

SHORT TAKES

2 new Delhi HC judges take oath

New Delhi: Two new Delhi high court judges took an oath of office Wednesday, taking the total number of judges to 31. Chief Justice D.N. Patel administered the oath of office to Justices Jasmeet Singh and Amit Bansal who were appointed as judges of the Delhi high court on February 22. The new appointments take the number of judges in the high court to 31 against a sanctioned strength of 60. Justice Singh, who was a central government standing counsel, has 27 years of experience, practising in the Delhi High Court and subordinate courts from 1992 onwards. He has been practising in constitutional, civil, labour, service and matrimonial matters, covering all branches of law. He has specialisation in service and civil law. Justice Bansal specialises in education laws, arbitration laws, indirect taxes and service law.

Toolkit: Court seeks reply on bail plea

New Delhi: A court on Wednesday sought response from the Delhi Police on the anticipatory bail application of Shantanu Muluk, who along with Disha Ravi is accused of sharing a "toolkit" on social media related to the farmers' protest. Mr. Muluk, along with Ms Ravi and another co accused Nikita Jacob, was booked for alleged sedition and other charges. Additional sessions Judge Dharmender Rana, who granted bail to Ravi on Wednesday, directed police to file reply to Mr Muluk's bail application and posted the matter for arguments on Thursday. Mr Muluk had got transit bail from Bombay high court on February 16 for a period of 10 days. During the brief hearing held through video-conferencing on Wednesday, the court also noted that Mr Muluk has been granted protection from arrest till February 26. — PTI

Mantri writes to L-G over temple issue

New Delhi: Union health minister Harsh Vardhan has urged Delhi Lt Governor Anil Bajjal for reconstruction of the Hanuman temple demolished by civic authorities in Chandni Chowk in January, saying religious sentiments of locals have been "deeply hurt". The minister, who is a Lok Sabha MP from Chandni Chowk, said many people, including traders, have contacted him for reconstruction of the temple on the central verge of main Chandni Chowk. The old Hanuman temple at Kucha Mahajani in Chandni Chowk was demolished in January after a court order, to pave way for Chandni Chowk beautification project being carried out by the Public Works Department (PWD) of the Delhi government. — PTI

7 PEOPLE DIE IN ROAD CRASH ON YAMUNA E-WAY

Noida: Seven people were killed in a collision between an oil tanker and a car on the Yamuna Expressway in Mathura district of western Uttar Pradesh, police officials said on Wednesday. The incident took place around 10.30 pm on Tuesday near Bajna cut on the Yamuna Expressway in Naujheel police station area of the district, Mathura senior superintendent of police (SP) Gaurav Grover said. Chief minister Yogi Adityanath also took note of the road crash and has consoled the demise of the people. "An oil tanker going towards Noida went out of control and crossed over on the other side of the expressway, where it collided with a speeding Toyota Innova car," Mr Grover said. "Seven car passengers, including two women and five men, were killed in the crash," he added. Mr Grover said senior officials had rushed to the spot to oversee the rescue and relief operation, following which the bodies were sent for post-mortem. Normal traffic was restored on the route after the damaged vehicles were cleared of the expressway and the oil spillage from the tanker has also been cleaned by the fire department. "Officials from the nearby oil refinery were also called in to inspect the situation for any preventive action," he added. — PTI

Covid -ve report may be must for visitors from 5 states

Over 18,000 beneficiaries vaccinated in Delhi on Wednesday ; total now at 3.4 lakh

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, FEB. 24

Amid a spike in coronavirus infections in some states, the Delhi government is likely to ask travellers from five states, including Mahara-shtra, Kerala and Punjab, to show negative Covid-19 test report before entering the national capital, officials said on Wednesday. They said an official order will be issued soon and it will be effective till March 15. People travelling in flights, trains and buses from these states will have to produce negative test report before entering Delhi, they said.

The requirement of the negative Covid-19 test report is likely to be implemented from Friday night, officials said.

The issue had also been discussed in a meeting of the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) on Monday.

According to sources, standard operating procedure (SOP) for those arriving from the five states is in the process of being finalised.

An official said that authorities need to take such steps to prevent any rise in Covid-19 cases in the national capital.

Maharashtra is showing a daily surge in Covid-19 cases, according to an official.

DELHI RECORDED 145 fresh Covid-19 cases and two new fatalities on Tuesday, while the positivity rate stood at 0.25%, authorities said

cial of the Union health ministry. Kerala is showing an incremental decline, but the daily cases in absolute numbers is still high over there.

Punjab, with its daily increase in cases, is also a cause of worry. Chhattisgarh and MP are also showing an increase in daily cases, the Central official had said on Tuesday.

Delhi recorded 145 fresh Covid-19 cases and two

new fatalities on Tuesday, while the positivity rate stood at 0.25 per cent, authorities said.

With this, the toll from the coronavirus infection has gone up to 10,903 and the case tally rose to 6,38,173.

Meanwhile, over 3.4 lakh beneficiaries have received Covid-19 vaccine till date in Delhi since the start of the inoculation drive a month ago, with more than 18,000 people receiving the jabs on Wednesday, according to data shared by officials.

Of these, more than 1.41 lakh are healthcare workers and over 2 lakh are frontline workers, as per the data.

On Wednesday, coronavirus vaccine shots were administered to nearly 18,600 beneficiaries in Delhi. Two minor cases of AEFI (adverse events following immunisation) were reported, officials said.

On Tuesday, 20,466 beneficiaries received the jabs across 313 centres.

On Wednesday, 18,599 people were vaccinated, including 4,263 healthcare workers who got their second dose, as the inoculation drive picked up pace, according to data.

"Two minor cases of AEFI (adverse events following immunisation) were reported," the official said. — PTI

DoE: No offline exams up to Class 8 in Delhi govt schools

New Delhi, Feb. 24: The Delhi government issued guidelines to its schools on Wednesday for the assessment of students up to Class 8, ruling out offline examinations and instead, asking them to grade the students on the basis of projects and assignments. The guidelines of the Directorate of Education (DoE) have been issued to the government-run and aided schools for assessment for the 2020-21 academic session, during which schools were closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and all teaching and learning activities were

conducted online. According to government officials, private schools will prepare their own schedule and decide on the modalities on their own.

According to the guidelines, for Classes 3 to 5, 30 marks will be for assessment based on worksheets, 30 for the assignments given in winter breaks and 40 for the assignments and projects provided from March 1 to 15. Similarly, for Classes 6 to 8, 20 marks will be for assessment based on worksheets, 30 for the assignments given in winter breaks and 50 for the assignments. — PTI

Delhi govt notifies scheme for doorstep ration delivery

New Delhi, Feb. 24: The Delhi government has notified its flagship scheme for the doorstep delivery of ration that is likely to be rolled out from next month, officials said.

Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal had announced his government's plan to launch the scheme in his Republic Day address.

The "Mukhya Mantri Ghar Ration Yojna" (MMGGRY) under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) of the National Food Security Act, 2013, was notified by the government on February 20, the officials said.

The MMGGRY involves the delivery of packed wheat flour and rice to beneficiaries at their doorsteps.

According to the notified scheme, the beneficiaries will have to pay the processing (conversion) charge along with the cost of subsidised foodgrains.

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"The entire operation from the lifting of foodgrains from FCI godowns, milling, packaging and till the delivery of packaged commodities to the beneficiary will be carried out under CCTV monitoring. Commodities will be carried in GPS-fitted vehicles," the scheme notification said.

There are about 17 lakh PDS beneficiaries in Delhi.

As per the notified scheme, Delhi State Civil Supplies Corporation (DSCSC) will empanel millers and rice processors to lift the foodgrains for cleaning, grinding and packaging.

The packed foodgrains will be transported from millers to fair price shops and from there to the doorsteps of beneficiaries through direct home delivery (DHD) agencies to be engaged by Delhi Consumer's Co-operative Wholesale Store Ltd (OCCWS).

"Distribution of packaged items (wheat flour and rice) will be done only after successful biometric authentication using e-PoS (point of sale) devices. The cost of subsidised foodgrains and a specified amount as milling or conversion charges will be collected from the beneficiaries," the scheme notification stated.

An e-POD (proof of delivery) will be captured for records, it said.

Ration card holders may draw their full entitlement of foodgrains in more than one instalment, it added. — PTI

New Delhi, Feb. 24 Campaigning for the upcoming municipal corporation bypolls intensified on Wednesday with AAP national convener and Delhi Chief Minister claiming that the BJP-ruled municipal corporations in the city were in a mess and promised ₹100 crore for a sewer line project in Bawana.

However, the BJP led by state unit chief Adesh Gupta and his predecessor and Lok Sabha MP Manoj Tiwari hit back at Mr Kejriwal and accused him of indulging in "politics of propaganda".

Addressing a well-attended roadshow in Shalimar Bagh (under North Delhi Municipal Corporation) which is among the five wards where bypolls will be held on February 28, Kejriwal said the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in Delhi has provided 24-hour electricity with zero bills, and good schools and hospitals.

"The MCDs are in a mess under the BJP," he



AAP convener and Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal waves at his supporters during a roadshow for the upcoming municipal corporation by-elections at Shalimar Bagh village in New Delhi on Wednesday.

claimed and asked people to vote for the AAP candidate contesting from the Shalimar Bagh North ward which fell vacant after the death of the sitting BJP councillor. "I have fulfilled all promises made in the last elections — providing 24x7 free electricity, improving schools and hospitals, and repairing roads and improving water supply," he said.

In another roadshow in Bawana under Rohini-C

ward, he said that the people in the area wanted a sewer line and promised to sanction ₹100 crore for it.

Mr Kejriwal was accompanied by Sunita Mishra, the AAP candidate from Shalimar Bagh North ward and Ram Chandra contesting from Rohini-C ward along with several MLAs, during the roadshows.

"We have elections on Sunday, you all must go and vote for AAP. We have

worked to improve Delhi in the last six years by improving schools, hospitals, availability of electricity, and water. But, due to the BJP, the corporations are in shambles," Mr Kejriwal said.

"It is your responsibility to make AAP victorious in the MCD, together we have to change the face of MCD," he added.

Mr Kejriwal further said that if some other party was voted to power, it will not let the area develop.

"They will fight with me, as you must have seen how BJP (Centre) fights with me. I have fulfilled all my promises that I made in the last elections. It is your responsibility to make AAP win for the development of your Delhi," he said in Bawana.

However, the Delhi BJP chief while campaigning in Shalimar Bagh said people will not vote for the AAP as its government in Delhi has failed to deliver. He accused the Kejriwal government of "stalling development work" in Delhi. — PTI

ED raids at Delhi firm in ₹800cr bank fraud case

New Delhi, Feb. 24: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday said it has raided a Delhi-based company and is probing two other entities in connection with a money laundering case linked to alleged bank loan frauds of over ₹800 crore.

It said the agency searched various premises of a firm, Shree Bankey Bihari Exports Ltd (SBBEL), and its promoters Amar Chand Gupta, Ram Laal Gupta, Raj Kumar Gupta and their family members on February 22.

The case against them, the ED said in a statement, is being probed under various sections of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and involves "siphoning and diversion" of loan funds amounting to ₹605 crore.

The agency filed the case after studying a CBI FIR against the accused company and promoters.

The probe found that "SBBEL had diverted the loan funds through its sister units and also by employing the modus operandi of showing bogus and fictitious sale/purchase transactions."

"The primary security had also been disposed by it without depositing the sale proceeds in the loan account," the ED alleged.

It was also found, the agency claimed, that the books of accounts had been secreted in various premises wherein business was being carried out by three promoters "in the name of other family members."

The ED claimed that during the searches "incriminating documents, laptops, mobile phones and digital storage devices indicating number of entities controlled by them to facilitate money laundering have been found."

The agency said it is also probing two other unidentified group companies for bank fraud of ₹100 crore each. — PTI

Former IFS officer shoots self dead in south Delhi house

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 24

An 81-year-old retired Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer allegedly shot himself dead with a pistol at his house in south Delhi's Defence Colony area on Wednesday morning.

The police said that the deceased identified as Ranjeet Sethi, left a suicide note stating that he does not want to live any longer.

According to Atul Kumar Thakur, DCP South district, the police received a Police Control Room (PCR) call at around 7.25 am that a man had shot himself in his house in Defence Colony following which an Emergency Response Vehicle (ERV) was dispatched for the spot.

"Sethi's domestic help made a PCR call stating that he was alive and needed an ambulance. On reaching the spot, police found that Sethi had allegedly shot himself in his room. He was immediately moved to Moolchand Hospital for treatment, but later succumbed," said the DCP.

"During an enquiry, it was revealed that Sethi was discharged from BL Kapoor Hospital on

Woman, 50, found murdered at her Greater Noida home

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 24

A 50-year-old woman was found dead inside her house in Greater Noida after she was allegedly beaten to death by a brick, the police said on Wednesday. Her husband, who runs a fast food stall, had alerted the police about the incident that took place at Chapargarh village in Dankaur area on Tuesday night, a senior official said.

"The couple had a fast food stall barely 100 metres from their home. Last night, they returned home, but the husband said he had forgotten his sweater at the stall and went to take it. When he returned, he found his wife's body who appeared to have been beaten severely by a brick but nobody else was at home," Greater Noida DCP Rajesh Kumar Singh said.

Tuesday, following some illness. A suicide note has been found and further investigation is underway," said the DCP.

New Delhi, Feb. 24: The government is ready to resume talks with protesting farmers if they respond to its offer to put the three contentious farm laws on hold for one-and-a-half year and work out the difference during that time through a joint committee, Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar said Wednesday.

