)*  | 61.11      | 0.91   |
| IN 10-Yr bond yield    | 6.074      | 0.00   |
| US 10-Yr T-bill yield* | 1.146      | -0.013 |

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

## Gross NPAs of PSBs decline to ₹6.09 L cr in Sept.

Gross non-performing assets (NPAs) of public sector banks declined from Rs 8.96 lakh crore in March 2018 to Rs 6.09 lakh crore in Sept. 2020 due to various government measures, minister of state for finance Anurag Singh Thakur informed the Rajya Sabha. There was record recovery of Rs 2.54 lakh crore during March 2018-Sept. 2020 and 11 out of 12 PSBs reported profit in the first half FY21 amounting to Rs 14,688 crore.

## IOB posts net profit of ₹213cr in Dec. quarter



Indian Overseas Bank (IOB) reported a net profit of Rs 212.87 crore for the December 2020 quarter as provisions for bad loans declined. IOB had posted a net loss of Rs 6,075.49 crore in the year-ago quarter. It had posted a net profit of Rs 148.14 crore in the Sept. quarter. Total income rose to Rs 5,786.51 crore from Rs 5,197.94 crore YoY. Gross NPAs fell to 12.19 per cent of gross advances from 17.12 per cent.

## Govt to close two pharma PSUs, disinvest in three

The Centre has decided to close two pharma sector undertakings and disinvest in the other three. "The Department of Pharmaceuticals has five public sector undertakings. Out of the five PSUs, the government has taken a decision to close two pharma PSUs, namely Indian Drugs & Pharmaceuticals Ltd and Rajasthan Drugs & Pharmaceuticals Ltd," minister of chemicals and fertilisers D. V. Sadananda Gowda said.

## German exports see biggest dip since 2009

Germany's exports plunged by 9.3 per cent last year as the pandemic dragged down demand, the biggest drop since the financial crisis in 2009. Imports dropped 71 per cent. That also was the steepest decline since 2009, when exports fell by 18.4 per cent and imports by 17.5 per cent. The US remained the single biggest destination for German exports despite a 12.5 per cent drop, at 103.8 bn euros (\$125 bn).

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■ Workers to be briefed on rights, concerns

## Wistron to restart riot-hit iPhone unit

SARITHA RAI  
FEB. 9

Apple Inc's manufacturing partner Wistron Corp will hire workers and restart operations in its Narasapura factory outside Bengaluru after a violent protest shut the iPhone-manufacturing facility last December. Apple's teams and independent auditors have been working with Wistron over the past eight weeks to put the necessary systems and processes in place, the Cupertino-based iPhone maker said in an emailed statement on Tuesday. However, the Taiwanese contractor will continue to face scrutiny. "A comprehensive set of corrective actions has now been completed and Wistron has restructured their recruiting team and



enhanced training and support for workers," Apple said in the statement. "Wistron remains on probation and we will monitor their progress closely." Apple had suspended new orders to Wistron in December after workers who had been hired on monthly pay of about \$200 stormed the factory and rioted over unpaid salaries, destroying furni-

ture and equipment leading to losses worth millions of dollars. All workers in the facility will undergo a new training programme to ensure they understand their rights and how to raise concerns, Apple said in the statement. Its representatives will remain on site to validate that the new processes are effective. —Bloomberg

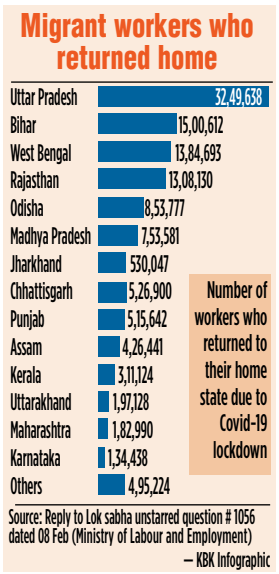
## Pak to seek debt relief from China

FASEEH MANGI  
FEB. 9

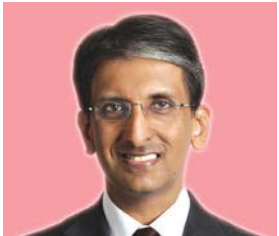
Pakistan plans to ask China for relief on payments for power projects Beijing financed over the past eight years, the latest developing nation that's struggling to repay debt under President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative. In informal talks, Pakistan and China have discussed easing terms on the repayment of debt on about a dozen power

