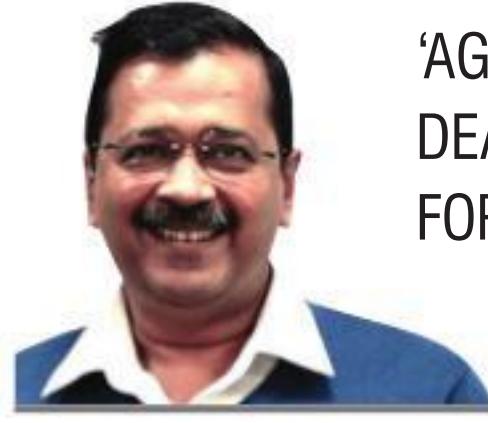




The Statesman

PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT, ALWAYS IN SESSION



'AGRI LAWS ARE
DEATH WARRANTS
FOR FARMERS'

P3



REMOVE ME IF YOU
CAN: OLI TO
PRACHANDA

P9



NEW YORK GOVERNOR
FACES 2ND SEXUAL
HARASSMENT CLAIM

P10



PCB CONCERNS
ABOUT VISA FOR
T20 WORLD CUP

P12

WEATHER

Mainly clear sky. Mist in the morning. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 31 and 13 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: NIL

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Max: 88% Min: 35%

TEMPERATURE

Max: 32.3°C (+7) Min: 15.6°C (+3)

SUN RISES

06:45 hrs 18:21 hrs

MOON RISES

20:36 hrs 08:50 hrs

THUMBNAILS



Voters wait for their turn to cast their ballot during Municipal By-polls at Shalimar Bagh area, in the capital on Sunday. SNS (P2)

Maharashtra minister quits: Maharashtra minister Sanjay Rathod, facing flak from the BJP over a woman's death in Pune, on Sunday resigned from the state cabinet, a day before the state legislature's budget session starts here. Shortly after Rathod announced that he had submitted his resignation to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, the latter said the resignation has been accepted. "There has been a lot of dirty politics over the issue of the woman's death," Rathod told reporters, adding he has quit so that the truth can come out. P4

Group claims responsibility for planting explosives-laden SUV: An organisation named Jaishul-Hind has claimed the responsibility for placing an explosives-laden SUV near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's house in south Mumbai, police said on Sunday. A senior police official said that all possible angles were being investigated in this connection. The outfit claimed the responsibility by posting a message on social messaging app Telegram.

Atmanirbhar Bharat a national spirit: Modi

SNS & PTI
NEW DELHI, 28 FEBRUARY



Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday stressed that Atmanirbhar Bharat is not just a government policy but also a national spirit, and said the mantra of self-reliant India is reaching villages of the country.

In his monthly *Mann Ki Baat* radio programme, Modi also called for a 100-day campaign to clean up all water bodies and prepare them for rain water harvesting before monsoon starts. Stressing the importance of collective responsibility towards water conservation, he said the Union Jal Shakti Ministry will soon initiate a 'Catch the rain' campaign with its main theme being 'catch the rain, where it falls, when it falls'.

Conveying greetings on the National Science Day, Modi said water has been crucial for the development

of humankind for centuries and people should understand their collective responsibility towards its conservation.

He said that in most parts of India, rainfall begins in May-June and asked 'can we right away start a 100-day campaign for the sake of cleaning up water sources around us and conserving rainwater'.

With this thought in mind, in a few days from now, 'Jal Shakti Abhiyan Catch the rain' is being initiated by the Jal Shakti Ministry, he said. "We shall commit ourselves to the task right now we shall get existing rainwater harvesting systems repaired, clean up lakes and ponds in villages, remove impediments in the way of water flowing into water sources; thus we shall be able to conserve rainwater to the maximum," he said.

Modi highlighted an asser-

tion made by a person who had written to him from Kolkata that the Atmanirbhar Bharat campaign is not just a government policy but also a national spirit, and said this was hundred percent correct.

When every person in the country takes pride in indigenous products and connects with the idea of self-reliance, Atmanirbhar Bharat doesn't just remain an economic campaign but becomes a national spirit, he said. "When we see fighter plane Tejas made in our own country doing acrobatics in the sky, when Made in India tanks, Made in India missiles increase our pride, when we see Made in India coaches in Metro trains in wealthy-advanced nations, when we see Made in India Corona vaccines reaching dozens of countries, then our heads are held high," Modi said.

Always told China that normal ties contingent on peace at border: FS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 FEBRUARY

India has always stressed in interactions with Chinese interlocutors that a normal bilateral relationship is contingent on peace and tranquility in the border areas, foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla said on Sunday.

Underlining that China is the second-largest economy in the world and India has a large trade profile with it, Shringla said clearly India has to continue to work on the economic relationship with the neighbouring country, but it has to be calibrated based on the progress on important issues that are critical to both countries politically.

Talking about the "recent disturbances" on the India-

Shringla said India has to continue to work on the economic relationship with China, but it has to be calibrated based on the progress on important issues critical to both countries

and as there is some forward movement in the resolution of some of the recent border friction points...obviously we have to see what else is required," he said.

"It is a very long border that we have with China and we are only talking about one small point on the border... We are trying to now see whether we can apply similar principles in sorting out some of the other areas which are in the Ladakh sector, some other sectors that we are talking about, and to see how else we can move forward on the issue of managing our long but contentious border with China in a manner that allows both countries to sort of maintain a level of semblance of normalcy," the foreign secretary said.

China border areas in Eastern Ladakh, Shringla, while speaking at a session of the Asia Economic Dialogue, said, "We in our interactions with our Chinese interlocutors have always made the point that a normal bilateral relationship is contingent upon peace and tranquility in the border areas."

"Now as we disengage

Woman stabbed to death during Delhi robbery bid, two arrested

NEW DELHI, 28 FEBRUARY

A 25-year-old woman was stabbed to death while resisting a chain-snatching bid in northwest Delhi's Adarsh Nagar area, police said on Sunday.

A senior police officer said the woman, Simran Kaur, was returning home from the market along with her two-year-old daughter and mother when the incident occurred around 9:30 pm on Saturday.

Police said they have arrested two men in connection with the incident.

The accused have been identified as Fardeen (19) and Aqibul (22), both residents of Jahangir Puri, they said, adding that Aqibul allegedly stabbed the woman during the snatching bid.

The incident occurred hardly 20 metres from the her house and there is a police post around 100 metres from the spot.

The accused stabbed the victim and fled, police said, adding that she was taken to a hospital where she was declared brought dead.

A CCTV footage of the incident went viral on social media.

In the video, the two women can be seen walking when a man chases them and tries to snatch the victim's chain from behind. Simran chases the man following which he falls on the road. Thereafter, he stands up, stabs her and flees from the spot.

Police said they received information that a woman had been stabbed by two men who were on a scooter. The victim was taken to Fortis Hospital in Shalimar Bagh where she succumbed to injuries, police said.

A case under section 302 (murder) of the Indian Penal Code was registered and investigation was taken up, police said. PTI (SEE P2)

Student-built satellites, Modi image, Gita ride into space on PSLV-C51

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SRINAGAR, 28 FEBRUARY



In the first dedicated mission of its commercial arm NSIL, ISRO on Sunday successfully launched Brazil's earth observation satellite Amazonia-1 and 18 co-passengers, including five built by students, onboard a PSLV rocket from the spaceport here.

The satellites were placed in precise orbits one after another after the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle PSLV-C51 lifted off at 10:24 a.m. from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SHAR), in the first mission this year for the Indian Space Research Organisation.

ISRO's tally of foreign satellites launched rose to 342 with today's mission.

har initiative and space sector reforms.

Of the five built by students, the SD-SAT is intended to study radiation levels among others, while UNITYsat, a three-in-one satellite built by universities, is for providing radio relay service and SindhuNetra developed by Bengaluru-based PES University would be used for identifying suspicious ships through satellite imaging, officials said.

Amazonia-1, a fully Brazil built satellite with a mission life of four years, is intended for providing remote sensing data to users for monitoring deforestation in the Amazon region and analysis of diversified agriculture across the Brazilian territory.

SKL said besides the picture of Prime Minister Modi, it was also sending

25,000 names on-board the SD-SAT.

"Congratulations to NSIL (NewSpace India Limited) and @isro on the success of the 1st dedicated commercial launch of PSLV-C51/Amazonia-1 Mission. This ushers in a new era of space reforms in the country," Modi tweeted.

The prime minister also congratulated Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro on the successful launch of Amazonia-1, and said this is a historic moment in space cooperation between the two countries.

Earlier, at the end of the 25.5 hour countdown, the four-stage 44.4 metre tall PSLV, a workhorse launch vehicle of ISRO in its 53rd mission, soared into a clear sky at the scheduled time of 10:24 am from the first launch pad here,

over 100 kms from Chennai.

"After a flight of about 17 minutes, the vehicle injected the Amazonia-1 into its intended orbit and in the succeeding 1 hour 38 minutes, all 18 co-passenger satellites successfully separated from the PSLV in a pre-determined sequence," the ISRO said.

Describing it as a special mission for the country, ISRO Chairman K Sivan said the agency guided the universities in building the satellites, adding it will enthuse industry and academic institutions to build their own satellites in future.

Sivan, also the secretary, Department of Space, said the mission was also special as the five satellites come under the newspace reforms announced by the Union gov-

ernment last year.

The Centre has decided to open up the space sector to private enterprises to carry out space activities like building rockets, satellites and providing launch services.

Sunday's mission was also the first dedicated launch by the New Space India Limited (NSIL), a PSU set up under the Department of Space in 2019, which undertook it under a commercial arrangement with Spaceflight Inc, a satellite ride-share and mission management provider based in Seattle, USA.

The co-passenger satellites placed in orbit include four from ISRO's Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACE) and 14 from NSIL, including 13 from the USA.

(SEE P2)

The co-passengers included Satish Dhawan Satellite (SD-SAT) nano satellite from Chennai-based Space Kidz India (SKI) which is engraved with a picture of Prime Minister Modi and also carried the Bhagavad Gita in a Secured Digital card format.

According to SKL, the picture of Modi has been engraved on the top panel of the spacecraft to show solidarity and gratitude for his Atma Nir-





He had stalled process of distributing land rights to 841 families in refugee colonies

GAUTAM DEB, TOURISM MINISTER, WEST BENGAL

ON HOW SMC BOARD CHAIRMAN ASOK BHATTACHARYA HAD ALLEGEDLY STOPPED THE PROCESS

MCD bypolls: Over 50 pc votes cast in five wards

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 28 FEBRUARY

More than 50 per cent voters cast their votes in the municipal corporation bypolls in five wards on Sunday, with the highest voting percentage recorded in Kalyanpuri and the lowest in Shalimar Bagh North, Election officials said.