The government and unions representing farmers, who have been camping at Delhi's border for about three months in protest against the three laws that they see will end state procurement of crops at MSP, have held 11 rounds of talks, the last being on January 22. Talks broke after wide-spread violence during a tractor rally by protesting farmers on January 26.

Speaking on the sidelines of an event here, Tomar said the government is committed towards the interest of farmers and agriculture, and under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it is making efforts to double farmers' income and strengthen the Indian agriculture sector.

The minister was replying to a query on



Union agricultural minister Narendra Singh Tomar and MoS agriculture Kailash Choudhary during an event to mark the second anniversary of Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Scheme in New Delhi.

Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait threatening to march to the Parliament on 40 lakh tractors if laws are not repealed.

Whether the government is making any effort to resume talks with unions, Mr Tomar said, "Bharat sarkar kisan se puri samvedana ke saath charcha karti rahi hai. Aaj bhi jab unka koi mat aayega, toh Bharat sarkar hamesha kisan ke saath charcha karne ko taiyaar hai (The government has been holding discussions with farmers sympathetically. Even today, whenever their response comes,

the government is always ready to hold talks)."

Thousands of farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh, is protesting at Delhi borders for around three months, seeking repeal of three new laws and a legal guarantee of the MSP.

In the 11th round of talks held on January 22, the government's negotiations with 41 farmer groups hit a roadblock as the unions squarely rejected the Centre's proposal to put three contentious laws on hold and form joint committee to find solutions. — PTI

19 arrested, 25 FIRs filed for R-Day violence, Centre tells HC

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 24

As many as 19 people have been arrested and 25 FIRs lodged in connection with the Republic Day violence during the farmers' tractor rally in protest against the three new agri laws, the Centre informed the Delhi high court on Wednesday.

Additional solicitor-general Chetan Sharma and Central government standing counsel Ajay Digaipal further told the high court that as many as 50 people have been detained and an investigation was going on into the incident. They also submitted that adequate personnel have been deployed at the Red Fort for its safety and security.

Taking note of the government submissions, a bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jasmeet Singh sought to know whether any similar matter has been already filed in or was pending before or disposed of by the Supreme Court.

It asked the central government to give it details of any similar matter in the apex court and listed the petition by a Delhi resident, Dhananjai Jain.

The petition has sought the removal of people squatting under the garb of farmers agitation and clear all the roads and public places.

It has also sought a direction to remove the police commissioner from his position with immediate effect and punish all the police officers who allegedly failed in discharging their duties relating to the Red Fort incident.

The petition has also sought a direction to the Centre to put adequate paramilitary forces to protect important monuments and to ensure the safety of life and property of citizens of Delhi.

■ 'If court shows indulgence to few, it will have cascading effect on exams in other streams

SC rejects plea for extra attempt for civil services exam

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, FEB. 24

The Supreme Court on Wednesday rejected a plea by some aspirants who have already availed all the attempts to appear for civil services exams conducted by the Union Public service commission (UPSC) seeking an extra chance on the grounds that their preparations during their last attempt in October 2020 were hampered by the Covid pandemic.

Turning down the plea

for an extra chance, a bench comprising Justices A.M. Khanwilkar, Indu Malhotra and Ajay Rastogi, in its judgment said, "If an additional attempt remains restricted to the last attemptees for the reason that they had suffered during the Covid pandemic, all attemptees irrespective of the nature of attempt (i.e. 1st, 2nd etc.) who appeared in the 2020 examination must have faced the same consequences as being faced by the writ petitioners and each one of them have suffered in one

HAVING REJECTED the plea for another chance, the court left the window open for the Centre to exercise its discretion in the future if a situation that was projected before the court arises

way or the other during the Covid-19 pandemic. At the same time, this reasoning would equally apply to those who have crossed the upper age barrier."

Referring to the data furnished by the UPSC on various selections held by

the commission in 2020 and the same must have been held by the state commissions and the recruiting agencies, Justice Rastogi speaking for the bench said, "If this court shows indulgence to few who had participated in the 2020 examination, it will set down a precedent and also have cascading effect on examinations in other streams, for which we are dissuaded to exercise plenary powers under Article 142 of the Constitution." Having rejected the plea for another

chance, the court left the window open for the Centre to exercise its discretion in the future if a situation that was projected before the court arises.

"We, however, make it clear that this decision would not restrict the 1st respondent (Union of India) or the executive in exercising its discretion in meeting out the nature of difficulties as being projected to this court, if come across in future in dealing with the situation, if required," the judgment said.

IN BRIEF

NAGALAND FAILS TO ADOPT MHA'S POLICY FOR REBELS

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, FEB. 24

If surrender policy of ministry of home affairs is paying a huge dividend in Assam and many other north-eastern states, trouble-torn Nagaland has not introduced the surrender-cum-rehabilitation policy of the Central government which provides monthly stipend of ₹6,000 for three years besides vocational training and a fixed deposit of ₹4 lakh in the name of each surrenderee.

It is significant that hundreds of youths in Nagaland who gave up arms and joined the mainstream have not only been deprived of benefits of the scheme but are still struggling for their livelihoods.

Pointing out that neither the state government has adopted nor given any publicity to the Central government policy, security sources said that the MHA was also ignorant in mounting any pressure on the state to adopt the policy which was introduced in revised form since 2018. Security sources however claimed that most of the militant groups engaged in peace-talks have been opposed to any such policy that may lead to surrender of armed cadres of their respective outfits.

Informing that 90 per cent of the expenditure incurred by the state government for implementing the scheme will be reimbursed under the security related expenditure of the home ministry, sources said that the scheme may lead to a large number of surrender of militants who are compelled to survive on a pay-role of nearly ₹2000-3000 of militant organisations in Nagaland.

BSF FILES FIR ON TMC MEN FOR HINDERING DUTY

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, FEB. 24

The Border Security Force (BSF) on Wednesday lodged an FIR against a group of ruling Trinamul Congress workers for allegedly creating hurdle in its duty along the India-Bangladesh border in West Bengal and defaming it. The BSF's step comes after the TMC lodged an FIR with the police accusing the BSF of beating them during their rally ahead of the Assembly election.

On February 22 afternoon an on-duty BSF constable of 112 battalion Akshay Kumar Singh stopped a motorcycle rally of around 400-500 TMC workers on the Indo-Bangladesh Border Road (IBBR) under the BSF border outpost Kalanchi in Gaighata of North 24 Parganas. He asked them to show the BSF permission for movement on the IBBR.

But, BSF (South Bengal Frontier) stated, a "drunken person from the rally pushed and tried to manhandle" Singh who then informed BOP Kalanchi officiating company commander inspector Adit Narayan. When Narayan rushed to the spot with five jawans, those, who were inebriated, disappeared. However the TMC workers claimed that the BSF jawans thrashed them.

STONES PELTED AT DALIT MAN'S WEDDING PARTY

Bayad, Gujarat: A group of persons allegedly pelted stones at the wedding procession of a Dalit man in Gujarat's Aravalli district while objecting to a traditional headgear worn by some of his relatives and use of DJ music system, an official said on Wednesday.

The incident took place when the procession was heading for the marriage in Linch village near Bayad town on Tuesday evening, following which an FIR was registered against nine men of the Rajput community, inspector R M Damor from Ambaliyara police station said.

Some people from Linch allegedly threw stones at the marriage procession when it entered the village, the official said quoting a complaint lodged by a cousin of the bride. "The accused objected to Dalit men and women in the procession wearing 'safa' (traditional headgear). They allegedly threw stones at the procession and also hurled casteist slurs," the official said.

When the complainant and other family members tried to reason with the accused and urged them to stop the stone pelting, one of the accused allegedly assaulted a relative of the bride, as per the FIR.

—PTI

Scenes in Kashmir reminiscent of early '90s

Securitymen abruptly and unexpectedly set up makeshift checkpoints and conduct random searches

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, FEB. 24

Security across Jammu and Kashmir has been stepped up exceptionally with local cops and members of Central armed police forces conducting surprise cordon-and-search and frisking operations in cities and towns particularly summer capital Srinagar at intervals. The Army is also launching sensitisation and area domination operations in select Valley areas quietly.

The scenes witnessed particularly in some crowded areas of the Valley's main town including at and around historic Lal Chowk over the past few days are reminiscent of the early 1990s when the Kashmiri separatist campaign was at its peak. The adequately equipped uniformed men, abruptly and unexpectedly, arrive in an area, choose a location, set up makeshift checkpoints and roadblocks and conduct random searches which include frisking of pedestrians after making them wait in lines. They also stop vehicles and then subject passengers to body search and check their



Security personnel check identity card of a youth during a search operation at Kawdara in downtown of Srinagar on Wednesday.

—PTI

belongings thoroughly.

The authorities said that such random operations have been necessitated by the recent spurt in militant attacks and in view of the reports that the separatists are planning more violence in coming weeks.

Last week, two policemen were targeted by a pheran-clad shooter with

an AK assault rifle concealed under the traditional Kashmiri outfit in Srinagar's Barzulla area resulting in their instant death. Against the backdrop of this incident and the demand of banning pheran raised by some Jammu-based Bharatiya Janata Party leaders and likeminded outfits, the

security forces deployed along the streets and other public places in the Valley have in several instances forced people to take off the outfit. There have also been reports of visitors being allowed to enter certain government offices and other sensitive premises only after removal of pheran by them. This has

evoked sharp criticism by political activities and netizens.

Counter-militancy strategists and policing experts also disagree with such actions and call for tactical changes towards dealing with the emerging situation by the security forces effectively.

Former director-general of police Shesh Paul Vaid said, "In 1990s also several incidents took place wherein militants used weapons hidden beneath their pheran to target security forces yet the garment was not banned. I don't think banning a particular dress is a solution."

He added, "Pheran and Kangri (traditional fire-pot) are part and parcel of the Kashmiri culture and lifestyle rather centuries' old wisdom to beat the biting cold in winters. As said, banning pheran is not the way out. The solution is, be alert, stop the person you suspect, subject him to frisking and if you find him hiding an illegal weapon beneath his garment take action as per law. That is what we would do during the heyday of militancy to minimise such gory acts".

India, France and Australia discuss Indo-Pacific

New Delhi, Feb. 24: India, France and Australia on Wednesday deliberated on ways to enhance trilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

An India-France-Australia Trilateral Senior Officials' Meeting was held with the three sides taking stock of the progress made on the outcomes of the foreign secretary-level Trilateral Dialogue held in September last year, including on maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), blue economy, protection of marine global commons, combatting illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing and cooperation in multilateral fora.

The Indian side was led by Sandeep Chakravorty, Joint Secretary (Europe West), Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), while the French side was led by Bertrand Lortholary, Director (Asia and Oceania). The Australian side was led by Gary Cowan, First Assistant Secretary (North and South Asia Division), and John Geering, First Assistant Secretary (Europe and Latin America Division).

—PTI

India blasts Pak, Turkey for criticism on Kashmir

Slams Islamabad for oppression of minorities at UNHRC

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 24

After Pakistan attacked India on the Kashmir issue at the UN Human Rights Council along with its close friend Turkey, India hit back, accusing Pakistan of "political repression"

in Balochistan and also raising the plight of Pashtuns and Sindhis".

New Delhi also flagged Islamabad's poor human rights record, especially in its own treatment of minorities. But in a worsening of ties, India lambasted Turkey and called it "a country which has trampled upon its own civil society".

New Delhi blasted the two nations while exercising its "Right of Reply under the High-Level Segment of the 46th Session of the Human Rights Council".

After criticism by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), India also lamented that the OIC had repeatedly allowed itself to be used as a platform of Pakistani propaganda against India.

India said, "It's well known that Pakistan has been crushing dissent and engaging in political repression in Balochistan, and other regions, for

2 militants killed in Anantnag

AGE CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, FEB. 24

Two militants believed to be associated with a proscribed outfit — possibly Jaish-e-Muhammad — were killed in a fierce gunfight raging in woods of southern Anantnag district since Wednesday morning. However, the authorities said that the identities of the slain men are being ascertained. The internet services in Anantnag have been suspended "as a precautionary measure," they said.

The Army said that the operation to flush out militants from Shalgu forest area of Srigufwara belt of Anantnag was launched following an input from the J&K police. The police sources said that its counterinsurgency Special Operations Group along with the Army's 3 Rashtriya Rifles moved in the woods on learning

about the presence of four militants including an IED 'expert'.

Initial reports quoting unnamed local police officials had said that all the four militants have been killed but later the police officially clarified that only two of them have been "neutralised" and that the operation was still underway. Local sources said that the Army also used a helicopter and drones for the surveillance of the area during the operation.

A statement issued by the police here said when, during the jointly launched cordon-and-search operation, the presence of militants was established they were given an opportunity to surrender.

"However, they fired indiscriminately upon the joint search party which was retaliated leading to an encounter."

▶ ABOUT 1,000 women from minorities are 'subjected to abduction followed by forced conversion and forced marriage in Pakistan every year', according to a recent report

decades. Enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and torture have been used as tools of coercion. Several Baloch human rights defenders have even met tragic death under mysterious circumstances, while in exile. Pashtuns and Sindhis have continued to struggle against systemic oppression and discrimination."

India also said, "We are not surprised that Pakistan's representative has chosen to misuse this august forum yet again. Pakistan's continued misuse of various platforms to engage in baseless and malicious propaganda against India is not new. We reiterate that the entire Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh are an integral and inalienable part of India. The steps taken by the government to ensure good governance and development in these UTs are our internal matters."

New Delhi further said, "As a country with one of

the world's worst human rights records, Pakistan would do well to put its own house in order, before venturing to point a finger at India. The violence, institutionalised discrimination and persecution faced by Pakistan's minorities, including Christians, Sikhs and Hindus, has continued unabated. There have been frequent attacks on the places of worship of minority communities, a grave violation of their right to freedom of religion and belief."