plants, according to a person with knowledge of the matter, who said Islamabad hasn't made a formal request yet. The parties have canvassed Beijing's willingness to stagger debt payments, as opposed to lowering equity returns, the person said, requesting anonymity as the plan is private. An enormous build-out of Chinese-financed power plants in Pakistan, which was originally intended to solve its electricity shortages, has

resulted in a surplus that Islamabad isn't able to afford. Infrastructure projects funded by China's initiative in other developing nations, such as Sri Lanka and Malaysia, have suffered issues ranging from heavy debt loads to corruption. China has denied US criticism that the initiative leads to debt traps, while acknowledging that countries have had difficulties repaying loans due to the pandemic-induced global recession. —Bloomberg



## INDIAN-ORIGIN LAWYER TO BE TEMASEK CEO



Dilhan Pillay Sandrasegara  
GURDIP SINGH  
SINGAPORE, FEB. 9

Indian-origin corporate lawyer Dilhan Pillay Sandrasegara will succeed Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's wife as the chief executive officer and executive director of a state-owned wealth management group. Sandrasegara will take over from Ho Ching—who has been serving in leadership roles at the wealth management group Temasek Holdings since 2004—on October 1. "Leadership succession is a strategic responsibility of the board," said Temasek Holdings chairman Lim Boon Heng. Lim described Sandrasegara as an established leading corporate lawyer, who joined Temasek 10 years ago "with a sense of mission and purpose". Sandrasegara has since played "several critical roles" in Temasek, including a two-year stint as head of the Americas, based out of New York. —PTI

## INDIA ENERGY DEMAND TO SEE FASTEST GROWTH, TO OVERTAKE EU

New Delhi, Feb. 9: India's energy demand will increase more than that of any other country over the next two decades, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said on Tuesday, forecasting that India would overtake the European Union as the world's third-largest energy consumer by 2030. An expanding economy, population, urbanisation and industrialisation will result in India's energy needs growing at three times the global average under today's policies, said the IEA's India Energy Outlook 2021. "India has arrived at the centre of the world energy stage," said Fatih Birol, the IEA's executive director. Energy use has doubled since 2000, with most of that demand met by coal and oil. This is set to grow about 35 per cent until 2030, down from 50 per cent before the coronavirus pandemic. India will see the addition of 13 new Mumbais in urban population, boosting demand for cement, steel, electricity, he said. IEA saw primary energy consumption almost doubling to 1,123 million tonnes of oil equivalent as the GDP expands to \$8.6 trillion by 2040. India at present is the fourth-largest global energy consumer behind China, the United States and the European Union. —PTI

## LIC IPO to reserve 10% shares for policyholders

New Delhi, Feb. 9: Up to 10 per cent of the LIC IPO issue size would be reserved for policyholders, minister of state for finance Anurag Thakur said on Tuesday.



The government will remain the majority shareholder and will continue to retain management control, safeguarding the interest of policyholders, he said. "In the Finance Bill 2021-22, it has been proposed to have a reservation on a competitive basis, to an extent of up to 10 per cent of the issue size, in favour of life insurance policyholders of LIC," Thakur said in a written reply to a query in the Rajya Sabha. In her Budget Speech 2021, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the initial public offering (IPO) of Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) would be launched in the next financial year, beginning April 1. The LIC Amendment Act has been made part of the Finance Bill, thereby bringing the required legislative amendment for launching IPO of the country's largest life insurer. The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management

(Dipam), which manages the government's equity in state-owned companies, has already selected actuarial firm Milliman Advisors for ascertaining the embedded value of LIC. Deloitte and SBI Caps have been appointed as pre-IPO transaction advisors. The Budget 2021-22 has set a disinvestment target of Rs 1.75 lakh crore, higher than the Rs 32,000 crore estimated to be garnered in the current fiscal. Of the Rs 1.75 lakh crore, Rs 1 lakh crore is to come from selling government stake in public sector banks and financial institutions, and Rs 75,000 crore would come as CPSE disinvestment receipts. —PTI

## Market received Budget well: FM

New Delhi, Feb. 9: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said the stock market has received the Union Budget 2021-22 with "positivity" with an 11 per cent increase in equity indices over the past week.