The voting went smoothly except for a few instances of replacement of electronic voting machines in Chauhan Bangar and Kalyanpuri. None of the COVID-19 infected voters, 10 in Shalimar Bagh North and two in Kalyanpuri, turned up to cast their votes, they said.

As per official figures, 59.19 per cent voters were cast in Kalyanpuri, 55.95 per cent in Trilokpuri, 55.60 per cent in Chauhan Bangar, 44.58 per cent in Rohini-C, and 43.23 per cent in Shalimar Bagh North wards.

Total voting percentage in the five wards was 50.86 per cent.

The main contenders AAP, BJP and Congress asserted victory after voting.

Senior AAP leader Durgesh Pathak said he visited various polling booths in the wards and was confident of the party winning all five seats. Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta reflected similar sentiment, asserting that people rejected the Kejriwal model and voted for the BJP.

The Delhi Congress in a statement said that it expected favourable results in view of support witnessed for the party in the wards.



The Congress filed a complaint with the Delhi Chief Electoral officer accusing AAP volunteers of seeking votes for party candidates at the time of voting.

Pathak rejected the charge as "baseless".

Officials said two sets of EVMs each in Chauhan Bangar and Kalyanpuri were replaced during voting.

A turnout of about 42 per cent was recorded in the first eight hours of voting for the bypolls to five municipal wards, the first electoral exercise being conducted in the national capital amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The results of these by-elections are likely to have an impact on the big-ticket 2022 Delhi civic polls.

Polling began at 7:30 am amid tight security arrangements, and was scheduled to end at 5:30 pm.

By 3:30 pm, the overall turnout across the five wards was 42.91 per cent, with Kalyanpuri ward recording the maximum 50.56 per cent, as per the data shared by a

senior official of the State Election Commission in Delhi said.

In Kalyanpuri ward in east Delhi, two of the seven polling locations are in "critical" category. A total of 16 polling locations out of the total 44 have been kept in this category, as per official data.

According to the State Election Commission, around 2.42 lakh people are eligible to cast their votes in two wards under the North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) and three wards under the East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC).

The results for the bypolls will be announced on March 3, officials said, adding that there are 327 polling stations and 26 candidates in the fray.

The officials said COVID-19 patients can vote during the last hour of polling as per the government guidelines.

Thermal guns are being used to measure temperature of all voters, and masks and sanitiser bottles being provided at polling stations, another official said.

The main candidates in the Kalyanpuri ward bye-elections are Dhirendra from the AAP, Siyaram Kanodia from the BJP and Dharmpal Maura from the Congress.

Vijay Kumar from the AAP, Om Prakash Gugarwal from the BJP and Bal Kishan from the Congress are contesting from Trilokpuri ward.

In Chauhan Bangar, former AAP MLA Haji Ishraq Khan is pitted against Congress' Chaudhary Zubair Ahmad and BJP's Nazir Ansari.

These three wards are under the East Delhi Municipal Corporation. The AAP held these wards. The bypolls were necessitated after sitting councillors contested the assembly polls last year and became MLAs.

In Shalimar Bagh North ward, which fell vacant after the death of the BJP councilor, the contest is between the saffron party's Surbhi Jaju, AAP's Sunita Mishra and Congress' Mamata.

The BJP had retained all three corporations in the 2017 civic polls with the AAP finishing a distant second. While the BJP had swept the polls by winning 181 seats, AAP had won 48 and Congress was on third spot in the tally with 30 seats in its kitty.

In May 2016, bypolls were held for 13 municipal wards, with the AAP picking up five seats, followed by Congress with four and the BJP with three seats, one ward picked up by an independent candidate.

The voters' turnout in 2016 bypolls was 45.90 per cent, as per data shared by the State Election Commission.

AAP, BJP, Cong exude confidence of victory

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 FEBRUARY

Rivals AAP, BJP and Congress exuded confidence of victory in the bypolls for five municipal wards after voting concluded on Sunday evening.

Senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and party in-charge for MCD (municipal corporations) affairs Durgesh Pathak said he visited polling booths in various wards and was confident of winning all wards.

"We will win all the five wards. I was in the field during voting and can say with confidence we are going to win," Pathak stated. Delhi Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president Adesh Gupta, who visited Kalyanpuri, Shalimar Bagh (north) and Trilokpuriwars, too claimed that the saffron party would bag the wards.

"The BJP will win with big margins... People of Delhi have completely rejected the development model of Kejriwal government. Seeing their enthusiasm towards the BJP, it will not be too early to say that the party (BJP) candidates have already won the by-elections," Gupta asserted.

He thanked the people for supporting the BJP.

Meanwhile, the Delhi Congress said that it will not only win the bypolls but also the civic body polls due in 2022.

"We won the hearts of the people in the semi-final (bypolls) and will also win the final in 2022," it said. The five yearly elections for 272 wards in three municipal corporations are due in 2022. "The support of the people in the five wards is sure to turn the results in the favour of the party (Congress) candidates," it said.

Next phase of COVID-19 vaccination to begin at 192 health facilities on Monday



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 FEBRUARY

Appointment for vaccination can be booked through the CO-WIN 2.0 portal.

On the launch day on March 1, the online slots for booking would be available from 12 noon to 3 PM. The slots will be available for booking between 9 AM to 3 PM from Tuesday onwards, officials said.

The mobile number cannot be used for making more than four registrations, they said.

People opting for vaccination at private hospitals will have to pay up to Rs 250 per dose, including Rs 100 service charge per dose, they said.

The maximum and minimum temperatures are expected to be around 31 and 13 degrees Celsius respectively.

Delhi's air quality was in the poor category throughout the day with the air quality index (AQI) recorded at 211, the real-time data of the Central Pollution Control Board showed.

According to the Ministry of Earth Sciences' System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR), high-surface wind speed, higher temperature and higher boundary layer heights were influencing AQI positively. "Hence, AQI is forecasted to be in moderate to poor category in the next two days," it said.

Delhi records 2nd highest mean max temp for Feb since 1901

NEW DELHI, 28 FEBRUARY

Delhi has recorded mean maximum temperature of 27.9 degrees Celsius in February, the second highest recorded for the month in the last 120 years, the Indian Meteorological Department said on Sunday.

The highest mean maximum temperature recorded for February in Delhi was 29.7 degrees Celsius in 2006, the IMD officials said.

On Sunday, a minimum temperature of 15.6 degrees Celsius, three notches above the season's average, was recorded, while the maximum temperature was 32.3 degrees Celsius, the Met Department said.

A mobile number cannot be used for making more than four registrations, they said.

People opting for vaccination at private hospitals will have to pay up to Rs 250 per dose, including Rs 100 service charge per dose, they said.

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Classified

LEGAL NOTICES

IN THE COURT OF MS. PREETI PAREWA ACJ/CCJ/ARC Room No. 03, Patiala House Courts, New Delhi Petition No. SC-1221 Smt. Jyoti Bhagat & Ors. Versus State NCT of Delhi.

(Petitioner) FOR SUCCESSION CERTIFICATE UNDER INDIAN SUCCESSION ACT, 1925.

To, All concerned.

Whereas in the abovenoted petition, the applicant/petitioner has applied for Succession Certificate under Section 32 of the Indian Succession Act, 1925 in respect of the debt and securities any person having a claim against or an interest in the Estate of the deceased Sanjay Kumar Singh, s/o Gopal Prasad Singh died on Dt. 16-10-2020 at Medanta, The Medicity Hospital, Gurugram. Are required to send particulars thereof in writing to the undersigned Court to be standing in the name of deceased.

Whereas the 22-04-2021 at 10 (Ten) O'Clock in the forenoon has been fixed for hearing and the application notice is hereby given to all concerned.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court this 24-02-2021.

ACJ/CCJ/ARC Patiala House Courts, New Delhi

Seal of the Court

rs=district_notice&district=gurugram.
Dated, this day of 25-02-2021.

Civil Judge (Junior Division), Gurugram

Seal of the Court

IN THE COURT OF PRINCIPAL JUDGE Family Court, Ghaziabad. Format No. 1A Service of Summon/Notice in Newspaper through Anenther (Order 5, Rule 10 CPC) Pending Officer: Smt. Anita Rai (HJS) Case No. 1901/2020

Abhishek Tripathi, A/c 35 Years, s/o Sh. Anirudh Tripathi, r/o P-1203, Super Tech Colony, Indirapuram, Ghaziabad, UP.

— Petitioner versus

Vandan Tripathi, w/o Abhishek Tripathi, s/o Sh. Anirudh Tripathi, J-141, Senior Citizen Colony, Sector Omega-1, Greater Noida.

— Respondent

Mr. Abhishek Tripathi has filed this suit against you under Section 13(1)(a) (ib) HMA. You are hereby informed that you are summoned to appear in person or through counsel before this Hon'ble Court on above date, the Court will pass ex parte order against you.

This order has been issued by me for hearing of the application and notice is hereby given to general public that if any other relatives/friends, kinsman or well wisher of the aforesaid minor/desire to adopt be apointed declare as guardian of the person

and property of th said minor/Lunacy of desire to oppose the application of the petitioner aforesaid he/she should enter appearance in this court on the aforesaid date and be prepared to adduce on that day and documentary or oral evidence which may be adduced in support of his/her claim to such adoption of declaration of th in support his/her opposition to the application of the petitioner aforesaid

Given under my hand and the Seal of this Court on this 15-10-2020.

Addl. District Judge-02 Dwarka Courts, New Delhi.

Seal of the Court

IN THE COURT OF SH. HARGURVARINDER SINGH Addl. District Judge-02 Room No. 605, 6th Floor, Dwarka Courts, New Delhi. PC No. 6/2021 Mrs. Jyoti Chaudhary —Petitioner Versus The State/NCT of Delhi and Ors.

—Respondent CITATION UNDER GUARDSHIP AND WARDS ACT, 1890

Whereas a petition under Section 7, 8, & 9 of the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1890 has been filed by Petitioner Mrs. Jyoti Chaudhary, Real Estate Agent Sh. Parwan Kumar, r/o H. No. 3/364, Near Holy Choky Village-Bijwasan, New Delhi-110061, for grant of Permission to sell Two-Third share of the minor daughters-Ms. Aahna Chaudhary aged (about 10 years), and Ms. Aayra Chaudhary (aged about 3 years) after death of her Husband who died on 04-02-2016, with the two minor daughters i.e., Ms. Aahna Chaudhary and Ms. Aayra Chaudhary properties bearing:

1. Khara No. 31/20, measuring 62.5 sq. Yards, Firm Road, Dr. Bhim Rao Ambekar Colony, situated at Village Bijwasan, New Delhi.