New Delhi pointed out that the condition of women belonging to minority communities, notably Hindus, Sikhs and Christians, remains deplorable. An estimated 1,000 women from minority communities are subjected to abduction followed by forced conversion and forced marriage in Pakistan every year, according to a recent report published by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.

Most of these women fall in the age bracket of 16-25 years. The fact that young women, and not men or older women, are the main victims of forced conversions is a telling fact about Pakistani society.

Set on fire after failed bid to gangrape, says UP girl

Shahjahanpur/Lucknow, Feb. 24: A college student who was found lying without clothes and severely burnt along a national highway in Uttar Pradesh's Shahjahanpur district has claimed she was set on fire after a failed attempt to gangrape her, police said on Wednesday.

Police sources said a few suspects have been taken into custody for questioning and they were "very close" to cracking the case. According to superintendent of police S. Anand, the girl told investigators that three people tried to rape her in a field near Rai Kheda village on Monday and when they did not succeed, they poured kerosene and set her on fire. The police officer, however, added that she frequently changed her statements and that she was not aware of how she reached the hospital from the third floor of her college building.

The BA second-year student was admitted to a hospital in the district and later referred to Lucknow. Dr S.C. Saundriyal, director of Syama Prasad Mookerjee civil hospital, Lucknow, where the girl is undergoing treatment for 72 per cent burns, told PTI, "Her condition is sta-

▶ THREE PEOPLE tried to rape her in a field near Rai Kheda village on Monday and when they did not succeed

ble right now."

Earlier, reports said she suffered 60 per cent burns.

In CCTV footage, the girl — a student of a college run by a trust of former Union minister Swami Chinmayanand — was seen coming down alone from the third floor, the police said.

"Investigations with the help of CCTV footage have found that the girl went out of the college campus from a broken outer wall about 20 minutes after entering the premises and was seen walking alone on a canal road," Mr Anand said.

Prior to this, the girl could be seen talking to her friends outside a classroom and visiting a library, the SP said. Three teams led by deputy superintendents of police (Dy SPs) and a Special Operations Group (SOG) team have been deployed. Besides, another team led by a Dy SP with five policemen is present at SPM civil hospital.

After recording the girl's statement in Lucknow, the investigating officer will take up the matter, Mr Anand said.

Police sources said some suspects have been taken into custody for questioning.

In her statement to the magistrate in Lucknow, the student named three youths and a girl. The youths include students of the same college, they added.

Over a dozen students of the college, including her friends, have been questioned.

The girl had called a person of her village on his mobile phone on the day of the incident and he has also been questioned, the SP said.

According to Asif Ali, a resident of the village where the student was found lying without clothes, the villagers had covered her with a stole before calling the police.

The SP said some tumblers were found in the field where she was lying but there was no trace of liquor.

The girl, a native of a village in Jalalabad police station area, studies in Swami Shukdevanand Post Graduate College run by Mumukshu Ashram of Chinmayanand. The ashram was at the centre of a controversy in 2019 after a female student of a law college run by an accused Chinmayanand of sexual assault.

—PTI

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, FEB. 24

Indian Army Chief General M.M. Naravane said on Wednesday that India has a strategy in place for further negotiations with China to resolve other pending issues in Ladakh and "again come out with a favourable outcome."

Gen. Naravane said that India has shown to China that its salami-slicing strategy "will not work with us" and "every move will be met resolutely".

He said that there were no overt signs of any collusion between China and



M.M. Naravane

Pakistan against India during the current stand-off at LAC. He said that there were no large scale mobilisations by Pakistan or any kind of activity which would be suggestive of any kind of help being given by one to the other.

The Army Chief said that on disengagement with China there is a long

way to go. "Now we have to move on to the stage of de-escalation and of course after that moving back of the troops and deinduction of troops which went to the higher reaches," Gen. Naravane said during an online interaction by Vivekananda International Foundation. He said that there is a trust deficit with China and India will be cautious and watching whatever movement happens at the LAC.

Last week Indian and Chinese troops completed disengagement from Pangong Tso in Eastern Ladakh after nine months

of stand-off. India and China are now discussing modalities of the second phase of disengagement in Depsang, Gogra, Hotsprings and Demchok.

Gen. Naravane said that the disengagement which has happened with China is a good end result. "It is a win-win situation and I think for any agreement to last both sides should feel that they have achieved something. To that end, this I think is a good outcome that has resulted out of this 10 rounds of (Corps Commanders) talks which have taken place," said the Army Chief.

Sasikala signals truce with AIADMK

Chennai, Feb. 24: Expelled AIADMK leader V.K. Sasikala Wednesday appealed to "true followers" of late party supremo J Jayalalithaa to join hands and post a spectacular victory in the coming Tamil Nadu assembly elections.

Her appeal, days after returning to Tamil Nadu after serving a four year jail in an assets case, appeared to be a signal for truce with the ruling AIADMK ahead of the polls, likely in April.

After paying floral tributes to Jayalalithaa here

on her 73rd birth anniversary, Sasikala recalled the late leader's famous quote that even after her lifetime, the AIADMK would continue to work for the people for centuries to come.

"True followers" of Jayalalithaa should come together and remember that the goal is winning it big in the assembly elections, she said without naming anyone and while addressing Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam cadres.

Expressing confidence that her pitch for unity



Sasikala

would be reciprocated by the late leader's loyal followers, Sasikala said she would throw her weight behind them.

She appealed to them to 'work like a bee' unitedly for poll victory.

In 2017, Sasikala and Dhinakaran were ousted from the AIADMK after the factions led by chief minister K Palaniswami, earlier chosen by her for the top post before proceeding to serve her jail term, and Panneerselvam merged burying the hatchet.

Senior AIADMK leader and fisheries minister D. Jayakumar, toeing the party stand of not accommodating Sasikala and her relatives, said her invite would not apply to his party and it meant only the AMMK. —PTI

NORTHERN RAILWAY		
CORRIGENDUM OF E-NOTICE INVITING TENDER		
TENDER NOTICE No.-Sr.DSC(Cord.)RPF/BSM-CAMC/DIV/2021 Date: 23.02.2021		
Opening & closing date and time is being changed for the tender of even no. & date of invited 'e-Tender' on behalf of President of India, Sr. Divisional Security Commissioner (Cord)/RPF/Northern Railway, Delhi Division, New Delhi, the details of corrigendum are as under:-		
Sr.No.	Description	Changed details
1.	Name of the work with its location	Repair along with Comprehensive AMC of 27 Baggage Scanner Machines installed over Delhi Division for two years.
2.	Office Address	Sr.DSC(Co-ordination)/RPF, P.K.Road, New Delhi.
3.	Approx. Cost of work (Tender value) (Rs)	Rs 1,90,15,329/- (excluding GST as per applicable)
4.	E.M.D. (in Rs)	Exempted for OEM
5.	Bidding start date (online)	26.02.2021
6.	Bid closing date & time (online)	12.03.2021 up to 1500 hrs
7.	Tender opening date	12.03.2021 at 1500 hrs.
8.	Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen	www.ireps.gov.in
9.	Cost of tender documents	Zero (due to e-tender process)
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE		4/2/2021

SHORT TAKES

2 jawans killed, 1 hurt in Naxal strike

Bhopal: In 3 separate incidents on Wednesday, Maoists killed 2 jawans and injured another in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar district of Narayanpur. According to Bastar range inspector-general of police P. Sunderraj, a jawan of district reserve group (DRG), identified as Kaner Usendi, was killed in an encounter with Maoists in the forested village of Kukur under Sonepur police station at around 10 in the morning. In another incident, a jawan of ITBP, L. Balchandra, was killed in a pipe bomb explosion, triggered by Maoists, near a bridge around one km from Sonepur at around 11 am. Similarly, a jawan of Chhattisgarh Armed Force, Bankeswar Paikra, was injured when he stepped on an IED, planted by Maoists at Karel Ghati under Kukrajhar police station. He was airlifted to Raipur for treatment and stated to be stable.

Cong, JD-S tie up for Mysuru mayor polls

Bengaluru: In a last minute twist, Congress and JD(S) joined hands to keep away BJP from taking control of the Mysuru City Corporation, during the mayoral polls on Wednesday. JD(S)' Rukmini Made Gowda was elected as the new mayor, while Anwar Baig of Congress was elected deputy mayor. Though the mayoral polls saw the continuation of the Congress-JD(S) alliance, the turn of events came as a surprise, as JD(S) had ahead of polls ruled out allying with any party and fielded its candidates. No party has an absolute majority in the council, but all three had fielded candidates, making for an interesting contest. The Congress and JD(S) decided to join hands at the eleventh hour to keep the BJP out of power. Sources said JD(S) agreed to it after the grand old party decided to sacrifice the mayor's post. — PTI

AFSPA extended in Assam again

Guwahati: The Assam government on Wednesday extended the existing "disturbed area" status of the state for another six months from February 27 under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA). "As per powers conferred under section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, the Governor of Assam has declared the entire state of Assam as 'disturbed area' upto 6 (six) months beyond 27/02/2021, unless withdrawn earlier," according to an official release. The release did not cite any particular reason for the extension, but sources said that it was in view of the assembly elections due in April-May and recovery of arms and ammunitions from some parts of the state. — PTI

PALGHAR CASE: SC SEEKS FRESH CHARGESHEET

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 24

The Supreme Court directed the Maharashtra police to put on record the second supplementary chargesheet in the case of alleged lynching of three persons, including two sadhus by a mob in Palghar district in April last year. Giving the Maharashtra government two weeks time to place on record the second supplementary charge-sheet in Palghar lynching case, a bench comprising Justices Ashok Bhushan and R. Subhash Reddy posted the matter for further hearing on March 12. The top court sought a second supplementary charge-sheet as the lawyer appearing for Maharashtra government told the court that the second charge sheet filed in the case, in which 18 delinquent police persons have been punished for dereliction of duty following a probe, some of them dismissed and some compulsorily retired. The court was hearing petitions, including one by the seers of Hardwar and Varanasi belonging to Shri Panch Dashnam Juna Akhara and relatives of the killed seers, demanding a separate probe by CBI or NIA into the alleged lynching as they are not satisfied with the "biased" police probe. Those arrayed in the petitions as respondent include the Centre, CBI and the Maharashtra police DG.



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi (centre) joins fishermen as they toil for the morning catch on the high-sea in Kollam, Kerala, on Wednesday.

I admire what you do: Rahul tells Kerala fishermen; sails with them

Kollam, Feb. 24: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday turned seafarer and pulled the net with local fishermen in high sea here to get a taste of their life and understand the issues facing them. In an emotional talk with thousands of fishermen, including women gathered at the Thangassery beach in this southern coastal district, the Nehru scion said he admired and respected what the fishermen do.

"I understand and respect what you do. I admire what you are doing. Many times, we eat the fish but we will not understand the hard work behind and how it reached our plate," Gandhi said.

The Wayanad MP ventured into the sea with some fishermen in their boat from Vadi beach here around 4.30 am and spent nearly an hour with them before reaching the venue of interaction.

Mr Gandhi also cast the net with them but could only catch one squid.

Clad in blue T-shirt and khaki trousers, the Congress leader could be seen waving hands to the onlookers from the boat

I went to sea early in the morning with my brothers. From the moment the boat left the shore and till the moment it reached back the shore, every force was trying to fight my brothers.

— Rahul Gandhi, Congress leader

while reaching back to the shores.

Addressing the fishermen as "brothers" throughout his talk, he said he wanted to get a sense of what many of them go through every day.

"I went to sea early in the morning with my brothers. From the moment the boat left the shore and till the moment it reached back the shore, every force was trying to fight my brothers," he said.

Sharing his experience of sailing with the fishermen, Mr Gandhi said they take the entire risk.

"They put their entire labour and fight the sea. They buy the net and

somebody else gets the profit," he said.

In my mind, I was expecting a net full of fish and the net came back empty. So I saw with my own eyes, your experience," Mr Gandhi added.

Highlighting hardships of fishermen, he said petrol and diesel prices go up every single day and the fishing community cannot buy an engine beyond a certain size.

He said the fishermen told him that if they come one hour late, they don't get the same price they would get if they came one hour before. They also told him that they did not have any insurance.

"I have a sense of what you deal with. And now, when a fisherman comes to me to tell that they are struggling, I understand a little bit what they are going through. Of course I will never understand exactly your reality. I only pulled the net for one day. You do it everyday," Mr Gandhi told the gathering.

"For the first time I realised, directly with my own eyes the difficulty to get the fish on the plate," he said amidst thunderous applause. — PTI

Insulting Indians Rahul's favourite pastime: Javadekar

New Delhi, Feb. 24: Amid a political slugfest over Rahul Gandhi's "north-south" comment, Union minister Prakash Javadekar called the Congress leader "superficial" and said "insulting Indians" was Gandhi's "favourite pastime".

Mr Javadekar also said Mr Gandhi has been severely admonished on social media while his Cabinet colleague Ravi Shankar Prasad asserted that the remarks have raised questions over the level of responsibility shown by the former chief of a national party.

"Insulting Indians is a favourite pastime of Rahul Gandhi. Indians are not superficial you are Mr Rahul Gandhi," he tweeted. Later during a media briefing, he said the BJP leaders have already reacted to that and "social media pe poori dhulayi hui hai" (he has been severely admonished on social media too). — PTI

Bihar cop shot dead by liquor smugglers

Key accused held while he was escaping to Nepal

NAYEAR AZAD
PATNA, FEB 24

A sub-inspector was killed and a police guard was injured in an encounter with liquor smugglers in Bihar's Sitamarhi district on Wednesday.