She said the Budget, which was presented in Parliament on February 1, has set the tone for greater play of the private sector, gave space for entrepreneurship, has come clean on the spending intent and unveiled a policy highlighting areas the government wants to stay away from. "We have now come over to the 10th day after the Budget was read out. Markets for the first time, I

understand, have completely for a whole full week kept the pace up with a sense of positivity. "Earlier markets being positive and going up for a few hours, would itself be a good message," Sitharaman said an Indian Chamber of Commerce event. She said the government has taken steps to instill confidence in taxpayers. It has not put any additional burden on taxpayers by way of increasing taxes to fund the stimulus, Sitharaman said. "We are staying away from burdening the taxpayer any further, while simultaneously easing compliance, record keeping," the minister added. The minister said the time bar for reopening of past assessments has been cut down to three years in the Budget, from six years earlier, because the intent of the tax department is not to bother a regular taxpayer. —PTI

## Murdoch Jr., Uday Shankar plan venture to acquire media firms

BAIJU KALESH & ANTO ANTONY  
FEB. 9



Uday Shankar



James Murdoch

James Murdoch's investment company Lupa Systems and Uday Shankar, former president of Walt Disney Asia Pacific unit, are weighing a plan to raise funds through a special purpose acquisition company (Spac), people familiar with the matter said. Murdoch, former CEO of 21st Century Fox Inc, and Shankar are seeking a blank-cheque vehicle to acquire Asian companies in sectors, including media and technology, the people said. The joint venture is sounding out advisers as well as potential investors in the Spac. They are considering listing the vehicle in the US, one of the people said. Deliberations are at an early stage, and details of the potential Spac, including venue may change, the people said. Shankar and a representative for Lupa declined to comment. Lupa and Shankar announced a partnership in January to look for growth avenues across

emerging markets. The 48-year-old son of billionaire Rupert Murdoch resigned from the board of News Corp in July last year, citing differences of opinion with the publishing company. Lupa entered India less than two years ago and has built a portfolio of technology investments, according to the statement. Murdoch and Shankar previously worked together at Star India, which became the country's largest media company before Walt Disney's takeover of a swathe of 21st Century Fox's assets, including Star, in 2019. Shankar worked for the Asia-Pacific unit of Disney after the deal, but left in December last year.

## Teens drive civil behaviour online

FC BUREAU  
HYDERABAD, FEB. 9

Microsoft on Tuesday said fewer people in India experienced negative online interactions or encountered online risks in 2020 compared to the previous year, thanks largely to positive interactions by India's teens. Unveiling results from its annual study, "Civility, Safety, and Interactions Online - 2020" along with findings from its 2020 Digital Civility Index (DCI), Microsoft said India's score in online civility had improved to 68 this year from 71 in 2019. The DCI survey covered 16,000 respondents. The survey found that the improvement in online experience was contributed by the positive approach of teenagers aged 13-16. The online experience among adults in 16 and above age group remained relatively poor. The measure of online civility among teenagers is 67 compared to a lower rank of 69 for adults. "It's heartening to see our next generation take the lead in driving posi-

**Dos for safer internet**

- Act with empathy, compassion and kindness. Treat everyone with dignity & respect
- Appreciate cultural differences. Engage thoughtfully & avoid personal attacks
- To pause and think before responding. Do not post anything that could hurt others
- Tell someone when feeling unsafe. Offer support to those who are targets of online abuse or cruelty

tive interactions online, and to witness digital citizens come together to uplift online communities during the pandemic," said Keshav Dhakad, group head & general counsel, Microsoft India. "Nonetheless, threats such as hate speech, together with other uncivil behaviours, continue to pervade society." Online risks such as hate speech doubled from 2016.

## AGGREGATORS | ON PROWL | Mom-and-pop sellers being aided to scale up business

## Wall St. investing billions to scale up Amazon sellers

SPENCER SOPER  
FEB. 9

Some of the biggest names on Wall Street and in Silicon Valley-JPMorgan Chase, Advent International, Khosla Ventures among them—are pumping billions of dollars into mom-and-pops selling everything from tea kettles to jock itch remedies on Amazon.com Inc. Investment banks, venture firms and private equity shops are backing so-called Amazon aggregators—often led by e-commerce veterans—that are betting they can take up-and-coming sellers, who often operate out of their garages, and transform them into global brands.