The 04-02-2021 has been fixed for hearing of the application and notice is hereby given to general public that if any other relatives/friends, kinsman or well wisher of the aforesaid minor/desire to adopt be apointed declare as guardian of the person

and property of th said minor/Lunacy of desire to oppose the application of the petitioner aforesaid he/she should enter appearance in this court on the aforesaid date and be prepared to adduce on that day and documentary or oral evidence which may be adduced in support of his/her claim to such adoption of declaration of th in support his/her opposition to the application of the petitioner aforesaid

Given under my hand and the Seal of this Court on this 23-02-2021.

Addl. District Judge-02 Dwarka Courts, New Delhi.

New Delhi, Whereas the 24-04-2021 has been fixed for hearing of the case. Notice is hereby given that any person having any interest in the Administration of the Estate of the said deceased may if he/she desires to appear in this court on the said 24-04-2021 and see the proceedings before the Grant of Probate (or for Letter of Administration).

Given under my hand and the Seal of this Court on this 23-02-2021.

Addl. District Judge-02 Dwarka Courts, New Delhi.

Seal of the Court

IN THE COURT OF SH. HARGURVARINDER SINGH Addl. District Judge-02 Room No. 605, 6th Floor, Dwarka Courts, New Delhi. PC No. 17/2019 Amit Gaikot —Petitioner Versus State & Ors.

CITATION UNDER INDIAN SUCCESSION ACT, 1925

Whereas an application under Section 276 of the Indian Succession Act, 1925, for Grant of Probate/Letters of Administration to the estate of Late Sh. Narayan Singh Gahlot, /o Late Sh. Karan Singh, who died on 12-07-1977 has been made by Sri Amit Gaikot, s/o Rambabu Singh Rathore, R/o 7/4, Block N-1, L-1, Sangam Vihar, Delhi in r/o the immovable property annexed with will dated 09-02-2017 bearing No. as under:

1. House No. 300 measuring 120 sq. yards situated in Kakola Housing Complex.

2. House No. RZ-227-A measuring 25 sq. yards with Khasra No. 10/14 situated in Gali No. 25 at Nand Vihar Kakola, Sector-16, Dwarka, Delhi.

The 04-02-2021 has been fixed for hearing of the case. Notice is hereby given that any person having any interest in the Administration of the Estate of the said deceased may if he/she desires to appear in this court on the said 04-02-2021 and see the proceedings before the Grant of Probate (or for Letter of Administration).

Given under my hand and the Seal of this Court on this 23-02-2021.

Addl. District Judge-02 Dwarka

FLYING A FIGHTER



A journalist who attended the "Aero India" show at Bengaluru had this interesting anecdote to narrate. An ace fighter pilot posted at the Yelahanka Airbase got married recently. His parents-in-law, who hail from Haryana, visited the couple for the first time just when the air show was on. They expressed their desire to watch the air show since their son-in-law was also to fly a fighter plane. He took off with a thunder during the air show and carried out a series of breath-taking combat manoeuvres. All the spectators had a nail-biting experience. After the display, the pilot landed and went straight to his wife and in-laws at the spectators' stands. In keeping with the traditions, he touched the feet of his father-in-law and got his blessings. When he touched the feet of his mother-in-law, she patted him on the back and said, "Mehnat karte raho beta, aa jayegaa jahaaz ek din kabuu mein (keep working hard son, you will be able to control the plane one day)." The father-in-law then gave him his piece of mind, "Ek baat aur bhi sun le, jahaaz ko thoda dheere aur thora neeche chalaya kar (listen one more thing, fly the aircraft a little slow and a little low)." The pilot just looked at his wife and smiled.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent tweet on the World Radio Day must have made many to look for their radio sets. The TVs and their colourful broadcasts have made people forget if they ever had radios or transistors with them. But what the radios meant in one's life a few decades ago, one can recall only with some emotion. There were only medium-wave and short-wave broadcasts before the FM channels came in their variety. For the adults and senior citizens, the prime use of the radio was for news bulletins, mostly on the home broadcaster AIR's different stations. The news meant Melville de Mellow, Surajit Sen and Latika Ratnam in English, and Devki Nandan Pandey and Indu Wahi in Hindi. Many more newscasters came later and became household names, like the legends before them. The regime followed in most homes, especially in government officials' houses, was of pin drop silence during the news broadcasts. The newscasters were so authoritative in their styles that every word was believed. The news content mostly originated from the government and comprised official accounts of various happenings, with little mention of lighter subjects or weather. But one was sure that if one heard the 9 pm English bulletin, or the morning 8 am, or the 2 pm bulletin, one could not miss out on any major news development. Life was comparatively easy and one could manage with these, and a



Image: Twitter/@sudarsansand

couple of other bulletins. The Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi bulletins too were popular and could supplement one's news intake. Urdu Majlis before the Urdu bulletin in the morning had a ghazal, which was meant to touch one's heart as well as mind. If there was a major newsbreak, the national broadcaster would interrupt a programme to announce it.

Nehruji's death was announced by Vividh Bharati, AIR's commercial service, by interrupting SD Burman's famous Bandini song "Mat ro mata laal tere bahutere" on a hot afternoon on 27 May, 1964. Those days a well-read person was also known by the number of radio programmes he kept track of. One knew what preceded a news bulletin and

what followed it. Radio Jalandhar's "Sabras" at 1 pm was unbeatable for its choice of sombre Hindi songs. "Hawa Mahal," a daily short play at night, was once very popular on Vividh Bharati. "Lehren" on Delhi A on Sunday mornings was an extremely popular short comedy Hindi play which could keep anybody laughing non-stop. The serious

plays of love and romance with historical or literary origin, were broadcast mostly on Delhi A at night, with prior publicity. There were plays which were broadcast on the same day every year, and one could predict them. On 15 August, there was always a play on Bahadur Shah Zafar's role in the first War of Independence, with Dina Nath

Zutshi playing the lead role. There were highly popular radio actors like Om Shivpuri, Sudha Shivpuri, Dinanath, Madhu Malti and Gopal Kaul. On the eve of Christmas, a Hindi play based on O Henry's short story "The Gift of the Magi" was sure to be played. It was a tragic story of a poor young man and his wife, who sell their precious possessions to buy a suitable Christmas-eve gift for the other. In spite of being broadcast on the radio year after year late at night, it could make any one turn to tears anytime. "Dadi Ma jaagi" (story of a woman coming out of coma after years) and "Neeli Chhatri" (a suspense thriller with a Delhi monument location) were other popular plays. Some of the plays on love and relationships could match even the best movies, and they sometimes ran in a series. There were incredible fan mails for some voices and an announcer could be taken off from a popular programme to stop being harassed. For small children, 10 am on Sundays on Delhi A was the time for a special programme. Till AIR's commercial service Vividh Bharati came, its model Radio Ceylon was a hot favourite. Every morning, it started with just uttering the name of legendary KL Saigal, and playing one of his songs. Radio Ceylon's Binaca Geet Mala on Wednesday nights played top of the chart songs—and keeping up with its selection meant a special status!

COLA MAGIC

Today, one has a range of cold drink brands to choose from. Whether it's fruit juices (claiming to be real and unadulterated) or a variety of aerated and cola drinks — from cans to bottles of varying sizes, one can have it all. In fact, for today's generation, consuming a cold drink is akin to drinking

water a generation back. During a discussion on the impact of cold drinks, which go hand-in-hand with fast food, an old-timer recalled the days when only two brands were available: Coca Cola and Fanta. They came in glass bottles that had to be returned to the shopkeeper, who would insist on a refundable deposit if the bottle was being taken

away. Also, the metal caps needed a bottle-opener that few homes had and would be borrowed from a neighbour, who had one. And so, getting home a bottle of cold drink was a big affair and it would generally be shared by the entire family. The elderly gentleman then chuckled as he narrated how, as a young child of about five or

six years of age, he believed a Coke or Fanta bottle would on its own fill up with the relevant drink. This, he thought, was what happened at the shopkeeper's end. And so, finding an empty bottle of Coca Cola, after some guests had been entertained at home, he proceeded to fill it up with tap water. He shook the bottle in the hope that the

water would turn into coke. While the colour of the "drink" did not change, it still smelt of Coca Cola and so the little boy merrily drank the bottle's contents imagining it to be coke!

TAILPIECE

Why have we become so careless in dealing with Covid while people con-

tinued to die in large numbers due to the virus worldwide, including India?" wondered a friend who himself took a month to recover from the infection after Diwali.

Contributed by:
Deepak Razdan,
Ashok Tuteja and
Asha Ramachandran

India

Modi govt's agri laws 'death warrant' for farmers: Kejriwal

CM joins a mega farmers rally in West UP, says 250 farmers have lost their lives over the last 95 days of their protests on Delhi's borders against farm laws but the Centre has done nothing about it

SNS & PTI
MEERUT, 28 FEBRUARY

Delhi chief minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)'s national convener Arvind Kejriwal today again termed the Narendra Modi government's controversial farm laws as a "death warrant" for farmers, charging that they would take away their land and reduce them to labourers on their own farms.

Addressing his first "Kisan Mahapanchayat" organised by his party here in Western Uttar Pradesh adjoining Delhi against the Centre's three new agriculture laws, Kejriwal said farmers have been continuously agitating in the cold for months because their farms will be taken over by capitalists.

The Delhi CM said that farmers have been protesting along with women and children on the borders of the national capital for 95 days against the BJP-led central government's contentious farm laws and that 250 farmers have lost their lives during these protests, but the government has done nothing about it. He said farmers have been continuing their agitation as this is a "do-or-die situation" for them.

The AAP supremo charged that the BJP cheated the farmers after coming to power.

Today, farmers are being tortured all over the country,



Kejriwal alleged, referring to the protests. Water cannons are being used against them and iron nails are studded on roads to restrict their movement, he said.

Stressing that farmers are not enemies of the country, he accused the Modi government of surpassing the colonial British in oppressing people.

Kejriwal also alleged that the protesting farmers were being falsely prosecuted. "These people (government) were behind the incident at the Red Fort. All the people coming to me said that these

people deliberately gave way to the farmers so that they move towards the Red Fort. Those who hoisted the flag were their own workers," he alleged. Thousands of protesting farmers clashed with the Delhi police in the national capital on January 26 during a tractor parade held to highlight their demands.