The incident occurred when a police team led by sub-inspector Dinesh Ram reached village Kunwari under Majorganj police station to arrest Mukul, Ranjan and their associates in connection with an extortion case.

Sources said that as soon as the police team started cordoning off the area, criminals opened fire in which the sub-inspector was killed and a police guard sustained injuries.

According to the police, Mukul, Ranjan and others have also been involved in liquor smuggling from Nepal and other neighbouring states.

Later, Mukul was arrested while he was fleeing to Nepal after the firing incident and one of the smug-

▶ **WHILE THE** ruling JD(U) termed the incident as 'an act of frustration' by the liquor mafia, Opposition blamed the state government for its failure to check liquor smuggling from outside the state. A total ban on liquor was imposed in April 2016.

glers was killed by the police.

"Manhunt has been launched and raids are being conducted to nab all those who have been involved in the incident", ADG (law and order) Amit Kumar told reporters in Patna.

The incident has triggered sharp reactions from across the political spectrum in Bihar. While the ruling JD(U) termed the incident as "an act of frustration" by the liquor mafia, Opposition blamed the state government for its failure to check liquor smuggling from outside the state.

"The incident shows

that there is no fear of law in Bihar. The state government should order a high-level probe and act against all those who are behind the entire liquor trade racket in the state. There are many big people who have close links with liquor mafias," RJD leader Subodh Rai told reporters.

A total ban on liquor was imposed in April 2016. Liquor prohibition was the first major announcement by Nitish Kumar after he was sworn in as chief minister in 2015 following an emphatic victory.

Recently after the Opposition raised questions on the success of liquor prohibition following eight hooch deaths in two separate incidents, Bihar CM Nitish Kumar defended the decision saying that "people were in favour of the act and if government employees are found consuming it will be dismissed from the service".

Maha minister in soup for defying Covid norms

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, FEB. 24

Maharashtra forest minister Sanjay Rathod might find himself in trouble as his party Shiv Sena has made it clear that Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray will not spare anyone and law will take its course in connection the gathering of huge crowd outside a temple in Washim district in violation of Covid norms.

Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut said, "The chief minister is very strict when it comes to laws and rules. He will not spare even if it means somebody is ours. The government will not spare. The law will definitely take its course if anyone has committed a mistake."

On Tuesday, thousands of supporters of Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Rathod gathered near Pohradevi Temple in Washim district when

minister visited the shrine. It was his first public appearance after his name was linked to the death of a 22-year old Pooja Chavan in Pune. He however had denied the allegations against him.

Mr Thackeray on Sunday announced that in view of the rising Covid cases, religious, social and political gatherings will be prohibited in the state from Monday.

Mr Rathod was conspicuous by his absence in public eye after his name was connected to the death of Pooja Chavan. On February 8, the deceased, hailing from Beed district, allegedly committed a suicide by jumping off a building in Pune. Her death had kicked off a political storm in the state, as several audio clips of her purported conservation have gone viral in the social media linking the incident to Mr Rathod.

Punjab govt shamelessly protecting gangster: UP

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, FEB. 24

The Uttar Pradesh government on Wednesday sought immediate transfer of gangster-turned politician Mukhtar Ansari from a jail in Punjab to the state (Uttar Pradesh) to face trial in several cases, as it accused the Punjab government of "shamelessly" shielding him.

A bench comprising Justices Ashok Bhushan and R. Subhash Reddy adjourned the hearing to March 2, 2021, as senior lawyer Dushyant Dave appearing for the Punjab government cited some personal difficulty.

Solicitor-general Tuskar Mehta, appearing for the Uttar Pradesh government, did not object to Mr Dave's request for adjournment. Appearing for Ansari, senior lawyer Mukul Rohatgi said he (Ansari) is a "small fry" who is being cornered by the "might of the state."

In a snide remark, Mr Mehta said: "You are such a small fry that a Punjab is shamelessly protecting you."

The Uttar Pradesh government has also sought the transfer of trial in the extortion case in Punjab to the special court in Allahabad. Ansari is lodged in the Rupnagar jail in Punjab since January 2019.

In its affidavit, the Punjab government has referred to the medical condition of Ansari and the advice of doctors, because of which he "could not be handed over to the UP police" as he is undergoing treatment in the jail hospital as well as in other hospitals from time to time since January 2019.

Odisha enhances incentive from ₹50,000 to ₹2.5 lakh 5-fold hike in perk for marrying divyang

AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 24

The Odisha government has enhanced cash incentives for marriage between persons with benchmark disabilities from ₹50,000 to ₹2,50,000 per eligible couple.

According to state social security and empowerment of persons with disabilities (SSEP) secretary Bhaskar Sharma, the enhancement in the cash incentive has been provided in the revised marriage guidelines.

Mr Sharma stated that guidelines for the award of the cash incentive have been revised due to some operational problems

brought to the notice during the implementation of the scheme.

The revised guidelines will be effective from the date of its issue.

As per the revised guidelines, the cash incentive will be given to either spouse with a benchmark disability. The marriage must be dowry free.

The eligible couple will have to apply online on the department website www.ssepd.gov.in.

Aadhaar-linked disability certificate, marriage registration certificate issued by the competent registration authority of marriages, self-attested postcard size joint photograph of the couple, a residential certificate issued

by the tehsildar or any other authentic proof of residence required for filling up the application form.

After completion of verification and other procedures, the incentive amount will be disbursed to the couple through the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS).

The amount of incentive shall be locked in for three years.

Withdrawal is allowed in three phases with the withdrawal of 10 per cent of the funds after six months, the next 10 per cent after one year and the balance 80 per cent of the funds after successful completion of three years

of the marriage.

"The couple can withdraw the amount under a joint signature. The bank shall be advised accordingly," the revised guidelines said.

"The names of couples who are sanctioned marriage incentive awards sanctioned shall be displayed on the official website of the SSEPD with a scanned joint photograph of the couple. If rejected, the reasons thereof shall be intimated to the applicant by the Collector & District Magistrate," it added.

Those who fraudulently avail the cash incentive will be punishable with imprisonment up to two years or ₹1 lakh fine.

Mamata slams PM

■ Continued from Page 1

BJP IT cell in-charge Amit Malviya later attributed her jibe to the PM and the Union home minister respectively. "Sensing an inevitable saffron surge across West Bengal, Pishi is clearly jittery and resorting to name calling, something culturally evolved people of WB had never witnessed in public discourse... From body shaming, calling PM Kimbhootkimakar and HM Hodoalkootkoot, Pishi has lost it!" he tweeted.

A day after the CBI questioned her MP nephew Abhishek Banerjee's wife Rujira Banerjee Narula at her home for her suspected links to overseas financial transactions in the high profile coal smuggling case, Ms Banerjee also asked the PM: "How can you, after entering my house, call a Bachcha Meye of 22-23 years who is also Ghorer Bou a coal thief when you are roaming with coal thieves in your lap? Don't you feel ashamed of yourself to call our daughters and sisters at home coal thieves? You have dirt all over you."

Many celebrities — film producer Raj Chakraborty, actress Shayoni Ghosh, actor Kanchan Chakraborty and cricketer Manoj Tiwari — joined the TMC in front of Ms Banerjee at the rally. Later, the CM urged the PM in a letter to help her government purchase vaccines from designated points on a top priority basis and offer them to people as part of a rapid drive in the poll-bound state.

Covid-19 jab for 60+

■ Continued from Page 1

said most of the ministers are thinking of paying for the vaccines.

Meanwhile, with Covid-19 cases surging in several states, the Centre on Wednesday deputed high-level, multi-disciplinary teams to Maharashtra, Kerala, Chhattisgarh,

Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Punjab, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir for supporting them in public health measures for targeted Covid response and management, and effectively tackling the pandemic.

These teams will work closely with state and UT administrations to ascertain reasons for the recent surge in the number of Covid-19 cases. They will also coordinate with health authorities of the states and UT for requisite Covid-19 control measures to break the chain of transmission. States and

UTs have been advised to regularly review the emerging situation with the concerned district officials to ensure that gains made so far in Covid management are not lost, Union health ministry officials said.

Union health secretary has also written to Maharashtra, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir which have been witnessing a rise in daily cases, along with decreasing proportion of RT-PCR tests.

The health secretary has urged states/UT to focus on undertaking aggressive measures to break the chain of transmission and to ensure that RT-PCR testing is amplified to flush out undetected cases.

"These states/UTs have been advised to increase testing in a focussed manner in the affected districts with the appropriate split of RT-PCR and

Rapid Antigen Tests and to also ensure that all symptomatic negatives of antigen tests are compulsorily tested via RT-PCR tests. The positive persons must be promptly isolated/hospitalised, all their close contacts be traced and also tested without delay," officials said.

The letter also mentioned that any laxity in implementing stringent measures to curb the spread, especially in view of new strains of virus observed in certain countries, could compound the situation. The Union health secretary has separately requested the chief secretaries of these 10 states and UTs to provide time to these high-level Central teams to debrief the respective chief secretaries at the conclusion of their state visit.

India on Wednesday reported 13,742 fresh cases and 104 deaths in the last 24 hours.

World's largest stadium opened

■ Continued from Page 1

about insulting Sardar Patel. Only BJP has shown respect to Sardar Patel".

The state-of-the-art stadium opened with third Test between India and England, a day-night game from Wednesday. It will also host the fourth and final game of the series from March 4. The Narendra Modi stadium in Motera is to be part of the planned Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Sports Enclave in Ahmedabad.

Gujarat deputy chief minister Nitin Patel, talking to a news channel said, "Congress neither knows the history or geography of Ahmedabad but tries to create controversy just to be in news. You can see files and (cricket) commentaries — that stadium is always called the Motera stadium. There is another Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel stadium but this stadium was popular as the Motera stadium."

Shiv Sena leader Priyanka Chaturvedi tweeted: "Stunning Motera Cricket Stadium Kudos. However Sardar Vallabhai Patel, great son of India, whose name was used extensively to

imply he wasn't given his due, we now see his name erased from the stadium. I am certain Honourable PM will object to his name being used to write-over India's Iron Man."

Responding to the criticism, BJP leader Y. Satyakumar tweeted: "Twenty-eight sports tournaments, awards and trophies named after members of Nehru-Gandhi family. Nineteen stadium named after the members of the Nehru-Gandhi family. Same party people are rattled when merely 'I' stadium has been named after Narendra Modiji which was his vision and brainchild."

"This stadium was conceptualised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he was Chief Minister of Gujarat. He was president of the Gujarat Cricket Association at that time," Mr Kovind said in his address after the inauguration.

"It represents India's aspirations and strength. India is called hub of cricket, so it is appropriate that we have the largest stadium. It will give India a new identity," the President said.

THE ASIAN AGE

25 FEBRUARY 2021

Renew thrust on tests, speed up vaccinations

The Union government's directive to states which witness a spurt in the daily case load of Covid-19 to tighten the testing procedures and the announcement that it will soon start the vaccination programme for people other than frontline workers have come not one day late. The pandemic shows no sign of going; in fact, it continues to make lives difficult in nations across the globe. The number of deaths due to the virus in the United States has crossed 5 lakhs; Britain, another hard-hit nation, which has already vaccinated one third of its adult population, sees a return to normal life only by June. Both France and Germany are worried about the turn the pandemic has taken. France has not yet announced a national lockdown, but there is night-time curfew. As many as 14 of the 16 states in Germany report higher than the target level of infections.

Back home in India, the scene is far from comfortable. As many as 16 of the 36 states and Union territories have reported a rise in the Covid numbers last week while seven states — Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Chhattisgarh, Delhi and Haryana — have reported a dramatic hike. Several districts in Maharashtra are under lockdown. India at present hosts all the important variants of the virus and scientists are afraid that some of them could frustrate vaccination drive by mutation.

This situation leaves the Union government with little option other than taking a serious look at the way the pandemic is fought at the ground. The nation has now practically done away with every restriction that was part of the lockdown announced last year. Life has returned to near normal in most parts of the nation.

This is incompatible with the reality, and hence the government must take a relook at the restrictions before it is too late, including those on social, political and religious congregations. Educational institutions have started functioning in most states and now some states are opening even the primary classes. The government must seek expert advice on the opening of educational institutions and share it with the states.

India has targeted to vaccinate three crore frontline workers in the first phase and is at present close to half the target. It must speed up the process and soon announce the roll-out of the programme for the next target group — people who are aged above 50 years. The government has announced that it will rope in the private sector in the next phase. At present, only 0.8 vaccine doses, the lowest, have been given to 100 people in countries with highest total vaccinations. Hence the government should waste no time and come up with a transparent policy to co-opt private hospitals for the massive programme. The renewed thrust on RT-PCR tests is also welcome; the Union government should think of incentivising such tests by the states. There has to be a concerted effort by the Centre and the states to stop another wave of the pandemic.

Business trumps nationalism

Irrespective of whether it is viable strategy or not, the Narendra Modi government gives the impression of wanting to get back to business as usual with China as early as possible. Some Chinese investment proposals stuck in the pipeline since the time last summer when India woke up to sour northern neighbour's incursion into Indian territory have thus been cleared expeditiously.

These clearances appear to have been accorded no sooner than the disengagement of troops and military hardware were completed in the north and the south banks of Pangong Lake last Friday, and while the Chinese side is being difficult about vacating the strategically vital Depsang Plains where China's military presence cuts us off from our airfield at Daulat Beg Oldie and access to the Karakoram pass.

When the People's Liberation Army (PLA) moved into Indian territory there was much to do about applying a squeeze on Chinese economic interests as a form of retaliation. Hundreds of Chinese apps doing brisk business in India were choked. The "Atmanirbhar Bharat" slogan was sought to be made routine from the highest levels of government. That phase appears to be behind us.