The aggregators say they have the expertise to select strong products and avoid faddish ones that flame out before they have a chance to grow. The latest entrant, Branded Group, said on Tuesday it had purchased 20 houseware and leisure brands. Formed last summer and flush with \$150 million raised by venture firm Target Global, Branded will be run by Pierre Poignant, who previously led the southeast Asian online marketplace Lazada, and Michael Ronen, who spent almost 20 years in mergers and acquisitions at Goldman Sachs and also worked for SoftBank's Silicon Valley venture division.



About 40 Amazon aggregators have emerged in the past few years, according to people following the trend, with most of them still quietly seeking deals behind the scenes. Eight have announced fundraising rounds totalling more than \$2.5 billion since 2019. Thrasio, launched in 2018, has the deepest pockets and has already purchased 90 companies with

\$1.75 billion in funding and debt from backers that include the PE firm Advent International. Perch, founded in 2020, has raised \$130 million and gobbled up almost 30 brands. Several PE firms have launched websites to court Amazon sellers. The demand for Amazon mom-and-pops reflects the maturation of the e-commerce giant's third-party marketplace, which accounts for more than half of all products sold on the site. The web store has grown so large that deep-pocketed investors can prospect for tomorrow's big hit among the millions of merchants competing on the site. "The emergence of these companies

reflects how selling with Amazon offers small businesses powerful opportunities to build their brands and reach millions of customers," an Amazon spokesperson said. Aggregators look for consistent money-makers with annual sales up to about \$10 million; they generally offer three to four times a target's annual profit, including the salary the owners pay themselves. The buyers don't focus on specific categories and are content to jam together a potpourri of brands. Perch, for example, sells maternity belts, auto upholstery tools, peppermint-based athlete's foot cures and virtual-reality headsets. —Bloomberg

## EQUITY MF REDEMPTIONS UNABATED IN JANUARY

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD  
MUMBAI, FEB. 9

The mutual fund industry's average assets under management (AUM) hit an all-time high of Rs 31.84 lakh crore in January. However, the net AUM fell to Rs 30.50 lakh crore in January on profit booking from Rs 31.02 lakh crore in December, monthly data released by the Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi) showed. Equity mutual funds continue to witness outflows as record gains in the equity market in January led retail investors to book profit, with equity-oriented schemes seeing outflows worth Rs 9,253.22 crore. Equity-linked savings schemes and other equity schemes also witnessed outflows worth Rs 2,940.96 crore. The hybrid schemes witnessed net inflows worth Rs 2,141.3 crore while the debt fund category witnessed outflows worth Rs 33,408.76 crore. Equity ETFs, index funds, gold ETFs and fund of funds investing overseas in total witnessed combined inflows worth Rs 7,966.82 crore. "Equity-oriented mutual funds continued to witness net outflows for the seventh month in a row. The continuation of net outflows from equity funds could be attributed to profit booking/portfolio rebalancing as markets continue to touch new highs," said Himanshu Srivastava, associate director-manager research, Morningstar India. "Though on an overall basis, the net outflow was lower than the previous month, yet in terms of absolute quantum, it continues to be on the higher side," he said.



## SHORT TAKES

## Olympic qualifying marathon in Delhi

**New Delhi:** The New Delhi National Marathon 2021, a qualification event for the Tokyo Olympics and recognised by Athletics Federation of India, will be held here on March 7. Rashpal Singh and Jyoti Gawte won the men's and women's titles respectively in the 2020 edition with timings of 2:23:29s and 2:50:37s. "The New Delhi National Marathon 2021 stands recognised by Athletics Federation of India and it will be held on 7th March 2021 in New Delhi," the AFI said. "The performance of athletes of Full Marathons in this Marathon will be considered for selection/participation in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games provided they achieve the qualifying standard as fixed by World Athletics."