Kejriwal told the massive gathering that farmers could be anything but traitors, but the BJP government was prosecuting them for alleged sedition and calling them "terrorists".

He said that in its 2014

general election manifesto, the BJP had said it would implement the Swaminathan Commission report and MSP (minimum support price) at 50 per cent more than actual cost of production would be given to farmers. But after forming the government, the party gave an affidavit to the Supreme Court saying it was not possible to increase MSP as it would distort the market.

Kejriwal said, "All the governments in last 70 years have cheated farmers who only want to get paid for their produce. In every party's manifesto, promises are made to

the people of the state by their unruly conduct and behaviour in the Vidhan Sabha. Congress leaders even misbehaved with the Governor which shows that these leaders have little respect for democratic values, he alleged.

All the four parliamentary seats were won by the BJP candidates by a record margin. The BJP candidates also won both the seats in the bye-elections to the state assembly, he added.

He said over Rs 203 crore had been spent on various developmental projects in Doon assembly constituency in the last three years tenure of the present state government and work was also in progress on projects worth Rs 240 crore.

He further stated that soon after assuming office, the very first decision of the state Cabinet was aimed at welfare of the common man by lowering the age limit for availing old age pension without any income limit from 80 years to 70 years.

The second decision made in the cabinet was to establish cow sanctuaries in the state so that cows were not left stray. In addition, a decision was also taken to levy a cess of Rs 2 per bottle of liquor to provide financial assistance to

the people of the state by their unruly conduct and behaviour in the Vidhan Sabha.

The Chief Minister said the present BJP government successfully brought back home about 2.50 lakh people of the state stranded in different parts of the country.

Congress leaders even opposed this move of the state government alleging that this would spread Corona in the state. These were the same Congress leaders who were initially accusing the government for not being serious to bring back the stranded people, he added.

He said that there were only 50 ventilators in the state a year ago but today the state had over 600 ventilators.

"Not even a single PPE kit was prepared in the country but today over 6 lakh PPE kits were being manufactured daily in the country. The hydroxychloroquine manufactured in the state is even supplied to several countries and all this was possible due to the timely assistance provided by the Centre Government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi," he said. Thakur said Congress leaders had put to shame

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We have not entered politics for power but to take India to the pinnacle of glory

BJP NATIONAL PRESIDENT J P NADDA

CLAIMING THAT THE BJP HAS NEVER SEEN A DOWNFALL

THUMBNAILS



Lok Jan Shakti Party president Chirag Paswan addresses party meeting in Patna on Sunday.

Two drug peddlers held: Two alleged drug peddlers were arrested on Sunday at two different places in Jammu and Reasi districts of Jammu and Kashmir after they were found in possession of contraband, police said. Vishal Sharma was riding a motorcycle when he was stopped by police at a checkpoint in the Bakshi Nagar area of Jammu city.

Bus overturns in Jammu: An over-speeding bus turned turtle here on Sunday crushing to death two people who were on a two-wheeler, police said. The bus, coming from Narwal towards Sidhra, overturned at a curve and hit the two-wheeler, killing two of its riders, they said. One person travelling in the bus was also injured, driver escaped unhurt.

Cong facing uphill task in poll-bound states

Cong is beset with ally troubles in Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu & Puducherry

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 FEBRUARY

The Congress is hoping to benefit from the anti-incumbency factor as well as the public protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act and agrarian laws in the upcoming round of Assembly polls, but still faces an uphill task in the coming days.

Barring Kerala, where the party feels it is poised to defeat the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF), the Congress is beset with ally troubles in all other poll-bound states—Assam, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu—and the Union Territory of Puducherry.

In West Bengal, the party's seat-sharing talks with the newly formed Indian Secular Front (ISF) are still underway with the Left-Congress alliance keen to have the fledgling party on board to pocket some of the 30 percent Muslim votes in the state.

In Assam too, the party is yet to finalise the agreement with Badruddin Ajmal's AIUDE, its main ally in the polls.

In Tamil Nadu, the Congress is banking fully on DMK to dethrone the incumbent AIADMK, while in Puducherry the grand old party is left

with hardly any core strength after the recent fall of the government to face an aggressive BJP, which is leaving no stone unturned to make inroads in the eastern and southern belts.

Though seat-sharing talks have started, the Congress is demanding over 50 seats this time which the DMK is reluctant to give.

Sources say that DMK is citing the Congress' poor performance in recent polls as well as in the 2016 assembly elections when it won just eight seats out of the 41 it contested.

Winning at least one state full steam is key to the revival of the sagging morale of Congress workers and the credibility of Rahul Gandhi as the numero uno in the organisation, observers say.

Only yesterday, top Congress dissenters expressed lack of confidence in Rahul Gandhi's leadership when they said in Jammu that the party was weakening and they had taken upon themselves the responsibility of rebuilding it.

Rahul Gandhi and his strategists hope to wrest Tamil Nadu and Kerala as power switches sides in these states every five years. They also believe they can upset the

incumbent BJP in Assam. That explains why Congress has announced "mission 100" in Assam which has 126 assembly seats. But this time, it does not have a stalwart like former chief minister Tarun Gogoi who passed away in November last year.

BJP leader and Assam minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has, however, dared the Congress saying, "A Congress tsunami can only come in Bangladesh".

The grand old party also faces a major challenge in West Bengal where the TMC and the BJP having long launched their poll slogans, while the Left and Congress are still dithering on their joint strategy.

The eight-phase elections in West Bengal are likely to witness a keen contest between the TMC and the BJP, with the Left parties seeking to regain control after allying with the Congress.

In 2016 Assembly polls in Bengal, the Congress-Left alliance bagged 38 percent votes, seven percent less than TMC. But in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP emerged as the main rival to Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress and the combined vote share of the Congress and the Left plummeted to 15

percent.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's personal push in all the poll-bound states is making the road to victory even more rugged for the Congress.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has already started a high-pitched campaign in the southern states and has also toured Assam. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra is also set to join the party's campaign in Assam on Monday and Tuesday, where she is likely to address smaller meetings as well as a bigrally in Tezpur on 2 March.

Rahul Gandhi's recent remarks in Kerala about "South Indians being deeply interested in issues unlike North Indians" are being used by the BJP to spin an anti-Congress narrative.

The grand old party is attempting damage control by saying Gandhi was talking about the need for people to debate national issues and not superficial matters.

With elections announced and seat-sharing details in poll-bound states yet to be disclosed, it remains to be seen how big the turf the Congress gets to fight on as it struggles to retain its pan-India electoral footprint, having lost governments in MP, Karnataka and Puducherry.

Azad praises PM Modi for being 'frank' about his past as 'tea-seller'

JAMMU, 28 FEBRUARY,

A day after accusing the Congress leadership of having weakened the party, senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad on Sunday described Narendra Modi as a "very grounded person" and said that despite becoming the Prime Minister he hasn't forgotten his roots and proudly calls himself a "chail-wala".

Addressing members of the Gujarati community at an event in here, Azad said, "People must learn from Narendra Modi, who despite becoming the Prime Minister, hasn't forgotten his roots. He proudly calls himself a 'chail-wala'. Though I have serious political differences with him, the PM is a very grounded person."

The remarks came days after PM Narendra Modi bid a tearful farewell to Azad on his retirement from Rajya Sabha. Modi broke down as he recalled Azad's help and efforts to bring back people from Gujarat stuck in Kashmir during a terror attack in 2007.

Local Congress leadership is in a state of confusion after the Saturday's mini-conclave of Congress dissenters (G23) here that was virtually against Sonia Gandhi and Rahul.

BJP will form next government in Bengal: Shivraj Singh Chouhan

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 28 FEBRUARY

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Sunday said that BJP will form the next government in West Bengal.

He came here to take part in the Parivartan Yatra. In the morning he offered puja at Kalighat temple.

Chouhan is confident that the BJP would clinch a 'spectacular' victory in the upcoming West Bengal Assembly polls and come to power in the state as people have now risen against the 'misgovernance' of the Mamata Banerjee-led dispensation.

"There is wave of changes in West Bengal. The Trinamul Congress government did not let farmers and the poor get any benefit from the Centre's policies. There is violence and corruption in the state. First it was the communists and the Congress who ruined Bengal and now it is done by the TMC," he said.

Chouhan added that he will take part in the three Parivartan Yatras in West Bengal. "This is a holy land where great men such as Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda were born. I came to Kolkata to take part in the Parivartan rally. I will address three public



meetings."

The Election Commission on Friday announced eight-phase polling in West Bengal from March 27 to April 29. "The Assembly polls have been announced in West Bengal. A BJP wave is prevailing here. Mamata didi is frightened and furious too," he said.

Chouhan added: "That is why Parivartan rallies are being attacked and BJP workers are being killed. But their sacrifice won't go in vain. West Bengal has risen against Mamata didi's misgovernance, goondaisim, corruption and loot." He said the BJP is going to get spectacular success in West Bengal and form a government.

"There is so much violence in the state. Till now 130 BJP workers have sacrificed their lives and their sacrifices will not go in vain. The method of the TMC is todo maro aur kato," he said.

Maharashtra minister linked to woman's death resigns

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 28 FEBRUARY



and video clips with her went viral on social media.

BJP welcomes resignation: The BJP on Sunday welcomed the resignation of Sanjay Rathod. Talking about Rathod's resignation, state BJP chief Chandrakant Patil said, "It was due to the constant pressure of the people of Maharashtra and the workers of the BJP that the chief minister had to ultimately yield."

He said he was glad that the chief minister showed courage in removing Rathod from the cabinet.

Patil said he hoped that NCP chief Sharad Pawar would also take a similar decision regarding another minister Dhananjay Munde, accused of rape by a Mumbai-based woman, who later withdrew her complaint.

On Saturday, Patil had said that the BJP will not allow the budget session of the state legislature, which begins on Monday, to function smoothly if the CM does not remove Rathod from the cabinet by Monday.

The BJP has accused Rathod of having links with the woman after his purported photographs, audio

"Attempts were made to

WHITEWASHED



Locals climb up a snow-covered mountain after fresh snowfall at the ski resort of Gulmarg on Sunday.

AGENCIES

Mehbooba accuses Centre of crushing J&K economy

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
JAMMU, 28 FEBRUARY

of our coming generations," she said.

Mehbooba advocated an unrelenting peaceful struggle for the restoration of democratic and constitutional rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

She said that people of Kashmir should not let despair decide their destiny but rather strengthen their resolve, unify their ranks and articulate their pain vociferously. Referring to the fact that more youngsters were taking to gun, she emphasised that gun is no solution to any problem and that we should always keep peaceful means as our lodestar and not lose sight of the fact that there are elements who wish to bracket us as violent and extremist so as to delegitimise our aspirations and our struggle.