Perhaps the business end of things is trumping nationalism for the Modi government. It turns out that in 2020 China remained India's biggest trading partner, and more was imported from China than from the US and the UAE — the second and the third biggest trading partners — put together.

It also became evident that at a time when India's exports were suffering on account of Covid and other factors, its exports to China were in steady shape. Perhaps the Modi regime does not want this compromised. India also uses Chinese heavy equipment, electronics and household appliances in a big way. On the whole, the Indian economy seems as difficult to disengage from the Chinese as Chinese soldiers from eastern Ladakh. Perhaps this is a reason why officially India is yet to acknowledge that China intruded into Indian territories.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Printer & Publisher: K. SUDHAKAR

The Asian Age office is located at:

New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 23211124.

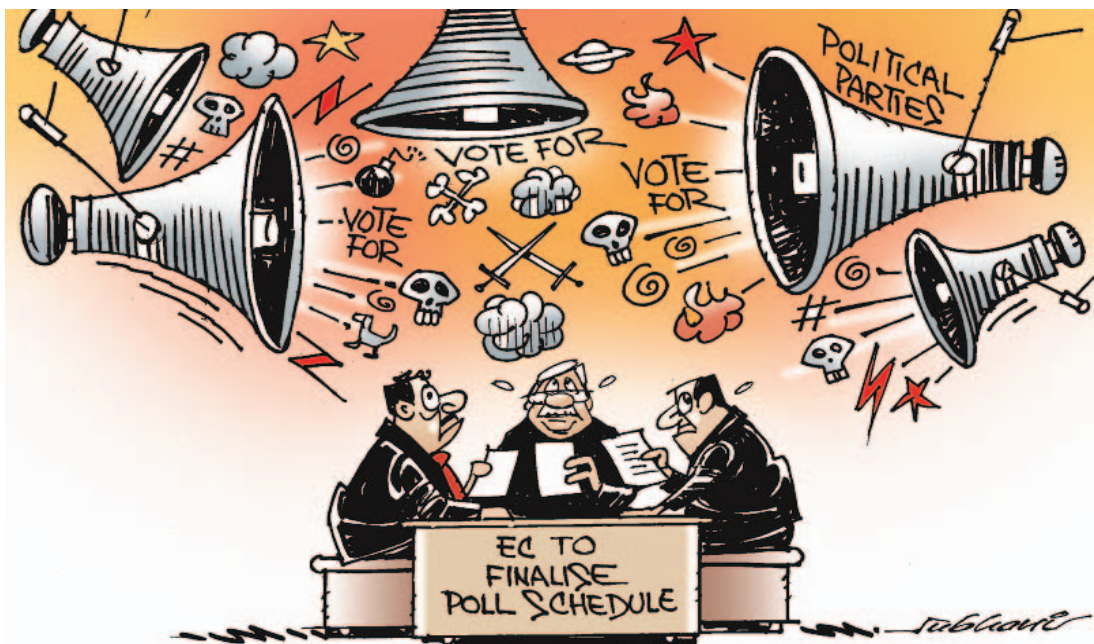
Published and Printed on behalf of and for

Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.

London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.

RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani



Ignoring Biden mantra may be costly for India



K.C. Singh

Three events have been shaping India's geopolitical environment since the Galwan Valley stand-off between India and China since May-June last year. One is the trajectory of the Covid-19 pandemic and the pace of vaccination. Two, the ascendancy of US President Joe Biden and his swift moves to establish his domestic and international agenda. Finally, the farmers' agitation against the three agricultural reform laws, passed hurriedly by Parliament without a proper examination by a select committee or a division and vote. Consequently, the normal boundaries between domestic politics and international relations have shattered, as the local and global factors impinge on each other.

A classic case was how a "toolkit" developed for environmental activists to be more effective, tweeted by global youth icon Greta Thunberg, became the locus of the police arrests of Indian activists recommending it to protesting farmers. From there it is being sought to be linked to pro-Khalistan proponents abroad. Almost 100 British parliamentarians threw their weight behind the Indian farmers, whose protest has gradually widened as the lead passed from mainly Punjabi and Sikh farm union leaders to the redoubtable Tikait brothers of western Uttar Pradesh and the family of late Prime Minister Charan Singh. Besides rumblings in the US Congress, the state department urged respect for the protesters' rights. American farm unions also lent their weight to the Indian protests.

In the brouhaha, not enough attention has been paid to the repeated message from President Joe Biden, as he told the Munich Conference that "we

are at an inflection point". From that assumption, he argues how the US plans to regenerate economically and reassert strategically. The main challenges are climate change, the global pandemic, Chinese assertiveness combined with Russian obduracy, reform of multilateralism and defence of the democratic way of life.

Between President Biden's Munich address on February 19 and his remarks at the G-7 meeting a day earlier, the most striking was his plea over the role of democracy and rule of law. Critics maintain that historically US actions in this regard have often been differed from America's words. For decades, during the Cold War, the Americans not only happily worked with autocrats and dictators as allies but overthrew with alacrity democratic governments, for instance in Iran and Chile, if seen as unfriendly to US interests. Therefore, the Indian government has so far ignored subtle hints from the US that freedom of expression includes the freedom to protest peacefully and tweet or support those protests on social media platforms. The spat between the government and Twitter over which handles to block underscored the divergence between the Indian approach and that adopted in the West by and large.

President Biden's words need closer attention to understand that this is a new America, traumatised by four years of Trumpian undermining of US institutions, including the former President denying his electoral defeat and repeatedly rejecting the orderly transfer of power. That wound is still open as despite the impeachment of Mr Trump having failed, the US Congress is in the process of setting-up a 9/11-type commission of inquiry into the Capital violence and Mr

Trump's role in it.

President Biden's Munich address began by recommitting America to its trans-Atlantic alliance, which his predecessor had contemptuously shredded. Then he developed at some length his defence of democracy. He argued that the alliance was rooted in the "richness of our shared values", including the need to protect the rights of all and the rule of law. He warned that in both the US and Europe "democratic progress is under assault". He added: "We are in the midst of a fundamental debate about the future and direction of our world". Despite the pandemic and the so-called fourth industrial revolution, he continued, democracy was essential and must prevail. He concluded this part with the telling sentence that "democracy does not happen by accident", nor is Western liberal democracy a "relic of history".

The same message emanated from the Australia-India-Japan-US Quad ministerial meeting, held a day before Mr Biden's Munich address. The statement notes the four nations share values as "political democracies, market economies and pluralistic societies". They seek a rules-based international order and respect for the territorial integrity of other nations. The second is aimed at both the maritime claims of China in South and East China seas, as indeed resolving Chinese intrusions across the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh. But India too had to accept in exchange the criticism of the military coup in Myanmar by joining the demand for the rule of law and democratic transition.

To assume that the US is just posturing against China and India's strategic value as a counterweight to China, economi-

Democracy for him is no longer some asinine prescription for the Third World, used selectively, but a living organism that needs defending if China and Russia have to be countered

cally and militarily, would keep any serious criticism of heavy-handed and majoritarian governance of the Indian government in check might be a mistake. Mr Biden has seen power exercised both from the White House as vice-president for eight years and from the Senate, where he chaired the foreign relations committee. Hillary Clinton recounts in her book *Hard Choices* that she and Mr Biden opposed President Barack Obama cutting Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak loose as the protests developed at Tahrir Square during the Arab Spring. That was Mr Biden as the traditional pragmatist. But the new Biden has emerged triumphant from Donald Trump almost bringing US democracy to its knees. Democracy for him is no longer some asinine prescription for the Third World, used selectively, but a living organism that needs defending if China and Russia have to be countered.

Sources in the BJP say Prime Minister Narendra Modi is unwilling to roll back the farm laws. As chief minister, he apparently browbeat protesting Gujarat farmers over the installation of electricity meters. He is trying to extrapolate that success in dealings with the farmers of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. The BJP's Haryana government hangs by a thread. The UP Assembly election is just a year away. The Covid-19 pandemic is starting to respite as the vaccination pace is slow, with the calls for private sector involvement ignored. As Harold Wilson once said, a week is a long time in politics. Exactly a year ago, a cocky President Donald Trump said before he travelled to India that the US was on top of Covid-19. With him gone and half a million Americans dead, the conclusion is unavoidable that political arrogance can be costly. India may discover just that, caught between Prime Minister Modi's obduracy, the BJP's reflexive majoritarianism and President Biden's evangelistic defence of liberal democracy.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambkcsingh.

LETTERS

DEN OF VICES

Dilip Cherian very rightly highlights the rampant maladministration and statutory noncompliances at the Delhi Gymkhana Club — one of the last relics of the British Raj ("Dilli Ka Babu", Feb. 24). It's no wonder, then, that its administration has been taken over by an "administrator". However, what is surprising is that the Club, which shares its boundary with the incumbent Prime Minister's House and is down the road from a former Prime Minister's residence, should degenerate to this level. A cleanup of the place was, therefore, imperative. And no tears would be shed if a permanent takeover of the club is on the cards.

Bhaskar Roy
New Delhi

PERSONALITY CULT

AHEAD OF THE third Test match between India and England, the newly refurbished world's biggest Motera cricket stadium, having a seating capacity of 1,10,000, was inaugurated by the President of India, Ram Nath Kovind. The renaming of the ground as the Narendra Modi Stadium replacing the Sardar Patel Stadium exposes the cult of personality being encouraged by the PM. Rather incongruously, the two bowling ends of the pitch are named after Reliance and Gautam Adani.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

NO DIGNITY OF LIFE

THE DEATH OF SIX people in an accidental gelatin and detonator explosion near a quarry and crushing site at Hirenagavelli village on the outskirts of Chikkaballapur district is shocking. The explosion occurred when the deceased tried to dispose of the illegally bought and stored explosives in a forested area to escape police action. Unfortunately, illegal quarrying continues unabated, despite several punitive measures in place, and often it is the innocent workers who pay with their lives.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

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

Mahir Ali



Keats' immortal poetry can be found on shelves all across world

The headstone above a final resting place dug in Rome's non-Catholic cemetery 200 years ago today bears the indelible inscription: "This grave contains all that was mortal of a young English poet who, on his death bed, in the bitterness of his heart at the malicious power of his enemies, desired these words to be engraven on his tomb stone: 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water'."

There is a harp above the inscription, but no name. As some readers might have guessed, the mortal remains are those of John Keats, the bicentenary of whose distressingly premature demise was commemorated yesterday with readings, lectures, virtual tours and the like. His immortal remains can be found in bookshelves all around the world.

Contrary to what the gravestone suggests, it wasn't bad reviews that killed the poet. The villain was tuberculosis, commonly known back then as consumption. After a night out in London in February 1820, Keats coughed up blood and recognised its

colour. "That drop of blood is my death warrant," he told his housemate. "I must die."

A couple of years earlier, he had watched his younger brother, Tom, succumb to the ailment. As a teenager, he had seen his mother die of the same disease. Besides, he was a qualified apothecary and an apprentice surgeon who eventually chose poetry over medicine, but not before working at Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals in London.

Orphaned at a tender age, Keats was a belligerent schoolboy, more interested in brawls than in scholastic pursuits. But he became a voracious reader in his later teens and soon began spouting verse. Hardly any of his juvenile poetry has stood the test of time, although the emotions expressed therein ought to be familiar to men — yes, it's the male gaze, although Keats was later to be commended (or criticised) for his feminine sensibility, too.

The sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" is generally seen as his first significant poem, signalling a lifelong fascination with

Greek mythology, which didn't always serve him well. It was followed not long afterwards by a far lesser known sonnet, Written in Disgust at Vulgar Superstition, an exhortation of organised religion. Some of the early poems also hint at political engagement, but it never came anywhere close to that of his contemporary (and admirer) Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Keats' first volume of verse, published in 1817, may not have been particularly impressive, but it did not deserve the derision it received from a Tory literary establishment almost genetically inclined to be dismissive of "Cockney poets". The criticism became even more vicious when Keats published his first long poem, Endymion; he himself was far from satisfied with this extended excursion into Greek mythology, but had decided that he couldn't countenance any further revisions.

What's particularly extraordinary, though, is that his genius wasn't widely recognised even after he published Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St

Agnes and Other Poems in 1820. The "other poems" included, mind you, some of the most exquisite verses committed to paper in the English language — the odes "To a Nightingale", "On a Grecian Urn" and "To Autumn", alongside the odes "To Psyche" and "On Melancholy". The only notable poem that followed was the sonnet Bright Star.

Yet by the mid-19th century Keats was yet to be recognised as a gift to posterity, unlike older contemporaries such as Wordsworth and Coleridge (both of whom he had met). Perhaps it was only in the 20th century that Keats' stature (he stood 5ft 11in) was deservedly elevated to that of a literary giant, but his star was already shining bright in the late 19th century.

On a visit in 1877 to the cemetery where the poet's remains are interred, Oscar Wilde prostrated himself upon the grave and declared it to be "the holiest place in Rome". He marked the occasion with a sonnet that includes the lines: "Thy name was writ in water — it shall

stand/ And tears like mine will keep thy memory green."

The original manuscript can be found in the Keats-Shelley House adjacent to the Spanish Steps in Rome, where Keats grew pallid and spectre-thin and died just months after he arrived in Italy, having survived a tumultuous sea voyage that included quarantine off the coast of Naples because of a cholera outbreak in London.

Keats stepped ashore on his 25th birthday, fully aware that his fears that "I may cease to be/ before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain" were about to come true. His possible future shall eternally remain a mystery and matter of conjecture. But given his core body of work, it's hard not to conclude that the opening lines of Endymion would have served as a far more appropriate epitaph than a name "writ in water": "A thing of beauty is a joy forever/ Its loveliness increases; it will never/ Fade into nothingness..."