The Tokyo Olympics marathon qualifying timings for men and women are 2:11:30s and 2:29:30s respectively. — PTI

## Bamford stars as Leeds sink Palace

**Leeds:** Patrick Bamford scored his 100th career goal as Leeds United cruised to a 2-0 win against Crystal Palace on Monday.

Marcelo Bielsa's side took the lead through Jack Harrison's early strike at Elland Road. Bamford reached his century after the interval to seal Leeds' third win in their last four Premier League games. His 12th goal of the season was a sweet moment for Bamford, who had a miserable loan spell at Palace in 2015-16 while on the books at Chelsea. Leeds are up to 10th place and their impressive first season back in the top-flight could yet feature a late push for a Europa League berth.

A first clean-sheet since December 29 was another welcome boost for Bielsa after six games without keeping the opposition at bay. — AFP

## Suarez scores but Atletico stumble

**Madrid:** Atletico Madrid slipped up in La Liga for the first time in nine games on Monday as Celta Vigo snatched a late equaliser to deliver a ray of hope to Barcelona and Real Madrid.

Luis Suarez scored twice to overturn Santi Mina's opener for Celta, with Atletico on course to restore their 10-point lead at the top of the table. But Facundo Ferreyra slid in to score in the 89th minute to earn a deserved 2-2 draw for the visitors, meaning Atletico's advantage at the end of the weekend is reduced to eight, still with a game in hand. Atletico still have a considerable cushion but after Madrid and Barca beat Huesca and Real Betis respectively, there is at least room for encouragement for the chasing pack. — AFP

## No hugs, high-5s at Tokyo Games

**Tokyo:** No socialising, no handshakes and definitely no hugs — that's what athletes at the coronavirus-postponed Tokyo Olympics can expect this summer, according to a virus rulebook released on Tuesday by organisers. The 33-page document — the last in a series of "playbooks" drawn up in a bid to ensure the Games can go ahead safely — also warns athletes they could be kicked out of their events if they break strict anti-virus rules. Under the guidelines, athletes will be tested for the virus at least once every four days, and will be barred from competing if they return a confirmed positive test. — AFP

## Live on TV

## TENNIS

**Australian Open:** First round matches from 5.30 am on Sony Six, from 1.30 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

## FOOTBALL

**Indian Super League:** Chennaiyin vs Jamshedpur from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

**FA Cup:** Fifth round — Swansea vs Manchester City from 11 pm; Leicester City vs Brighton from 1 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1, HD; Everton vs Tottenham Hotspur from 1.45 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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## CHECKMATE

## Warhorse Anderson hands a rare home defeat to king Kohli's India

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR  
CHENNAI, FEB. 9

What started as an ambitious chase of 420 turned into mere survival in just about an hour. And the faintest of hopes to save the Test was dashed much before tea. The inevitable was delayed a little by a near-flawless innings from skipper Virat Kohli (72).

A clinical bowling performance earned England a thumping 227-run win over India for a 1-0 lead in the four-match series. While it dented India's prolific home run — only their second defeat since 2012 — England continued their brilliant 'away' streak by making it six on the trot. Within a fortnight of the dizzying high of breaching the Gabbatour, India slumped to their first defeat in the new millennium at fortress Chepauk.

Now, India need at least two wins and a draw in the remaining three matches to qualify for the World Test Championship final to be held at Lord's in July. Left-arm spinner Jack Leach, who had a forgettable outing in the first innings, broke open India's fancied batting line-up by removing Cheteshwar Pujara.

On a deteriorating fifth day pitch, where spinners were expected to pose the bigger threat, James Anderson produced an outstanding spell of fast bowling in the morning. Old warhorse Anderson is one of the finest exponents of swing bowling. He dug deep into his repertoire and used the reverse swing to his advantage to strike twice in a span of four balls. India were left reeling at 92 for four.