Mehbooba, who was addressing a PDP convention in the apple-growing belt of Pulwama in south Kashmir, alleged that apart from robbing us of our constitutional rights we have witnessed the loot of our resources and our economy being crushed. The horticultural sector which forms the backbone of our economy has not been spared either.

By allowing apple produce from Iran to flood the market and our own crop destroyed by supply of spurious pesticides, the nefarious designs are being implemented. "This also seems to be a part of the scripted scheme to pulverise our economy. The need is to stand up in unison and struggle for our rights, identity and the future

"Pulwama is the heartbeat of PDP and your unwavering support is the source of personal strength to me. And my first visit to your district after being re-elected as the party president is a reaffirmation of my love for you," she said.

Reaffirming that dialogue and reconciliation as envisioned by PDP founder Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, is the only way to bring about peace and prosperity not only to the people of J&K but the whole of subcontinent, Mehbooba said that they would continue to advocate dialogue between India and Pakistan no matter how disliked the idea is.

"We have always advocated dialogue and reconciliation. No matter what they said till yesterday, today we see them only emulating our roadmap as inevitable. The recent joint statement of DGMOs of Indo-Pak Armies is a case in point. We want them to take this forward to the highest levels and also engage with the people of Jammu & Kashmir constructively respecting their dignity," she added.

'India emerging as a frontline nation in scientific innovation'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
JAMMU, 28 FEBRUARY

Union minister Jitendra Singh on Sunday said that India is fast emerging as a frontline nation in scientific innovations.

Delivering the keynote address on the occasion of 'National Science Day' in the University of Jammu, Jitendra Singh said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in the last few years, government has taken some revolutionary and programmatic decisions to give fillip to indigenous scientific innovations which will be key to "Atma Nirbhar Bharat".

In this context, he made a special mention of the decision to "unlock" India's Space Technology to private players for the first time after independence and the approval given by the union Cabinet to go ahead with joint ventures in the field of Atomic energy and nuclear energy in order to promote the setting up of new nuclear installations.

The theme 'Future of Science Technology Innovations...' chosen for this year's 'National Science Day', said Dr. Jitendra Singh, is most appropriate considering the rapid strides being made in contemporary India and being followed by other countries of the world.

He cited the example of Covid vaccine which India is

Banks should play keyrole in making India self-reliant'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
PATNA, 28 FEBRUARY

not only among the first countries to prepare indigenous but also to export to other countries.

Jitendra Singh said, it is a remarkable coincidence that on the morning of 'National Science Day' today ISRO achieved another glorious landmark by successfully launching the PSLV C51/Amazonia-1. While India began its Space journey much after several other countries, today we are in a position to provide inputs from Managyaan and Chandrayaan to the premier institutions of the world like the NASA of the USA, he added.

He said, it is to the credit of PM Modi that he promoted the extension of applications of space technology to different sectors and areas in order to bring ease of living. He said, whether it is railways or smart cities, agriculture or disaster management, highways or defence, space technology is contributing in a big way.

In his concluding remarks, Jitendra Singh said, this year's 'National Science Day' is being observed at a time when India is on the verge of entering the 75th year of independence and we would be planning for the next 25 years when India celebrates 100 years of independence. This is the period when India will be a world superpower and the journey of ascent has already started, he said.

Speakers at a function highlighted how banks have significant roles to play in making the country Atmanirbhar (self-reliant). The speakers made these observations at a webinar organised by the Society for Empowerment on Saturday.

Inaugurating the function, BJP's national media co-head and lawmaker Sanjay Mayukh said there were lots of talks about the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" at the global level.

When East India Company came to India, he explained, they set up Bank of Bengal in 1809, Bank of Bombay was established in 1840, Bank of Madras in 1843 and all these Banks were merged post 1857 after British Empire took the reign. Post merger these Banks played an important role, he informed. Stating that the banks have an important role to play in creation of wealth, he said banks should give loans to common people for creation of employment resulting in capital formation and a rising self-sustainable (Atmanirbhar) economy.

Member of Economic Advisory Committee and Core member of Atmanirbhar Bharat, Professor Krishna Raj said a Special economic and comprehensive package of Rs 20 lakh crores given by Government of India is equivalent to 10 percent of India's GDP. This package tries to cater to various sections including cottage industry, MSMEs, labourers, middle class and industries.

Large dependents on the timely flow of credit to different sectors of the economy. He recalled how Indira Gandhi government nationalised the 14 biggest commercial banks in 1969 which impacted on savings and succeeded in financial deepening because of the rapid spread of branches.

He also shed light on the classification of migrant labour, their reason for migration and reverse migration in the Covid-19 scenario. He highlighted how labour had an important role in the development of the country and how they also played an active role in India's freedom movement. Stating that the returning migrant labourers are looking for bank loans, he said the banks should come forward in funding the labourers by supporting self-help groups and MUDRA schemes.

One year on, LNJP corona warriors recall raging pandemic, challenges

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 FEBRUARY

At Delhi government-run LNJP Hospital, the nerve centre of Delhi's battle against the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, many doctors at times had to wear PPE kits for nearly 18 hours to attend to struggling patients in the sweltering heat when its first wave had hit the city and the mortuary was piled up with bodies.

It's been one year since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the national capital, and daily cases and death counts have both come down significantly, and scenes of distress in the hospital's corridors and outside morgue have been replaced by talks about the ongoing vaccination.

It was on March 1 that the first case of COVID-19 was recorded in the city, a few months after the "unpredictable virus" had wreaked havoc in Wuhan in China, where it was first reported globally.

Rohit Datta, a businessman from east Delhi, who had returned from Italy last year, tested positive for the new virus that had left the world puzzled and in a grip of extreme fear. The world had not seen anything like this before since

LNJP Hospital, now a par-

tial COVID-19 facility, was the first hospital to be converted into a dedicated coronavirus facility in Delhi, and soon Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital (RGSSH), GTB Hospital and other government hospitals were also roped in, besides reserving beds in private hospitals to treat increasing number of patients.

On June 23, the national capital had reported its first wave of the infection with 3,947 cases, the highest single-day fatality count till then.

Delhi went into a war mode, with government efforts to combat the pandemic being led by 'corona warriors' in hospitals in white lab coats and police in streets wearing khaki. Ritu Saxena, Emergency Department chief, at the hospital, which has treated a record over 11,000 COVID-19 patients till date, recalled that in June when

Is old gold?

Barely a day goes by nowadays when there isn't a reference to India's young demographic in one context or the other. But while the country plays host to one of the youngest populations in the world, approximately 6.6 per cent of India's 1.3 billion strong citizenry comprises those over the age of 65. That is a pretty significant number. While there is a focus, and rightly so, on a national youth policy that looks at all-round development of youngsters, we have not as yet ~ despite our cultural traditions which place a premium on looking after the aged ~ been successful in putting a comprehensive action plan in place to administer to the needs of the elderly.

The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic and its particularly lethal impact on the elderly has brought out in sharp relief the vulnerabilities of India's older population. There is no better time, then, to turn the spotlight on what needs to be done to ensure that the future for all citizens and not just those who happen to be 20 today (but will turn 65 one day too) is worth looking forward to. Old age brings with it certain vulnerabilities that need to be addressed. Medical, health, and wellness infrastructure ought to be a key priority for planners given the size of our aging population. India is only at the beginning of the curve which has topped out in the developed world as increasing prosperity ensures people live much longer. As the population's median age goes up, so will the need to allocate resources in proportion.

This would include not only increasing access to medical services for the elderly like specialised geriatric care units in hospitals and rehabilitative care in hospices but also emotional-psychological support where required. Loneliness, quite apart from the ailments which come with old age, can be a killer too. Mobility for the aged so they have some independent ability to get around is another imperative. Our public transport system infrastructure is woefully short of even the basics ~ ramps, shallow steps, easy-to-grab handrails, emergency medical kits, priority queues et.al. On the flip side, as our elderly population stays healthier longer thanks to the advances in medical science and better standards of living, they need to feel a productive part of society.

Many have skills and expertise that can be used whether in the voluntary sector or even for mentoring in the professional world. The Indian armed forces, for example, have a post-retirement counsellng system which has helped many older people occupy themselves gainfully even as they add value to organisations they are associated with. It is time we started walking the talk when we assert that old is gold.

Motera musings

When India's fast-forward third Test against England in the current series ended a good two hours before time on its second day ~ the hosts going up 2-1 with the last match set to start on Thursday ~ doubts about the Motera wicket's quality came quite naturally to be voiced. And the opinions were predictably split in terms of nationalistic loyalties. But facts can't really be got away from even when patriotic fervour influences ~ or colours ~ cricketing judgment. The pitch was one that, egregiously partial to spinners, restricted run-making to an extremely surprising extent, leaving England skipper Joe Root ironically to comment, once the hury-bury was done, that those who had shown up for a crackerjack knock from Virat Kohli, the Indian captain, were obliged to settle instead for his counterpart in the visiting side helping himself to a five-scap haul.

Which implied India's own frailties in the briefest Test held in this land and even though some experts had already said that Motera wasn't quite as blatantly spin-friendly as Chepauk during the second Test, the hosts' guiding philosophy, once the first Test had been lost, was that no matter how they batted on designer tracks themselves, the visitors would do worse. India got it right too. England went into Motera with Jimmy Anderson partnering Stuart Broad in the pace department but it was Axar Patel and Ravichandran Ashwin who called the shots with their spin bowling on a strip which suited the Indian duo more palpably.

True, Patel turned out to be especially effective when the ball didn't turn ~ his dismissals were mostly lbws or bowled ~ but he also said that the generously lacquered, very hard pink ball had tended to skid off the wicket, leaving batsmen undone. But Root's spectacular success with the ball is from the world of magic, which should inspire inquiries about a spin-bowling Hogwarts far away from Indian shores. Kohli's team are now closer to the World Test Championship final but their successes, unlike on their recent trip to Australia, have been far less than authentic on home wickets that are not meant to showcase Test cricket at its best.

Pitches that don't measure up to Test cricket's time-honoured traditions should have no place in the game. Chennai has copped some unwelcome attention earlier in the series, hosting two matches, but it is the cricket control board which supervises pitch-making for international matches today, led by a chief who once captained India.