By arrangement with Dawn

SHORT TAKES

6-YEAR-OLD DIES IN GREEK CAMP FIRE

Athens, Feb. 24: A 6-year-old boy from Iran died of burns suffered during an overnight fire at a migrant camp north-west of Athens, Greek authorities said Wednesday.

The blaze broke out late Tuesday at a short-term residence facility near the town of Thebes, about 90 kilometres (55 miles) from the Greek capital. Nobody else was reported injured. The fire service said in a statement that firefighters sent to the incident were initially prevented by camp residents from entering, and had to call police support to get in and extinguish the blaze. By then, the boy had already been brought unconscious out of the building where the fire broke out.

SEDITION: THAI COURT OUSTS 3 CABINET MINS

Bangkok, Feb. 24: Three Cabinet ministers in Thailand were forced to leave their posts Wednesday after a court found them guilty of sedition for taking part in sometimes-violent protests in 2013-2014 against the government then in power.

The Criminal Court in Bangkok found Digital Economy Minister Buddhpongse Punnakanta, Education Minister Nataphol Teepsuwan and Deputy Transport Minister Thaworn Senneam guilty along with about two dozen other defendants in a case that was launched in 2018.

The verdicts can be appealed to a higher court but under the law the Cabinet ministers must relinquish their jobs immediately.

THREE KILLED IN CLASHES IN IRAN

Tehran, Feb. 24: Three people were killed over two days in clashes in the southeastern Iranian town of Saravan near the border with Pakistan, the semiofficial *ILNA* news agency reported.

An angry mob stormed the district governor's office Tuesday, a day after shootings of fuel smugglers at the border left at least two people dead. Tuesday's *ILNA* report quoted Malak Fazeli, Saravan's representative in parliament, as saying: "As far as I know, three people lost their lives while being transferred to the hospital." It was unclear whether all three people were killed in the border shootings or if one of the fatalities was a result of the chaos at the district governor's office.

JIHADIST REBELS KILL 10 IN NIGERIA

Maiduguri (Nigeria), Feb. 24: At least 10 people were killed and about 60 others injured in an attack by suspected jihadist rebels on the northern Nigerian city of Maiduguri, officials said Wednesday. The governor of Borno state, Babagana Zulum confirmed the attack and visited hospitals where the casualties were being treated.

"This is a new form of attack, totally different from the usual suicide bombing," said Zulum. "It is worrisome and there is an urgent need to strategize to forestall further occurrence." The attack started at about 5:45 pm. Tuesday when deafening sounds of explosions and the cracking of shootings by assault rifles could be heard.

JAPAN PM SON SCAM: OFFICIALS FACE MUSIC

Tokyo, Feb. 24: Japan's communications ministry punished 11 senior officials on Wednesday for accepting lavish dinners paid for by Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's eldest son and his fellow executives at a satellite broadcaster, the latest embarrassment for Suga's already scandal-laden government.

The case surfaced after weekly magazine Shukan Bunshun reported recently that Seigo Suga and other executives from the satellite broadcaster Tohokushinsha Film had entertained the officials at the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry, which regulates communications business. On Wednesday, the ministry announced penalties including salary cuts and reprimands for the 11 ministry officials.

Protest in Lebanon



Protesters burn tyres to block a road in front of Judge Fadi Akikis house during a demonstration calling for the release of anti-government activists detained following riots in northern Lebanon late last month, in Beirut, on Wednesday.

— AP

Officials: Engine explosion, fire kill 10 Afghan civilians

Kabul, Feb. 24: A minivan carrying civilians caught fire Wednesday after its engine exploded in southern Afghanistan killing 10 family members, including three children, an official said.

Southern Urozgan provincial police spokesman Ahmad Shah Sahel said the family was returning from a wedding when their minivan became partially submerged in the Helmand River. Sahel said the family wasn't able to exit the vehicle as it was half in the water.

High pressure and water finding its way into the engine caused an explosion and fire inside the car, killing all the family members, Sahel said. The bride and groom were riding in a separate car and were not among the casualties. A police spokesman said the incident happened in an area where militants and Afghan forces are active and police were not able to provide assistance immediately. Meanwhile, a media advocacy organisation called Nai said in a statement that unknown gunmen shot and killed Dr Khalil Narmgo, former head of a Baghlan journalists association in northern Afghanistan. A Baghlan police official who wanted to remain anonymous as he was not authorised to speak to the media said Narmgo was returning to the capital of Baghlan province late Tuesday when unknown gunmen stopped his car, took him out, and opened fire at him.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. Afghanistan has seen a nationwide spike in bombings, targeted killings, and violence as

Germany prepares way for its troops to stay in Afghanistan

Berlin, Feb. 24: The German government is preparing the way for the country's troops in Afghanistan — the second-biggest contingent in a NATO force — to stay in place until next year if needed.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's Cabinet on Wednesday approved a new draft mandate that would enable German troops to stay until Jan. 31, government spokesman Steffen Seibert said. German troop deployments overseas require parliamentary approval, which is typically granted on an annual basis. The current mandate for Afghanistan expires at the end of March. NATO has just

under 10,000 troops in the war-ravaged country, helping to train and advise Afghan security forces.

Germany's contingent of nearly 1,100 is the second-biggest in the Resolute Support mission after the United States. President Joe Biden is reviewing his predecessor's 2020 deal with the Taliban, which includes a May 1 deadline for a final U.S. troop withdrawal. In Washington, calls are mounting for the US to delay the final exit or renegotiate the deal to allow the presence of a smaller force. Germany's foreign minister, Heiko Maas, has said the withdrawal of foreign troops should be tied to progress.

— AP

peace negotiations in Qatar between the Taliban and the Afghan government resumed this week after over a month's delay. The Islamic State group's local affiliate has claimed responsibility for some of the attacks, but many go unclaimed.

— AP

EX-US GEN: PAK GAVE TALIBAN SANCTUARY

Washington, Feb. 24: A former top US military official has told lawmakers that the Afghan Taliban have had sanctuary in Pakistan and the terror group originated from the madrassas in that country.

During a Congressional hearing on Tuesday, General (ret) Joseph F. Dunford, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, also told lawmakers that the probability of civil war is high in the wake of a precipitous US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

We know that the Taliban have had sanctuary in Pakistan. We know that they have an active diplomatic effort travelling to Moscow, travelling to other countries. We know they travel in the Gulf. We know Iran has provided some material support, he said.

Dunford said the Taliban gets its financial support from drug trade.

The Taliban, he said is a Sunni terrorist organisation. There's no question that the Taliban originates from the madrassas in Pakistan. — PTI

UK judge to rule on Nirav today

London, Feb. 24: Wanted diamond merchant Nirav Modi, who remains behind bars in a London prison as he contests his extradition to India on charges of fraud and money laundering in the estimated USD 2-billion Punjab National Bank (PNB) scam case, will find out the UK court's ruling in the nearly two-year-long legal battle on Thursday.

The 49-year-old is expected to appear via

videolink from Wandsworth Prison in south-west London at Westminster Magistrates' Court, where District Judge Samuel Goode is set to hand down his judgment on whether the jeweller has a case to answer before the Indian courts.

The magistrates' court ruling will then be sent back to UK Home Secretary Priti Patel for a sign off, with the possibility of appeals in the High Court. — PTI

GLOBAL | DRAMA

Unravelling conspiracy after series of terrorist attacks

Hillary to pen state of terror thriller

New York, Feb. 24: Former US First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and her long-time friend Louise Penny will come out with a novel *State of Terror* which will be published on October 12 by Pan Macmillan India.

The story follows a novice Secretary of State who has joined the administration of her rival, a president inaugurated after four years of American leadership that shrank from the world stage. A series of terrorist attacks throws the global order into disarray, and the Secretary is tasked with assembling a team to unravel the deadly con-

spiracy, a scheme carefully designed to take advantage of an American government dangerously out of touch and out of power in the places where it counts the most.

This high-stakes thriller of international intrigue features behind-the-scenes global drama informed by details only an insider could know, the publishers said. The characters, their nuanced backstories and the tense, all-too-believable plot leap off the page.

The mind of the Secretary of State as high stake crises explode. Before we started, we talked about her time as Secretary of State. What was her worst nightmare? 'State of Terror' is the answer," she says. Clinton adds, "Writing a thriller with Louise is

Imran, Gotabaya discuss trade ties

Productive talks with Khan: Rajapaksa

Colombo/Islamabad, Feb. 24: Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday called on Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa during which they discussed areas of common interest like tourism and agriculture and ways to strengthen political and trade ties for their mutual benefit.

Khan, who is here on a two-day visit, called on Rajapaksa at the Presidential Secretariat here and held a one-on-one meeting with him.

"Had an excellent meeting with President of Sri Lanka @GotabayaR. We discussed our common passion for poverty alleviation esp in our rural areas. We also exchanged views on how to give farmers more for their produce and get cheaper food and fruits to the population by using technology to eliminate middlemen," Khan tweeted. "We also discussed other dimensions of our extensive ties to strengthen political & trade ties for our mutual benefit," he wrote. President Rajapaksa on his Twitter handle said he had a "productive" discussion with Khan.

"The discussions were mainly focused on common interests such as trade, tourism & adoption of technology in agriculture which both countries could positively leverage on," he wrote.

The Lankan President and the Prime Minister of Pakistan had a long discussion on bilateral relations. Khan said the talks were highly productive, *Colombo Page* news portal reported. The two leaders also discussed how to exchange technical know-

Lease report on port false: China

Beijing, Feb. 24: China on Wednesday said a report quoting Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena that the controversial deal to take over the Hambantota port on a 99-year lease has a provision for its extension for the same number of years "runs counter to the facts". Gunawardena has revealed that the previous Maithripala Sirisena government had awarded the Hambantota port to China not only for a 99-year lease but also provided a provision for extension for another 99-years.

There is a provision for a further 99-year extension

sion of the lease, he was quoted by the Sri Lankan newspaper Ceylon Today on February 20 as saying.

As we are implementing our policies giving much attention to all countries, the previous government made a mistake on the Hambantota port deal when they cancelled the lease and gave it on a longer period of 99 years plus another 99 years once the first term ends, Gunawardena said.

When asked whether the clause is mentioned in the MoU, Gunawardena said: Yes. It says the 99-year lease can extend for a further period. — PTI

ture which both countries could positively leverage on," he wrote.

The Lankan President and the Prime Minister of Pakistan had a long discussion on bilateral relations. Khan said the talks were highly productive, *Colombo Page* news portal reported. The two leaders also discussed how to exchange technical know-

ledge to promote agriculture in the two countries.

The two leaders stated that their goal was to uplift the agrarian economy in a way that would provide higher incomes to farmers and subsidised prices to consumers. Khan said that Pakistan's agricultural economy is very similar to that of Sri Lanka. — PTI

Reject UN rights body resolution: Lankan FM

Colombo, Feb. 24: A top Sri Lankan minister has made a fervent appeal to the member states of the UNHRC to reject the impending resolution on the island nation's human rights accountability and reconciliation, terming it a "pure political move" against the country.

Addressing a UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) session virtually on Tuesday, Foreign Minister

Dinesh Gunawardena urged that the resolution be rejected by the council and brought to a closure.

The minister described the impending resolution as unsubstantiated and a pure political move against Sri Lanka.

Gunawardena's remarks followed the country's rejection of the UN rights Commissioner Michelle Bachelet's report which had called for drastic

measures such as targeted sanctions and international criminal court procedure against those allegedly responsible for rights violations during the last phase of the armed conflict with the LTTE in 2009.

A draft of the resolution is expected to be tabled at the UNHRC sessions on Wednesday, officials here said.

— PTI

OLI PREPARED TO FACE PARL, SAYS OFFICIAL

Kathmandu, Feb. 24: Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli will not resign immediately and implement the Supreme Court's verdict against him by facing Parliament that is due to convene within two weeks, an official representing the embattled premier said on Wednesday.

In a landmark ruling, a five-member constitutional bench led by Chief Justice Chandra Shumsher on Tuesday annulled the Oli government's "unconstitutional" decision to dissolve the 275-member lower house of Parliament. The court also ordered the government to summon the House session within the next 13 days.

Nepal plunged into a political crisis on December 20 after President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved the House and announced fresh polls on April 30 and May 10 at the recommendation of PM Oli. — PTI



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50781.69	2.07
Nifty 50	14982.00	1.86
S&P 500*	3,901.34	0.51
Dollar (₹)	72.33	0.16
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.44	0.33
Euro (₹)	87.98	0.03
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,307.148	0.31
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	67.17	2.75
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.147	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.425	0.061

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Common infra for govt, corp bonds mulled

Unification of government bond and corporate bond markets will enable the trading of such securities on the same platform, thereby utilising common infrastructure for trading, clearing, settlement and holding of securities, said Sebi chairman Ajay Tyagi. "Unification of government bond and corporate bond markets is an idea whose time has come," Tyagi said. This would lead to seamless transmission of pricing info, he said.

Bidders of PSBs should have deep pockets: RBI



The potential owners of privatised public sector banks must be financially strong to ensure that the lenders have robust risk buffers, the RBI governor said. While the government has the final say in deciding the buyers, from the regulator's perspective, the bidders should meet RBI's fit and proper criteria and have enough financial strength to capitalise the banks significantly, governor Shaktikanta Das said in an interview.

Bosch to invest ₹800 cr to upgrade B'loru campus

Bosch Group, a German technology and services major, is investing Rs 800 crore to upgrade its existing campus in Bengaluru to a fully artificial intelligence of things (AIoT)-enabled 'smart campus.' The 75-acre campus is likely to house the second-highest number of Bosch employees in the world, said Soumitra Bhattacharya, MD of Bosch Ltd and regional president of Bosch Group in India.