The way Anderson breached the defence of both Shubman Gill and Ajinkya Rahane seemed like an action replay. The cartwheeling off-stump, on both occasions, made for a spectacular sight. Before India could recover from the double blow, Anderson sent Rishabh Pant packing with a soft dismissal. Joe Root, at short cover, pounced a simple catch off a leading edge. Anderson's



England's James Anderson celebrates taking the wicket of Ajinkya Rahane on Day Five of the first Test in Chennai on Tuesday. — ECB

## SCORECARD

**England 1st Innings: 578**  
**India 1st Innings: 337**  
**England 2nd Innings: 178**  
**India 2nd Innings (overnight 39/1):** Rohit Sharma b J. Leach 12, Shubman Gill b J. Anderson 50, Cheteshwar Pujara c Stokes b J. Leach 15, Virat Kohli b B. Stokes 72, Ajinkya Rahane b J. Anderson 0, Rishabh Pant c Root b J. Anderson 11, Washington Sundar c Buttler b D. Bess 0, R. Ashwin c Buttler b J. Leach 9, Shahbaz Nadeem c Burns b J. Leach 0, Ishant Sharma (not out) 5, Jasprit Bumrah c Buttler b J. Archer 4. Extras (b-8, lb-5, nb-1) 14. **Total (all out in 58.1 overs) 192.**  
**FOW:** 1-25, 2-58, 3-92, 4-92, 5-110, 6-117, 7-171, 8-179, 9-179.  
**Bowling:** Jofra Archer 9.1-4-23-1, Jack Leach 26-4-76-4, James Anderson 11-4-17-3, Dominic Bess 8-0-50-1, Ben Stokes 4-1-13-1.

astonishing spell read 5-3-6-3.

As Washington Sundar, caught behind off Dom Bess, followed suit for a five-ball duck, India were reduced to 117 for six inside the first session. Jofra Archer steamed in and unleashed a barrage of bouncers. R. Ashwin had to take blows on his head, fingers and body to see India through to lunch.

Kohli, who hasn't scored a Test century since November 2019, looked set to end the

drought. He smashed erring off-spinner Bess for three consecutive boundaries. Against Ben Stokes, Kohli punched through the covers elegantly and pulled with authority. However, a probing delivery from Stokes kept low and crashed into Kohli's off-stump.

England bowling coach Jon Lewis' prediction came true when Leach roared back from his first-innings thrashing to end with figures of 4 for 76.

## Root all praise for 'GOAT' Anderson

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, FEB. 9

England skipper Joe Root was all praise for his bowling unit who helped the visitors take a 1-0 lead against India in the four-match series. Pacer James Anderson took three wickets in an impressive spell on the final morning to trigger India's collapse.

Describing Anderson as "England's greatest of all time", Root said the swing bowler has set high standards. "He seems to get better all the time. His skill level keeps improving, his work-rate is as good as anyone's I have ever seen and his fitness levels are probably the best they have ever been."

India suffered their first defeat at Chepauk since 1999 and Root knows Virat Kohli & Co. would come back hard in the second Test, starting here on February 13. "It's certainly a good victory but in the scheme of the series we know it's just a start. India are a brilliant team, especially in these conditions and a proud nation as well. They will 'come back hard at us but to be sat here 1-0 up is really good. We have 'set a benchmark now and have something to work from and compare ourselves to. There is 'still areas we can improve and that excites me, to play as well as we have and still be able to get better," Root said.

## NUMBERS GAME

● India's 227 runs defeat against England in the first Test was their first after eight successive wins at home.

● The last time India lost a Test in Chennai was in 1999. It was an epic encounter, which Pakistan won by 12 runs. Since then, India won five out of eight Tests here before this defeat to England.

● India had lost just one home Test in their last 35 games before this one, going back to the beginning of 2013. They had won 28 games during this period.

● James Anderson took 343 wickets after turning 30, which is the most for a fast bowler. He went past West Indian Courtney Walsh, who has 341. Among all bowlers, only three have more wickets after turning 30 — Sri Lanka's Rangana Herath (398) and Muttiah Muralitharan (388), and Australia's Shane Warne (386), while India's Anil Kumble has 343 as well.

— S. PERVEZ QAISAR

## Kohli vows to bounce back

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, FEB. 9

The heat is on Virat Kohli. The Indian skipper has now lost four consecutive Test matches, but he is confident of bouncing back. The second Test begins at the same venue in just three days.

Excerpts from post-match press conference:

**On India's batting performance:** I think the Test probably shifted in their favour when we batted in the first innings because we were looking to bat long and we were not able to do that and I don't think there was enough application shown by us as a batting unit. It (showing application) is something that we take a lot of pride in. We don't think about batting milestones. We think about partner-

ships and putting the team into good positions.