Well might India go on to win the second match in Motera for an eventual WTC final appearance and be triumphant at the Lord's summit showdown too but the way they have gone about their task ~ or the spadework for it ~ in the home series could leave a lot of people quite underwhelmed.

India, amazingly, have the human resources for all conditions, but stick with old, not quite universally acclaimed ways when it comes to the crunch. World champions though must have fans the world over.

MSP no panacea

There is no doubt that the MSP regime is beleaguered by issues related to adequacy and effectiveness. Indeed, MSP is not necessarily a panacea for problems that plague Indian agriculture. We need to look beyond MSP



At the time of independence, India was staring at a major deficit in terms of cereal production. After struggling for the first decade, the government decided to go for extensive agricultural reforms. Of all the development programmes introduced during the post-independence period, the 'Green Revolution' during the late 1960s is considered an outstanding achievement. The expression 'Green Revolution' was deliberately coined to contrast it with the phrase 'Red Revolution.' It carried the conviction that agriculture was being peacefully transformed through the quiet working of science and technology, reaping the economic gains of modernisation while avoiding the social costs of mass upheaval and disorder associated with rapid change. The green revolution led to a substantial increase in agricultural output, to the extent that it almost solved India's food problem.

If the government pricing policy is unfair, then the community can never thrive. Demand and supply curves for any agricultural commodity show that as the price of the commodity declines, the demand for that commodity rises and the supply falls. If the market is left free, with no government intervention, the price will settle at a point which is referred to as the 'free market equilibrium price' where demand equals to supply. At one price farmers get too low a recompense for their labour, while another may be too high for the poor households. Policy makers grappled with both these perceptions and they called for some carefully scripted government action.

Keeping in mind the interests of farmers, one method that has been used in India is to announce a Minimum Support Price (MSP) for the commodity in question. It was used for the first time in 1966-67 when the MSP was declared only for wheat at Rs. 54 per quintal. Since then, it has been an integral part of India's agricultural policy. Presently, the MSP has been announced by the government India for as many as 23 crops at the beginning of each season viz. rabi and kharif.

MSP is a form of market intervention by the government of India to insure agricultural produces against any sharp fall in farm prices. The major objectives are to support the farmers from distress sales and to procure food grain at MSP for the Public Distribution System. In case the market price for any commodity falls below the assured MSP due

to bumper production and glut in the market, government agencies purchase the entire quantity offered by the farmers at MSP. Thus, MSP serves as a 'safety-net' for farmers. The MSP of any crop is fixed by the government after taking into account: (1) Recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP); (2) views of State governments; (3) views of concerned Ministries, and (4) other relevant factors.

The CACP submits its recommendations to the government separately for five groups of commodities namely kharif crops, rabi crops, sugarcane, raw jute and copra. Currently, MSP for 23 crops as recommended by CACP consists of seven cereals (paddy, wheat, maize, sorghum, pearl millet, barley and ragi), five pulses (gram, tur, moong, urad and lentil), seven oil seeds (groundnut, rapeseed-mustard, sesamum, sunflower, safflower, Niger seed) and four commercial crops (sugarcane, copra, cotton, raw jute). But it is seen that despite MSP for agricultural produce, the agrarian distress is not relieved. This is mainly because the declared MSP is not generating sufficient returns on costs incurred by farmers.

As a ramification of low prices of farm produce in the open market, the agrarian distress gets intensified, and it is visible through escalating farmer indebtedness and suicides. Therefore, for the overall sustainability of farming, it becomes even more crucial to strengthen MSP and extend its reach to all farmers and all crops. For MSP to be remunerative, farmers across the country have been demanding since 2006 the fixation of MSP as per M S Swaminathan's formula.

The Swaminathan report recommended that the MSP should be computed by incorporating almost all actual farm costs as C2 along with an additional 50 per cent margin over it. The then Finance Minister, in the Union Budget for FY 2018-19, had announced the proposal to hike the MSP of the upcoming kharif crop at a level that was 50 per cent higher than the cost of production. The proposal was hailed as a 'historic' step towards doubling the farmers' income as promised in the earlier budget. But during calculation, govern-

ment used the formula A2+FL (paid out costs plus imputed wage of family labour) and 50 per cent margin on it. Such calculation barely brought about an increment in farmer's income. Indeed, the use of the term 'historic' has rendered the farmers delusory. The proposed MSP formula of Swaminathan is C2 (comprehensive cost including imputed rent and interest on owned land and capital) plus 50 per cent. As C2 is greater A2+FL, Swaminathan's formula seems to be a better approach towards providing farmers with the deservedly higher value for their produce.

MSP can have an impact on the country's economy. But there are serious disadvantages of a high MSP.

(1) MSPs have unequal access: The benefits of MSP do not reach all farmers and for all crops. There are many regions of the country like the north-eastern region where the implementation is too weak. The Shanta Kumar Committee report asserts that only six per cent of all farmers have benefitted from MSP and around 94 per cent farmers are dependent on private markets.

(2) Excess procurement and storage: Every year Central and state governments announce the crops that will be purchased at MSP. Though MSPs have been declared for as many as 23 commodities, in practice, the governments - both Union and some State governments- procure food grain - mainly rice and wheat - at MSP for distribution through Public Distribution System (PDS), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) and other welfare schemes under the National Food Security Act, 2013. Since procurement is open-ended, buffer stocks continue to increase. About two-thirds of the total cereal production is taken through procurement operation leaving only a third for open market. This has created shortage of crop produce in the open market which has a serious impact on consumption patterns. Thus, government becomes the biggest hoarder of food, thanks to the annual ratcheting up of MSP. The rise in stock means rise in storage cost, loss due to deterioration in quality and consequential rise of food subsidy.

(3) Market distortion: Huge

procurement at MSP distorts the free market. It favours some crops over others. A survey by the Center for the Advanced Study of India, University of Pennsylvania, US, found that procurement by government agencies at MSP invariably resulted in a significant increase in the prices of produce. Higher MSPs over-incentivize Indian farm goods leading to supply glut. Hikes in MSP also adversely affect the exports. MSP does not cover perishables.

(4) Ecological problem: MSPs lead to non-specific agricultural practices whereby the soil and water are stressed to lead to degrading ground water table and salinization of soils. The case of Punjab can be mentioned. Close to 95 per cent of farmers in Punjab sell rice and wheat at MSP under the Government's Procurement system. In the 1960s, Punjab had cropping intensity of 126 per cent, which has now increased to 200 per cent at the cost of ecology.

(5) Inflation: In its annual report (2017-18) Reserve Bank of India says that MSPs of crops has a major impact on inflation. The adverse impact of higher MSP on rising food prices for poor people is often explained as the rationale behind keeping MSP low.

(6) Issues with WTO: India's MSP scheme for many crops has been challenged by many countries in the WTO. If the current trend of increasing MSP continues, the country will face international criticism for breaching the 10 per cent norm for subsidy on farm produce set by the WTO.

MSP is the main point of contention in the three much-debated new farm laws. The agitating farmers fear the discontinuation of MSP. Such apprehensions are not hypothetical. The new agricultural policy - defined by the new farm laws - is laying a foundation for an environment wherein the MSP and PPS (public procurement system) are likely to become redundant.

There is no doubt that the MSP regime is beleaguered by issues related to adequacy and effectiveness. Indeed, MSP is not necessarily a panacea for problems that plague Indian agriculture. We need to look beyond MSP. Significantly, certain long term and fundamental reforms of agriculture were recommended in 2004-06. To arrest the decline, farmers must be given productive assets, like education, appropriate skills, infrastructures and economic activities. Our distressed farmers need an enabling environment and scope to grow. In the words of Amit Kalantri, 'A farmer is a magician who produces money from the mud.'



JAYDEV JANA
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

Covid trajectory rising again!

SIR, Please refer to your front-page report "Covid jabs for senior citizens from 1 March". After the peak of the first Covid-19 wave, the seven-day average of new cases ~ also known as the case trajectory ~ dropped to the lowest on February 11 across the country, when it touched 10,988.

Since then, it has started rising again, and touched 13,742 on Wednesday a jump of 21 per cent. This is, at present, fuelled by a handful of states. In Maharashtra, the case trajectory has gone up 143 per cent in the same time period; in Punjab, daily cases have increased by 66 per cent; in Madhya Pradesh, by 56 per cent; and in Jammu and Kashmir, by 40 per cent.

As alarm intensifies over what appears to be the beginning of India's second Covid-19 wave, the Union government on Wednesday lifted certain key restrictions to speed up vaccination and expand

the parameters of who is eligible for inoculation. From next month, the drive has been opened to people above 60 and those above 45 with comorbidities.

Significantly, the government has also allowed that vaccines ~ which will be administered free at all State-run facilities to those eligible under the new criteria ~ can be administered for a price at private hospitals to those who can afford them.

This is a welcome first step towards opening up the vaccina-

tion drive, both in terms of private sector involvement and providing access to vulnerable groups other than health care and frontline workers, at a time when there is need to scale up.

There are other key measures that need to be taken, notably the approval of more vaccines, allowing its open market sale for all, and permitting companies to buy in bulk in order to administer vaccines to employees and their families.

It is important that India

LITERARY PAGE

SIR, The revival of the Literary Page after close to a year has been a covetous addition to your esteemed daily. It will surely be savoured by the readers. It might help the intending buyers of the books if the names of the outlets are also mentioned. While reviewing the book, *Rabindranath Tagore*, by Bashir Fraser, the reviewer has stated certain events and "all of them denoted exceptional measures in exceptional times". Whereas these events had occurred during a long span of time, the narrative does not convey that impression. The statement "Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose formed the Indian National Army" begs slight modification : Netaji was not the founder of the INA. He took over the charge in 1942, one year after the passing of Rabindranath.

Yours, etc., Sanjit Ghatak, Narendrapur, 26 February.

leverages its relative success against Covid-19 to equip its citizens in the face of a race against time to forestall a possible second wave. Wednesday's decision by the Union Cabinet marks a step in the right direction.

Yours, etc., Khokan Das, Kolkata, 26 February.

STADIUM AND ITS HISTORY

SIR, India hosted its first Asian Games in 1950 in a grand stadium of that time, named after the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.

Many other edifices have since gone up bearing his name. The Nehru Museum at Teen Murti has since been rendered generic to Indian Prime Ministers.

Now we have the Modi Stadium, the world's biggest in capacity. History is defined by the palimpsests that must inevitably follow. That is how history is registered for posterity. And exceptions are not known to have spared a leader era, ruler or leader.

Yours, etc., R Narayanan, Mumbai, 26 February.