Maruti drives in new Swift from ₹5.73 L onwards

Maruti Suzuki launched an updated version of its premium hatchback Swift priced between Rs 5.73 lakh and Rs 8.41 lakh, ex-showroom Delhi. It comes with manual and automatic automatic gear shift (AGS) transmissions. The manual trims are priced between Rs 5.73 lakh and Rs 7.91 lakh, while the AGS variants cost Rs 6.86 lakh to Rs 8.41 lakh. The 1.2 litre petrol model with manual transmission has fuel efficiency of 23.2 km.

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at BFL Infotech Ltd, C-9 Sector 3, Noida-201301. Published at 219, N D Tiwari Bhawan, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editor: T.Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 30074/09, Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

Bourses trade till 5 pm; indices soar
Glitch gives stocks an extended run

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, FEB. 24

The National Stock Exchange on Wednesday faced a major technical glitch, leading to a halt in trading for more than three hours from 11.40 am, as the bourse had faced connectivity issues with its server.

Surging volumes both in cash and futures & options segments before the monthly derivatives expiry on Thursday might also have contributed to the technical glitch, said market experts.

On Tuesday, the traded value of NSE's cash segment was Rs 75,979 crore against rival BSE's Rs 4,520 crore.

As traders had several open positions a day before the monthly equity derivatives expiry, the halting of trading led to a panic situation among the market participants as there was no communication either from the NSE or the market regulator as to when trading would be resumed while the BSE was functioning normally.

Around 1 pm the NSE spokesperson stated that the exchange's multiple telecom links with two service providers were having issues with their links, due to which there was an impact on NSE systems and that they were working on restoring the systems.

Finally, the market hours had to be extended till 5 pm to close the open positions in the market. The NSE finally

SEBI SEEKS NSE'S EXPLANATION FOR NOT MIGRATING TO DISASTER RECOVERY SITE

Mumbai, Feb. 24: Regulator Sebi on Wednesday asked the National Stock Exchange to explain why trading on the bourse did not migrate to a disaster recovery site after facing connectivity issues.

It also advised the NSE to carry out a detailed root cause analysis of the "trading halt" witnessed at the exchange.

The NSE should "explain the reasons for

reopened for trade at 3.30 pm after ironing out the glitches and trade continued till 5 pm uninterrupted.

The extended trading hours resulted in sharp gains for the market ahead of the futures & options contracts expiry.

The Fifty-50 closed 274 points, or 1.86 per cent, higher at 14,982 while the Sensex gained 1,030 points to close at 50,781.

"Due to technical glitch, the option buyers (especially 'put' option buyers) had to pay the price because we witnessed premiums falling drastically due to the loss of time. For call buyers (as well as put writers), it may not have impacted much because once the market resumed trading for a short period, market had a sharp upsurge which could have definitely benefitted them. But for other counter

party, prices just diminished rapidly," said Sameet Chavan, technical and derivatives analyst, Angel Broking.

Marketmen questioned the bourse's decision to halt trade, as only index feeds were not updating.

"The biggest question in this whole issue is why was the entire market shut just because index feeds were not refreshing? Feeds for underlying contracts were fine and so was order matching, so why shut down the entire market?" asked Jimeet Modi, CEO & founder, Samco Ventures.

"A similar issue in index feeds had happened a few months ago, but trading was not completely halted. Instead, trading went on with the glitch in index prices that day. Sebi and NSE need to quickly look at alternatives here," Modi said.

All pvt banks can now offer pension, other govt biz

New Delhi, Feb. 24:



Nirmala Sitharaman

The finance ministry on Wednesday allowed all private sector banks to participate in government-related business like collection of taxes pension payments and small savings schemes.

Currently, only a few large private sector banks are allowed to conduct government-related business.

"Embargo lifted on grant of Govt business to private banks. All banks can now participate. Private banks can now be equal partners in development of the Indian economy, furthering Govt's social sector initiatives, and enhancing customer convenience," finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in a tweet.

An official statement said, "with the lifting of the embargo, there is now no bar on RBI for authorisation of private sector banks (in addition to public sector banks) for government business, including government agency business. The government has conveyed its decision to RBI."

The government has already announced its intent to privatise two public sector lenders, other than IDBI Bank, in the Budget 2021-22.

—PTI

PLI for pharma, IT hardware unveiled

New Delhi, Feb. 24: The government on Wednesday extended the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme to the pharmaceutical and IT hardware sectors, offering over Rs 22,000 crore of sops to boost domestic manufacturing and create jobs.

The PLI scheme will help India export IT goods worth Rs 2.45 lakh crore and Rs 1.96 lakh crore of pharma products over 2022 to 2028, communications and IT minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said while briefing reporters on decisions taken by the Union Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The scheme provides manufacturers cash-backs of between 1 per cent and 4 per cent of additional sales of locally made goods over a certain period, with 2019-2020 as the base year.

While Rs 15,000 crore of incentives will be provided for the pharma sector over the period 2020-21 to 2028-29, Rs 7,325-crore PLI will be made available for domestic manufacturers of laptops, tablets, personal computers and servers for four years.

The focus of the scheme is to get global champions to India and to make national champions out of local manufacturers," Prasad said.

The scheme for the IT hardware sector envisages production of Rs 3.26 lakh crore and exports of Rs 2.45 lakh crore over the next four years, creating 1.80 lakh jobs.

The same for the phar-



Ravi Shankar Prasad

ma sector is expected to promote production of high-value products and increase the value addition in exports.

Incremental sales of Rs 2.94 lakh crore and incremental exports of Rs 1.96 lakh crore are estimated during six years from 2022-23 to 2027-28, creating 20,000 direct and 80,000 indirect jobs.

The PLI push for hi-tech IT hardware gadgets comes close on the heels of the Cabinet last week clearing a Rs 12,195-crore scheme for telecom equipment manufacturing.

An incentive scheme for mobile phone manufacturing was announced last year and has since garnered strong response from players despite the challenging times of the pandemic.

The PLI scheme for IT hardware announced on Wednesday will benefit five major global players and 10 domestic champions, an official statement said.

The PLI scheme is expected to enhance the development of the electronics ecosystem in India, at a time when global manufacturing is undergoing a shift and companies across the

world are looking to diversify their manufacturing locations to mitigate the risk involved in depending on a single market.

"India will be well-positioned as a global hub for Electronics System Design and Manufacturing (ESDM) on account of integration with global value chains, thereby becoming a destination for IT hardware exports," the statement said.

The scheme will usher additional investment in electronics manufacturing to the tune of Rs 2,700 crore.

The laptop and tablet demand in India is now largely met through imports, valued at Rs 29,470 crore and at Rs 2,870 crore, respectively.

The market for IT hardware is dominated by six-seven companies globally, which control about 70 per cent of the world market. These companies are able to exploit large economies of scale to compete in markets.

As many as 16 companies were approved under the first round of the PLI scheme for large scale manufacturing of mobile phones and specified electronic components.

Another scheme for promoting manufacturing of electronics components has also received 22 applications involving an investment of about Rs 13,500 crore in the areas of active, passive and electromechanical components, displays and mechanics for mobile phones.

—PTI

India, China reduced global income inequality: ILO

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 24

Economic convergence, driven mainly by China and India, has caused global labour income inequality to decline over the past 13 years, finds the International Labour Organisation.

According to the ILO, the global labour income distribution is lopsided. A worker in the top decile earns \$7,475 per month and one in the bottom decile earns \$7,475 per month and one in the bottom decile, just \$22. The highest-earning 10 per cent of workers worldwide received almost half, or 48.9 per cent, of total pay, the next decile received 20.1 per cent while the remaining 80 per cent workers received just 31 per cent.

Although global pay inequality levels are very high, it is important to note that they have decreased between 2004 and 2017. However, if India and China are excluded, a much slower reduction in labour income inequality over that period has been observed. Interestingly, these findings do not reflect a decrease in

DIFFERENT STROKES

- ▶ Global labour income distribution is lopsided. A worker in the top decile earns \$7,475 per month and one in the bottom decile, just \$22
- ▶ The highest-earning 10% of workers worldwide received 48.9% of

total pay while 80% workers got just 31%
▶ Neither India nor China registered a dip in inequality, rather their growth along with initial low income 'mechanically' reduced global inequality

inequality within India or China—indeed, the data suggest that neither country registered such a decline during 2004-17. Instead, the two countries have enjoyed very high growth rates, which, together with their initially low level of average labour income, have contributed "mechanically" via economic convergence to a global decrease in inequality.

The report also finds that despite the economic progress made in past decades, the number of people not in employment, education or training and workers in poverty are likely to increase in Asia-Pac, including India, due to the recent deceleration of GDP.

The share of youth who are not in employment, education or training in the region reached 24.3 per cent in 2019 compared with 23.9 per cent in 2018. The high rate is driven by South Asia, where opportunities for young women to go to university or work is limited. In South Asia nearly 161 million youth, including 81 million young women, have this status.

Further, the labour productivity growth rate, measured as output per worker, dropped from 4.3 per cent in 2018 to 3.9 per cent in 2019. This drop was driven mainly by countries in South-East Asia, the Pacific and

South Asia, including India and some of the Asean countries where GDP growth decelerated. Poor job quality and high rates of informality remain a challenge to be tackled by governments and employers' organisations. As many as 79.1 million workers in Asia and the Pacific, or 4.2 per cent, remained in extreme poverty in 2019, and 277 million workers or 14.6 per cent were still living in moderate poverty. While working poverty continues to decline, those who have escaped poverty remain highly vulnerable to adverse economic shocks and therefore face a significant risk of becoming poor again.

The report also found that the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) of India is not in line with international best practice. The main difference between the ILO modelled estimates of November 2019 and those of November 2018 is the revision of historical unemployment rates for India. There are considerable methodological differences here, it said.

91-year-old Suzuki chairman to bow out

RIVER DAVIS
FEB. 24

Suzuki Motor Corporation's 91-year-old chairman Osamu Suzuki is stepping down after leading an automaker for longer than anyone else in the industry.

Suzuki, who served as the Japanese carmaker's chief executive for 22 years and then as chairman for another two decades, will step down from his current role following a shareholders meeting in June, the company said in a statement on Wednesday. He will remain as a senior adviser.

With almost half a century at the helm, Suzuki is widely credited with turning the carmaker into what it is today: one of the largest small-vehicle manufacturers in the world. Instead of taking Japan's biggest auto giants like Toyota Motor Corp head on, Suzuki worked to grow the company by finding new markets around the world for its compact automobiles, building a dominant share in India during his first of two terms as



Osamu Suzuki

president from 1978 to 2000.

The nonagenarian also steered Suzuki into alliances with two of the world's biggest automakers, Volkswagen AG and General Motors Co, though those ultimately failed.

His departure comes one week after Honda Motor Co's chief executive Takahiro Hachigo said he would resign effective June, underscoring the churn the Japanese auto industry is currently undergoing. Japanese carmakers are beginning to recover from a tough pandemic-marred year, but even as demand revives, they're struggling to meet sales targets amid a global chip shortage.

—Bloomberg

ITALIAN GROUP TO ACQUIRE MODERN FOODS

Mumbai, Feb. 24: Private equity player Everstone Capital has sold Modern Foods, which it had taken over in early 2016 from Hindustan Unilever, to Italian baking major Grupo Bimbo for an undisclosed sum.

Everstone in a statement on Wednesday said that Modern Food Enterprises, which was held by its bread and bakery platform Everfoods Asia, was sold to Ready Roti India, the domestic subsidiary of the Italian major.

Grupo Bimbo is the largest baking company in the world, operating in 33 countries, including in India, and has a diversified portfolio of over 13,000 prod-



ucts and more than 100 brands.

Everfoods acquired Modern Foods from Hindustan Unilever in April 2016 and successfully relaunched the iconic bread brand in June 2017 nationwide.

HUL had bought Modern Foods from the government in 2000 as part of the divestment process and later decided to exit as part of its strategy to leave non-core sectors.

Modern Food Industries was set up by the government 1965 as Modern Bakeries in Madras and was renamed as Modern Food in 1982. When sold off to HUL it had 13 bread manufacturing units apart from fruit juice concentrates under brand name Rasika in New Delhi and aerated soft drinks Double Seven.

HUL took over 74 per cent of its equity in January 2000 for Rs 10.5 crore.

—PTI



SHORT TAKES

Murray knocked out by Gerasimov

Montpellier: Andy Murray was dumped out of the ATP event in Montpellier on Tuesday after suffering a straight-sets defeat in the opening round against Belarusian Egor Gerasimov.

Murray, who missed the Australian Open after testing positive for Covid-19, was playing his first ATP Tour event since last October. The 33-year-old Briton lost in the final of a second-tier Challenger tournament in Italy to Ilya Marchenko earlier this month. Murray fell a break behind in the seventh game against Gerasimov on Tuesday, but fought back to force a tie-break. He missed one opportunity to take the set in the breaker, but his opponent clinched it on his fourth set point. It was all one-way traffic in the second set, though, as Murray had to save a match point to avoid being on the wrong end of a bagel. The three-time Grand Slam champion is currently 121st in the world, having been beset by hip and groin injuries. — *AFP*

Gulia stuns world champ, in quarters

New Delhi: Jyoti Gulia (51kg) upstaged two-time world champion Nazym Kyzaibay of Kazakhstan to enter the quarterfinals along with two others but three Indians bowed out after second-round losses in the 72nd Strandja Memorial Boxing Tournament in Sofia, Bulgaria. Gulia, a 2017 world youth champion, prevailed 3-2 over Kyzaibay, a gold-winner from the 2014 and 2016 senior world championships. The Haryana-boxer is also a 2019 national champion. She will take on Romania's Perijoc Lacramioara in her quarterfinal bout on Thursday. Another Indian to enter the quarter-finals on the second day was Bhagyabati Kachari, who outclassed Russian opponent Anna Galimova 5-0 in the 75kg category. — *PTI*

Doncic clinches thriller for Dallas

Los Angeles: Luka Doncic nailed two clutch three-pointers, including the game winner with one second left, to lift the Dallas Mavericks to a thrilling 110-107 victory over the Boston Celtics on Tuesday in Texas.