**On England coming with better preparation:** They said the same thing when Australia won the first Test in 2017 as well. It's important we don't jump the gun and we don't come to conclusions too early. As a side, our focus is the next Test and bouncing back into the series. What is being perceived is something that doesn't bother us at all. You could say they are well prepared but to say they are better prepared than us in our own conditions is not an accurate assessment.

**On the decision to pick Shahbaz Nadeem ahead of Kuldeep Yadav:** When you are playing two off spinners, Kuldeep more or less becomes a similar



kind of spinner taking the ball away (from the left hander) so you need variety in the bowling attack. We were quite clear on what combination we wanted to play and there are no regrets. Moving forward we will think of combinations which brings us variety as a bowling attack and not one dimensional.

On Ajinkya Rahane's per-

**formance:** I have said many times in the past as well. Along with Pujara, he is our most important Test batsman and he's gonna continue to be. We believe in his abilities.

**On the World Test Championship standings (India pushed No.4):** We are not bothered at all about the table. Our approach in the next three tests is not going to change. If the rules suddenly change during lockdown, then nothing is in your control.

**On India's bowling:** As a bowling unit, we did not bowl well collectively. The pacers and Ashwin bowled in good areas. But if Nadeem and Washi were equally economical, then there would have been more pressure on England.

## INDIA SLIP TO 4TH SPOT, ENGLISH EYE WTC FINAL

**Dubai, Feb. 9:** India on Tuesday slipped to fourth position in the World Test Championship rankings after their 227-run defeat to England in the opening Test in Chennai as the visitors kept alive their hopes of making the final of the inaugural event.

New Zealand have already qualified for the WTC final, to be held at Lord's later in the year, winning 70.0 per cent of their matches (with no other series scheduled). The victory at Chepauk lifted England to first place and 70.2 percentage points on the table and they have improved their chances of securing one of the three series results in their favour that could see them through to the final — 3-1, 3-0 or 4-0, the ICC said in a release.

India grabbed the top spot after their incredible series win Australia last month. India, who have slipped to fourth position with 68.3 percentage points, will now be looking to win at least two of the remaining three matches to secure a 2-1 or 3-1 result and a place in the final. — PTI

## AUSTRALIAN | OPEN

## Barty bagels, Rafael roars

**Melbourne, Feb. 9:** Rafael Nadal's injured back didn't slow his bid for a record 21st Grand Slam title on Tuesday, as women's world number one Ashleigh Barty romped to a 6-0, 6-0 'double bagel' at the Australian Open.

On a day when women's champion Sofia Kenin also reached round two, but two-time winner Victoria Azarenka lost after breathing problems, Nadal and Barty were the headline acts at the coronavirus-delayed Slam.

Spanish great Nadal, who pulled out of last week's ATP Cup with back problems, beat Serbia's Laslo Djere 6-3, 6-4, 6-1 in one hour and 52 minutes on a sun-kissed Rod Laver Arena.

"It's been a tough 15 days for me," said the 2009 champion, whose back stiffness first flared during an exhibition match last month.

"I needed to survive today and that's what I did. I'm happy to be through and I think I did a good job today. Straight sets is what I needed."

After world number one Novak Djokovic eased through late on Monday, Russia's Daniil Medvedev extended his winning streak to 15 matches with

an emphatic 6-2, 6-2, 6-4 victory over Canada's Vasek Pospisil.

Russian seventh seed Andrey Rublev also continued his winning start to the year with a straight-sets victory over German Yannick Hanfmann 6-3, 6-3, 6-4.

And Greek fifth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas made short work of French veteran Gilles Simon, winning 6-1, 6-2, 6-1 in 92 minutes.

## ASHLEIGH'S PARTY ON

Barty also outclassed Montenegro's Danka Kovinic, losing only 10 points as she raced into round two in just 44 minutes.

With the win Barty, last year's semi-finalist who sat out most of the 2020 season, ramped up hopes of a first Australian women's winner in 43 years.

Women's champion Kenin was less convincing and she audibly vented her frustrations during her 7-5, 6-4 win against Australian Maddison Inglis, who is ranked outside the top 100.