A MEMBER OF THE **ANN**
ASIAN VOICES

Gesture of solidarity

Nothing could be more reassuring and uplifting in times of trouble than a true friend's presence. Sri Lanka has only a few generous, altruistic friends, and Pakistan certainly is prominent among them. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit, albeit brief, could not have come at a better time for Sri Lanka, a badger facing a pack of growling mastiffs in Geneva; what it needs most at this juncture is moral support.

Many are the nations that have proffered loads and loads of unsolicited advice to Sri Lanka on how to protect democracy and human rights. But none of them helped remove the scourge of terror, the gravest threat to democracy and humankind.

Pakistan stood unwaveringly behind Sri Lanka during its war on terror and helped the latter in numerous ways. It was the multi-barrel rocket launchers Pakistan rushed here in the aftermath of the fall of Elephant Pass garrison, in 2000, that enabled the Army to put the brakes on the 'unceasing wave' of the LTTE.

Otherwise, the Tigers would have laid siege to Jaffna with ease, forcing the Army to withdraw its troops. (Some countries even offered ships for ferrying soldiers to Colombo!) Today, Sri Lanka is free from political assassinations, massacres, child conscription, etc., as LTTE terrorism has been neutralised.

If it had given in to pressure from the Western bloc and spared the LTTE's military muscle, thousands of lives would have been destroyed during the last 12 years or so. There were calls, in some quarters, for PM Khan to take up the issue of forced burials with Colombo. They were obviously aimed at creating a media feeding frenzy and thereby giving the anti-Sri

The Island

Lankan campaign in Geneva a boost. Pakistan and Sri Lanka have their own way of sorting out problems; never do they resort to megaphone diplomacy.

But, the fact remains that mandatory burials have hurt the Muslim community beyond measure mostly because those who die of Covid-19 are allowed to be buried in other countries including those notorious for their antipathy towards Muslims. Some prominent Sri Lankan medical experts are of the view that the burial of pandemic victims should be permitted, provided the health regulations in place to prevent the spread of the pandemic are strictly followed.

Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, as a sensible leader, must have gone by expert opinion including that of the Sri Lanka Medical Association, when he said in Parliament recently that the burial of Covid-19 victims would become an option. Sadly, he was overruled.

It is significant that the Head of State of a prominent Islamic nation has been to Sri Lanka while the pro-LTTE groups are exerting a considerable pull on a section of the Muslims community who courageously stood up to LTTE terror and thwarted Prabhakaran's efforts to extend his control over the Eastern Province.

IN MEMORIAM

GHOSH USHA — In beloved memory of our mother and wife of the late Muralijibhan Ghosh. She left us this day in 2004. — Remembered by sons Abhijit Ghosh-Dastidar and Arindam Ghosh-Dastidar.

MADHUKAR UPADHYA

The early February Uttarakhand flood in India made global headlines, bringing with it new layers of concern regarding the Himalayas. The shocking videos ensure that the incident will continue to draw attention because of climate change impacts in a region that shelters some of the world's poorest.

The unprecedented flood reminded people of other events that had made headlines in the past: the devastating flood in Kedarnath in June 2013 which killed more than 5000 people and damaged property worth billions of rupees and the Seti flood in May 2012 in Nepal which killed 72 people. The Kedarnath flood occurred during the early monsoon period, an unusual time for floods, but it wasn't a big surprise because cloud bursts are a common phenomenon in these parts of the Himalayas. However, the fatal floods of the Seti occurred in May, a very dry month in the middle of summer. Similarly, the Uttarakhand flood occurred in February - the middle of winter.

The initial assessments of the Uttarakhand flood deemed that it was a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF); this was later rejected almost unanimously as glacial lakes are normally frozen during winters. Moreover, no lakes in the region were capable of producing such amounts of water basin. When the Seti River flooded in May, it took several months for experts to rule out the possibility of any GLOF and confirm, as in the case of Uttarakhand, that massive landslides at the ridge of high mountains were the main reason for the catastrophic floods.

These two examples demonstrate that deadly winter floods, though unusual, are a reality in the region. Often associated with a combination of factors, including avalanches and massive landslides which temporarily block rivers in narrow valleys in remote mountains, winter floods seem to be the result of landslide lake outburst floods. These areas are often quite remote and inaccessible. Since no information about threat levels is available, the events have caught everyone by surprise and, as a result, the damage was high.

Disasters like these only illustrate the risks we live with each day, which are probably increasing with climate change. In the case of Uttarakhand, experts haven't ruled out the fact that landslides at such high ridges were triggered by warm weather - a result of global warming. As high mountains warm faster than average, we are like-

Nations must collaborate to understand Himalayas

ly to see more frequent dry season floods in the years ahead. The events have further exposed how vulnerable our infrastructure and the populations below truly are.

The diverse geography of the Himalayas poses equally diverse problems, from those related to the sub-tropical areas of the Tarai, which get flooded every monsoon, to the sub-alpine regions that have glacial lakes and landslide-prone, fractured high ridges as seen in the Seti and Uttarakhand floods. If we address floods in the plains, we still have landslides in the hills and if we address landslides, we still have GLOFs in the high mountains. Our institutional and technical capabilities to tackle these problems aren't as robust as we'd like them to be.

Sadly, we haven't been able to effectively tackle water-induced disasters in the middle mountains where landslides are not only common but recur annually. If the 2020 events serve as any indication, landslides have become more devastating. There were more than 400 landslide events last year, several of them quite deadly, killing more than 300 people and damaging infrastructure over a wide area.

One of the strategies to reduce damage from water-induced disasters is to establish an early warning system; it provides advance warnings for monsoon floods and helps save lives. During the 2017 Tarai flood, one of the deadliest in recent times, the weather forecast warned of an unusual event two days in advance; it helped get people out of harm's way before the flood, which cost more than 60 billion Nepali rupees in property and infrastructure damage, occurred. Warning systems have also been installed for some glacial lakes. However, the dry season flood events will serve as a grim reminder of how unpredictable such events in the region are.

As we continue to chase progress, the construction of hydropower plants and roads will expand in the mountains to meet the growing demand for power and connectivity. The lack of proper design or hydrogeological study as well as explosive demolitions in the construction of hydropower projects have already been questioned by experts as well as



communities; they infer that such an approach has destabilised the fragile slopes leading to unusual landslides in unusual times and places. Though it may take us a while to unearth the actual cause of the winter flood, it's a reminder of how our development works in the mountains have increasingly placed people and property in harm's way.

In addition, an interesting scenario seems to be unfolding in the Himalayan region: it's getting wetter due to increased rainfall, yet droughts have prevailed. These changes have altered the local environment as evidenced by the lowering of the tree line. It's now been established that altitudinal limits of vegetation in the Himalayas is controlled by the availability of moisture rather than tem-

perature unlike in other mountain regions such as the Alps. The dry season is getting more arid and drought-like, while the monsoon is getting more destructive. Perhaps due to increased drought-like conditions, we have seen a loss of springs across the mountains and increased droughts have most notably impacted sub-alpine regions.

The Himalayas aren't a monolithic mountain range. Therefore, the myriad impacts of climate change - from precipitation to rise in temperature - will be nonhomogeneous as well. With landslides during the monsoon, like those of 2020 and floods during the winter like in Uttarakhand, the fate of our prosperity will undoubtedly be nebulous if not dismal. Emerging circumstances and

risks require a thorough revisit of our core problems. Unfortunately, we don't have the luxury, as we did in the past, of advocating for more forests as a solution to floods and landslides for nearly half a century, just to find out that villages located below the protected forests aren't always safe. In 2020, villages situated right below the projected forest area were also destroyed by landslides. We need to go beyond the conventional ways of addressing these issues. It's time for countries that share the Himalayas to collaborate and improve our understanding to ensure that future risks are reduced. Otherwise, we should get accustomed to more incidents in Seti and Uttarakhand in our future.

The Kathmandu Post/ANN

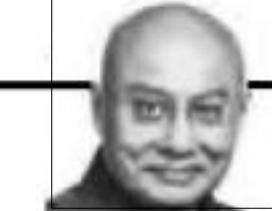


ILLUSTRATION: DEBABRATA CHAKRABARTY

I had detested the wrenching transition from the city to the industrial estate, but the insight into the life of a daily shift worker - its fierce discipline, grueling demand, rigid conformity - that I had gained made me delve for years into the nature of organizational ills and ethos. I applied what I had learned as I worked later for the UN family, consulting groups and the diplomatic service.

From far-flung corners, Subroto, JP and I remain friends. When JP called me to say that Subroto, the largest and

strongest among us, had been afflicted by Covid-19, I wondered if our trio had finally run its course; defying odds, Subroto emerged triumphant. We three spoke by Zoom and celebrated our unbroken alliance.

Even the year of the pandemic could not tear the fraternity that had started in, and become the hallmark of, a unique year.

The writer is a Washington-based international development advisor and had worked with the World Bank. He can be reached at mnandy@gmail.com

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

Speaking as the first President of the Tropical Diseases Section of the Royal Society of Medicine in London, Sir Leonard Rogers referred to the great new School in Calcutta, to be formally opened this year, as an unique example of such institutions which should inspire efforts in the same direction throughout the world. It is the example of Sir Leonard Rogers himself and his helpers in the initiation of the Calcutta School which should inspire men to go and do likewise in other countries. Meantime it would be a relief if a satisfactory answer could be given to the report which formed a subject of comment at the recent meeting of the Medical Research Section of the Indian Science Congress in Calcutta. This report was to the effect that the Government of India were likely to curtail expenditure on the Calcutta and Bombay schemes of tropical research in order to concentrate all available funds on the establishment of a new Imperial Institute of Medical Research at Delhi. The people of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, and Assam have given generous support to the Calcutta scheme on the understanding that the Imperial Government would make the School a success; but if Government aid is to be diverted to a new project there seems to be serious reason for apprehending that the Calcutta School may be crippled at the outset.

NEWS ITEMS

RIOT AT HOWRAH STATION

A riot occurred at Howrah station at about 5-30 last evening. The workmen of the East Indian Railway workshops at Lillooah have been out on strike for some time. Apparently they understood that the general strike of the Railway's employees originally timed for 5 PM. on the 28th instant would aid them in their endeavour. As is well known, the general strike was called off. A meeting was called on the Howrah maidan and when it was discovered that no general strike was to take place a mob of about five hundred men assembled in the yard outside Howrah station and on the Bamangachi Bridge. A good deal of general rioting took place as the police on the Howrah station were unable to cope with the mob.