Doncic hit consecutive go-ahead three-pointers in the final 30 seconds, draining a step-back three with 15 seconds left to make it 107-105. He repeated the feat by shooting a high arching 28-footer over two Celtics defenders with less than a second left to win it. The 21-year-old Slovenian finished with 31 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists as the Mavs earned their sixth win in seven games. — *AFP*

Bamford fires Leeds to 3-0 win

Leeds: Patrick Bamford strengthened his case for an England call-up ahead of the European Championship by scoring his 13th goal of the season in Leeds' 3-0 win over struggling Southampton in the Premier League on Tuesday. Bamford squeezed a low, angled shot into the corner from the edge of the area in the 47th minute to put Leeds ahead and move level with Harry Kane and Dominic Calvert-Lewin as the leading English scorers this campaign. Only Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah and Manchester United midfielder Bruno Fernandes have scored more. Left back Stuart Dallas provided an outside-of-the-foot finish at the end of a breakaway in the 78th for Leeds' second goal and Brazilian winger Raphinha wrapped up the victory with a curling free kick from 20 meters as Southampton's winless run extended to eight games. The margin of victory flattered Leeds. — *AFP*

Live on TV

CRICKET

India vs England: Third Test, Day 2 from 2.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

South Africa T20 Challenge: Warriors vs Knights from 5.55 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

FOOTBALL

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

Published by K. Sudhakar for and on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002. and Printed by him at BFL Infotech Limited, C - 9, Sector - III, Noida - 201301.
Editor - T. Venkatram Reddy,
RNI Registration number 57290/94, Price in Nepal - Nep. Rs. 20.00 per copy.

AXAR'S SIXER!

Patel takes 6/38 as India bowl England out for 112

Ahmedabad, Feb. 24: Axar Patel's devastating six-wicket haul bundled England out for 112 before Rohit Sharma's languid elegance shone through in an unbeaten half century that handed India the edge on the opening day of the day-night third Test here on Wednesday.

The combination of left-armed Patel and off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin exploited the turning Motera pitch at the newly-inaugurated Narendra Modi stadium to the full and England's first innings folded in just 48.4 overs after the visitors opted to bat.

Patel (21.4-6-38-6) grabbed his second five-for in his second Test while Ashwin (16-6-26-3) took three.

At stumps, India were 99 for 3 from 33 overs with Rohit batting on 57 off 82 balls. Ajinkya Rahane (1) was giving him company following skipper Virat Kohli's dismissal in the second last over of the day.

Kohli was dismissed for 27 off 58 balls by left-arm spinner Jack Leach (10-1-27-2).

India trailed by just 13 runs with seven first innings wickets in hand. Before this, it was a nightmare that unfolded for England with the 47-run stand for the third wicket being their best.

They lost their last six wickets in the second session. The last seven wickets yielded just 38 runs.

This was after Ishant Sharma, only the second India's first bowler after Kapil Dev to play in 100 Tests, fittingly took India's first wicket in the third over to open the floodgates for the hosts.

He was accorded a guard of honour by his teammates after being felicitated by President Ram Nath Kovind and Home Minister Amit Shah ahead of his landmark game.

In reply to a below par score, India negotiated the opening spells of much-vaunted England seamers James Anderson and Stuart Broad without any damage in the tricky twilight period. Rohit and Shubman Gill (11) did not face too much trouble seeing out the precarious phase.

Anderson and Broad did not get much the desired movement with the pink ball and the dew factor did not have a big role either.

But Jofra Archer (5-2-24-1) gave England the breakthrough in the 15th over with Gill, trying a pull shot from the off stump, top-edged for Zak Crawley to end the 33-run opening partner-



India's Axar Patel celebrates an England wicket on the opening day of the third Test in Ahmedabad on Wednesday. — *BCCI*

SCORECARD

England (1st Innings): Zak Crawley lbw b Patel 53; Dom Sibley c RG Sharma b I Sharma 0; Jonny Bairstow lbw b Patel 0; Joe Root lbw b Ashwin 17; Ben Stokes lbw b Patel 6; Ollie Pope b Ashwin 1; Ben Foakes b Patel 12; Jofra Archer b Patel 11; Jack Leach c Pujara b Ashwin 3; Stuart Broad c Bumrah b Patel 3; James Anderson (not out) 0. **Extras (b 1, lb 2, nb 3) 6. Total (in 48.4 overs) 112.**
FoW: 1-2, 2-27, 3-74, 4-80, 5-81, 6-81, 7-93, 8-98, 9-105.
Bowling: Ishant 5-1-26-1, Bumrah 6-3-19-0, Axar 21.4-6-38-6, Ashwin 16-6-26-3.
India: Rohit Sharma (batting) 57; Shubman Gill c Crawley b Archer 11; Cheteshwar Pujara lbw b Leach 0; Virat Kohli b Leach 27; Ajinkya Rahane (batting) 1. **Extras (b 2, w 1) 3. Total (for three wickets in 33 overs) 99.**
FoW: 1-33, 2-34, 3-98.
Bowling: Anderson 9-6-11-0, Broad 6-1-16-0, Archer 5-2-24-1, Leach 10-1-27-2, Stokes 3-0-19-0.

ship. India lost another wicket soon after in Cheteshwar Pujara with Leach getting him trapped LBW for a first-ball duck to reduce India to 34 for 2.

After that, Rohit and Virat shared 64 runs for the third wicket, rotating the strike and finding the gaps as well for regular boundaries. Kohli was dropped by Ollie Pope when he was on 24. — *PTI*



Spectators wait outside the Narendra Modi Stadium on Wednesday. — *BCCI*

Baroda hammer Hyderabad by 110 runs

Surat, Feb. 24: Baroda continued their winning streak in the Vijay Hazare Trophy after beating Hyderabad by 110 runs in their Elite Group A match here on Wednesday, courtesy Kedar Devdhar's hundred and impressive show by the bowlers.

This is Baroda's third win on the trot after they had defeated Goa and Tripura. Put into bat at the Lalbhai Contractor Stadium, Baroda rode on Devdhar's stroke-filled 131 to post a competitive 316/7 on the board, and then bundled out the opposition for 206, with Babashafi Pathan (3/37) doing the bulk of the dam-

age. Devdhar was back among the runs as he tore apart the Hyderabad attack with his 139-ball innings, hammering 14 boundaries and two maximums.

He and Smit Patel (35) added 79 runs for the first wicket. But Patel perished after being caught by B Sandeep off right-arm medium pacer Ajay Dev Goud (2/68). In-form Vishnu Solanki (15) also fell cheaply as Baroda slipped to 107/2. Then, Devdhar found an able ally in Krunal Pandya (55 off 50 balls; 7x4, 1x6) as the duo steadied the innings, adding 98 runs for the third wicket. But

Hyderabad pegged Baroda back as they removed Krunal and Ninnad Rathwa (0) in quick succession to leave them at 210/4.

Another defeat for Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu, the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy winners, suffered their second defeat in the tournament after losing by 11 runs to Madhya Pradesh. M Shahrukh Khan's attacking knock of 67 not out (77 balls, 3X4s, 5X6s) could not carry Tamil Nadu past the line in pursuit of 226-run target against Madhya Pradesh.

MP made 225, thanks to captain Parth Sahani's 46. — *PTI*

BRIEF SCORES

- Baroda 316/7 (Kedar Devdhar 131, Krunal Pandya 55; Ajay Dev Goud 2/68, CV Milind 2/74) beat Hyderabad 206 (Tilak Verma 47, Tanmay Agarwal 34; Babashafi Pathan 3/37, Lukman Meriwala 2/39) by 110 runs.
- Gujarat 336/7 (Het Patel 114, Dhruv Raval 83; Rana Dutta 5/74, Manisankar Muralisingh 1/68) beat Tripura 204 (Udian Bose 65, Hardik Patel 3/25, Ripal Patel 2/26) by 132 runs.
- Goa 210 (Darshan Misal 56, Amit Verma 46; Veer Pratap Singh 4/29, Sumit Ruikar 2/24) lost to Chhattisgarh 213/2 (Rishabh Tiwari 91 not out, Harpreet Singh Bhatia 56; Amit Verma 2/34) by eight wickets.
- Andhra 175 in 48.1 overs (Nitish Kumar Reddy 30; Siddarth Kaul 4/27, Barinder Sran 3/29) lost to Punjab 176 for 3 in 36 overs (Mandeep Singh 64 not out, Abhishek Sharma 32, Prabhsimran Singh 32) by seven wickets.
- Vidarbha 288 for 9 in 50 overs (S R Ramaswamy 82, Akshay Wadkar 76, Aditya Sarwate 37; Vikash Singh 4/65) lost to Jharkhand 294 for 7 in 49.3 overs (Kumar Deobrat 100, Utkarsh Singh 49; S R Dubey 3/59) by three wickets.
- Madhya Pradesh 225 all out in 48.2 overs (Aditya Shrivastava 46, Parth Sahani 46; M Mohammed 3/39) beat Tamil Nadu 211 all out in 49 overs (Shahrukh Khan 67 not out, Dinesh Karthik 37, B Indrajith 32) by 14 runs.



A vehicle rests on its side after a rollover accident involving golfer Tiger Woods in Rancho Palos Verdes, a suburb of Los Angeles. Woods suffered leg injuries. — *AP*

Tiger in hospital after major crash

Washington, Feb. 24: The amazing golf career of Tiger Woods, from two-year-old prodigy to his epic comeback 2019 Masters victory, was in jeopardy Tuesday after injuries suffered in a serious solo car crash.

The 45-year-old American, among the world's most famous athletes for the past quarter-century, underwent surgery for multiple leg injuries following the early morning wreck near Los Angeles.

It could mean the end of a groundbreaking career that has seen Woods win 15 major titles, three shy of the all-time record set by Jack Nicklaus, and 82 US PGA crowns, level with Sam Snead for the all-time mark.

Woods has faced plenty of prior troubles off the course, including multiple back and knee surgeries, the 2009 revelation of multiple affairs that led to an emotional public apology and divorce from wife Elin Nordegren plus a 2017 reckless driving incident.

Woods was recovering from 2017 back surgery when he was arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, his mug shot drawing worldwide attention. He said he had not realized how prescription drugs he was taking might interact and later pleaded guilty to reckless driving.

In the 1990s, Woods put



Tiger Woods

himself alongside pal and NBA star Michael Jordan as two of the world's most iconic sports stars and richest endorsement pitchmen, his fame going beyond golf lovers or sports fans.

Woods thrilled audiences with his skill as well as a winning charm and personality, global audiences inviting him into their homes through television every week, while at the same time keeping private details about his life.

Woods was the first black winner of the Masters in 1997, hugging his father Earl after his historic victory in course record fashion.

In 2019, Woods would come off the same green at Augusta National after winning his first major title since 2008 and hug his children, Sam and Charlie, in a bookend moment to signal a completed return from back surgery Woods hoped would allow him a normal life. It also gave him another chance at golfing glory.

— *AFP*

SAINA AND KASHYAP GET TOUGH ALL ENGLAND DRAW

New Delhi, Feb. 24: Reigning world champion PV Sindhu has got an easy passage to the quarterfinals but her compatriot Saina Nehwal was not as fortunate, drawing a tougher first-round opponent in the prestigious All England Championships. The tournament is scheduled to be played from March 17-21.

The 2021 All England Open will be the second tournament this year to offer ranking points to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics, after the Swiss Open.

Sindhu will kick off her campaign in the women's singles with a clash against Malaysia's Soniia Cheah. Provided she wins here initial rounds, Sindhu could face Japan's Akane Yamaguchi in the quarterfinals and arch-rival Carolina Marin in the semifinals. Marin has been given top billing for the tournament while Sindhu is seeded 5th.

London Olympics bronze medallist Saina has drawn the in-form Mia Blichfeldt of Denmark in her first round women's singles match.

Commonwealth Games gold medallist Parupalli Kashyap has also got a tough draw as he locks horns with world No. 1 Japanese Kento Momota in his opener. In other men's singles matches, Kidambi Srikanth is set to face the formidable Tommy Sugiarto of Indonesia in the opening round while world championships bronze medallist B Sai Praneeth will take on France's Toma Junior Popov.

— *PTI*

Giroud overhead kick gives Chelsea the edge

THE RESULTS

LAST 16, FIRST LEG

Atletico Madrid 0
Chelsea 1
(Giroud 68)

Lazio 1
(Correa 49)
Bayern Munich 4
(Lewandowski 9, Musiala 24, Sane 42, Acerbi 47-og)

avoid an early exit.

It also continues a worrying dip for Atletico, whose lead in La Liga is also under threat after one win in four matches.

Bayern rout Lazio

At Rome, Holders Bayern Munich brushed off their recent poor domestic form by throwing down a Champions League marker with an emphatic 4-1 win at Lazio to take a "huge step" towards the quarter-finals.

Robert Lewandowski gave Bayern an early lead before 17-year-old Jamal Musiala scored his first Champions League goal on only his fourth appearance in Europe. — *AFP*