Two-time major-winner Garbine Muguruzza, who was stunned by Kenin in last year's final, had little trouble beating Russia's Margarita Gasparyan 6-4, 6-0. — AFP

## SELECTED RESULTS

**Men's singles first round:** Andrey Rublev (RUS x7) bt Yannick Hanfmann (GER) 6-3, 6-3, 6-4; Lorenzo Sonego (ITA x31) bt Sam Querrey (USA) 7-5, 6-4, 6-4; Radu Albot (MDA) bt Roberto Bautista (ESP x12) 6-7 (1/7), 6-0, 6-4, 7-6 (7/5); Alexei Popyrin (AUS) bt David Goffin (BEL x13) 3-6, 6-4, 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (8/6), 6-3; Daniil Medvedev (RUS x4) bt Vasek Pospisil (CAN) 6-2, 6-2, 6-4; Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x5) bt Gilles Simon (FRA) 6-1, 6-2, 6-1; Karen Khachanov (RUS x19) bt Aleksandar Vukic (AUS) 6-3, 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/2), 6-4; Ricardas Berankis (LTU) bt Sumit Nagal (IND) 6-2, 7-5, 6-3; Rafael Nadal (ESP x2) bt Laslo Djere (SRB) 6-3, 6-4, 6-1; Matteo Berrettini (ITA x9) bt Kevin Anderson (RSA) 7-6 (11/9), 7-5, 6-3; Fabio Fognini (ITA x16) bt Pierre-Hugues Herbert (FRA) 6-4, 6-2, 6-3.

**Women's singles first round:** Ashleigh Barty (AUS x1) bt Danka Kovinic (MNE) 6-0, 6-0; Olga Danilovic (SRB) bt Petra Martic (CRO x16) 7-5, 3-6, 6-4; Belinda Bencic (SUI x11) bt Lauren Davis (USA) 6-3, 4-6, 6-1; Elise Mertens (BEL x18) bt Leylah Fernandez (CAN) 6-1, 6-3; Karolina Muchova (CZE x25) bt Jelena Ostapenko (LAT) 7-5, 6-2; Sofia Kenin (USA x4) bt Maddison Inglis (AUS) 7-5, 6-4; Jessica Pegula (USA) bt Victoria Azarenka (BLR x12) 7-5, 6-4; Samantha Stosur (AUS) bt Destanee Aiava (AUS) 6-4, 6-4; Coco Gauff (USA) bt Jill Teichmann (SUI) 6-3, 6-2; Elina Svitolina (UKR x5) bt Marie Bouzkova (CZE) 6-3, 7-6 (7/5); Garbine Muguruzza (ESP x14) bt Margarita Gasparyan (RUS) 6-4, 6-0; Ann Li (USA) bt Shuai Zhang (CHN x31) 6-2, 6-0.



Ashleigh Barty of Australia celebrates after defeating Danka Kovinic of Montenegro 6-0, 6-0 in their Australian Open first round match in Melbourne on Tuesday. — AP

## MARADONA DEATH: NURSES, PSYCHOLOGIST INVESTIGATED

**Buenos Aires, Feb. 9:** A psychologist and two nurses who helped care for football legend Diego Maradona before his death have been added to a widening involuntary manslaughter probe, a judicial source told local media on Monday.

Maradona died of a heart attack outside Buenos Aires on November 25, weeks after undergoing brain surgery on a blood clot.

His psychiatrist Agustina Cosachov and heart surgeon Leopoldo Luque are already under investigation, as they were treating Maradona before his death.

The three people newly under investigation must appear before prosecutors this week, the judicial source told local media. Investigators are trying

to determine if any of the five people who had Maradona in their care were in any way negligent.

Maradona was suffering from liver, kidney and cardiovascular disorders, but there were no signs of alcohol or narcotics consumption, according to his autopsy.

Luque, the surgeon, in November responded to the launch of an investigation for involuntary manslaughter by saying he did "everything he could, up to the impossible" for an "unmanageable" patient. A first autopsy conducted the day Maradona died found he had suffered from liquid on the lungs with acute heart failure brought on by a disease of the heart muscles that makes it harder to pump blood. — AFP