BIGGEST IRISH AMBUSH

What is unofficially described as the biggest ambush that has yet occurred in Ireland took place today near Macroom, mid Cork, ending in serious losses to the Government forces, of whom it is reported that fourteen have been killed. Three hundred Sinn Feiners entrenched themselves in the hills under cover of rocks, and attacked seventy auxiliary police in motor lorries, under the command of Major Grant, who, with three of the police, is reported to have been shot dead. After a fierce combat which lasted for some hours, the police were apparently driven back. They eventually carried off some of their wounded, but were compelled to leave ten behind, who are presumed to be dead. It is believed that the Sinn Feiners, who were not dislodged from their position, have suffered heavily.

GUN AND SHELL FACTORY CASE

Judgment was delivered yesterday by the Police Magistrate of Sealdah in the case in which J.N. Ghosh, late head assistant of the Financial Department of the Government of Bengal, and his two sons I.N. Ghosh, P.N. Ghosh were charged with conspiring with a man named Brewin, formerly a storekeeper of the Gun and Shell Factory, for the purpose of disposing of brass rods said to have been stolen from the factory. The first accused was specifically charged with disposing of the rods. The defense was that the receipt of sale under the signature of the first accused was a forgery. The Magistrate held that the receipt was a genuine one. J.N. Ghosh was fined Rs 1,000 and I.N. Ghosh was sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment. P.N. Ghosh was acquitted.

PROSPECTS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

The Government of the United Provinces have directed to revise the rates of pay of primary school teachers. A Resolution on the subject states that the total cost of bringing into effect the scales now sanctioned will amount to approximately Rs 22 lakhs per annum. Towards this amount the local boards have already been promised grants aggregating Rs 11 lakhs per annum. The Local Government have decided to meet the balance in 1921-22 and 1922-23 by increasing their grants to the boards by an additional sum of Rs 6 lakhs per annum and by permitting them to divert towards the pay of teachers funds (approximately Rs 5 lakhs per annum) previously earmarked for the expansion of primary education.

IT CAME TO MIND | MANISH NANDY

A Unique Year

A unique year? Admittedly, every year in our life is unique, with its special dark and bright spots. But I remember a particular year as very special, as a time of both transition and transversal: when life changed, and I connected with people differently.

It was the year I left the university and quickly found a job and went to work. It was a big company, and the salary and benefits weren't negligible. Those weren't small things for a 22-year-old from a middle-class family in a land of chronic unemployment. But if those were exhilarating factors, the deterrent was the job was in a factory and in a semi-rural area.

A half-hour bus ride and an hour-long train journey brought me to the plant, where I was given a rent-free apartment. It meant a painful estrangement from my accustomed city life and an agonizing separation from my friends and girlfriends. It was hard to accept that I would see them only during a fleeting weekend.

It became harder when I realized that an industrial estate was hardly the place to pursue my interests: literary discussions, political debates, indie films, cultural events. I asked local people what they did in their spare hours. Some drank and others played cards; the rest hibernated with their families. The club life, dominated by mid-level executives, consisted of bingo and more drinking. Culturally, I felt at the centre of the Sahara. Unenchanted with the options I saw, I took to tennis the way one takes to religion.

My isolation was not mine alone. Two other young persons who had

been hired with me were also city folk and felt like lone wolves in the industrial estate. We became a reluctant trio - reluctant because we were quite different by taste and temperament, still a trio because people saw us as a coterie. Subroto was gregarious and effusive, while, in contrast, Jyoti Prakash, briefly JP, was reticent and under demonstrative, but both were determined to make a go of the job. I was more selectively social, comfortable with some and indifferent to others, and rather dubious about a business career, let alone in a plant. We shared our miseries, voiced our ill-formed hopes, and dreamed of means that would get us some fun.

We all did crazy things. JP acquired a ferocious dog that behaved more like a wolf and prompted some of us to think of a werewolf. I made surreptitious notes of what I saw in the factory and made narrative of it that created an unholly splash when it came out in a major newspaper. But Subroto brought the entire works nearly to a stop when he covertly courted a Sikh official's pretty daughter and engendered massive animus in the large local Sikh community. I became an uncomfortable suspect too, for I had briefly tutored the daughter on the official's request. The hullabaloo subsided only when Subroto went to a Gurdwara and reverently married his inamorata.

I was unquestionably the most useless of the three in running our household. I had no idea where to buy things, how to furnish our apartment or how to instruct our cook or gardener. JP and Subroto managed all and indulgently allowed me to be the idle beneficiary of their expertise. My dubious contribution to the general entertainment was my stories of weekend misdeeds in the city, where I had ignominiously lost a girlfriend and was ineptly cultivating another.

The trio had now developed a profile of its own. We knew what we could do well together, and we looked after our common interests. We worked together, ate together, talked together, fought together, laughed together. We knew our foibles and we also knew and admired our strengths. JP brought quiet solidity to our pool, Subroto his comic hilarity and I, often to their irritation, my insistent, analytic view of all affairs.

It was a stunning surprise a little

more than a year later when the bosses informed me that I was to transfer to the city headquarters. It was an elevation, and I was happy to return to my favoured milieu, but I was also sad to break up the fraternity. A decade later I was to make the bigger move to another company and even later I went to work abroad.

Subroto and JP rose steadily in the factory hierarchy and eventually occupied senior positions in the production department. When Subroto left the company, he returned to the city and quickly transformed himself into an entrepreneur. He established a successful export group marketing leather products in the US. JP made a reputation as a steady, resourceful executive and worked the longest with the plant.

Even when he left the organization - and the organization sadly went into liquidation - he built a home nearby

and worked to set up another plant.

From far-flung corners, Subroto, JP and I remain friends. When JP called me to say that Subroto, the largest and

strongest among us, had been afflicted

by Covid-19, I wondered if our trio had

finally run its course; defying odds,

Subroto emerged triumphant. We

three spoke by Zoom and celebrated our unbroken alliance.

Even the year of the pandemic

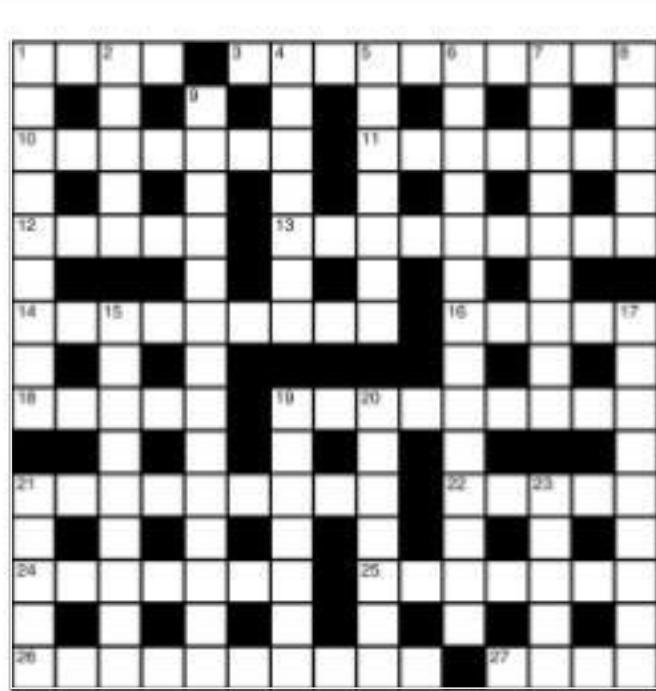
could not tear the fraternity that had

started in, and become the hallmark

of, a unique year.

The writer is a Washington-based international development advisor and had worked with the World Bank. He can be reached at mnandy@gmail.com

CROSSWORD



- 1 Character to eviscerate
- 3 Nazarene (4)
- 5 Pull on weed relentlessly
- 7 shackles donkey (5-5)
- 10 Left at sea, aim to make forecast (7)
- 11 Sons in poor health — would bring on nausea? (7)
- 12 Singer in a wooded hollow heard (5)
- 13 Poor snail one Yankee cooked with onions (9)
- 14 Ruthless to spread lies about terrible truth (3-6)
- 16 Weapon, returned to court, that causes bleed (5)
- 18 Discharge of gas put through drink (5)
- 19 Fitting fresh cover for metal bearings (9)
- 21 Right arm is not broken in heavy fall (9)
- 22 Inventive sort decorates Lancastrian houses (5)
- 24 Energy cuts must stop (5,2)
- 25 Annoyed when struggling to find pain reliever (7)
- 26 Ice for this lolly? (5,5)
- 27 Goddess wants case dropped in Boeotian city (4)

DOWN

- 1 One needing floor that's hard and carpet free? (3,6)
- 2 Message sensibly conveyed in this bottle (5)
- 4 Covered earlier clothing left for Spanish gentleman (7)
- 5 Republican on camera coming round to sum up (2,5)
- 6 Genre briefly returned in horrific series (7,7)
- 7 One trap set during harangue in spring (9)
- 8 Hunter and dog requiring fence in dash (5)
- 9 Border teams helped to build new town (5,9)
- 15 Make hit plays and perform amusing opera (3,6)
- 17 Repetitive notes written about adult in private meeting (4-4)
- 19 Enquiry ended early on ring with no charges (3,4)
- 20 Servant goes with crowd for violent disorder (7)
- 21 What's taken into staff about to give treatment (5)
- 23 Reportedly steps over fence in dash (5)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

NO 28840



THUMBNAILS

Birla Precision to ramp up capacity: With a shift in the global supply chain amid the pandemic and companies looking beyond China for sourcing, auto component firm Birla Precision Technologies Ltd is ramping up its capacity to tap emerging opportunities in India, according to a top company official. To start with, the firm plans to invest up to Rs 30 crore in the next one year to ramp up its drill manufacturing capacity under its cutting tools division. PTI

Honda Motorcycles: Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India is exploring the possibility of exporting its mid-sized premium bike H'ness CB350 to various markets across the globe even as it works to cater to the robust demand for the model in the domestic market, a senior company official said. The company rolls out the bike with over 90 per cent localisation from its Manesar (Haryana) based manufacturing facility. HMSI had introduced the bike in October 2020 and has already crossed 10,000 sales mark in February this year in the domestic market. PTI

IKEA toys: Swedish furniture major IKEA, which has a range of over 1,000 products as part of its children's range, is looking to scale up sourcing of toys from India for its operations here, said a top company official. Besides, IKEA India is also aiming to have around 12 per cent of sales from kids' range of products in the coming years. PTI

IPV investment: Inflection Point Ventures (IPV) aims to double its investment to \$20 million in start-ups this year as it looks to play a larger role in mentoring and growing the start-up ecosystem in the country. IPV, which comprises about 4,000 investors, is also looking at expanding its network to 5,000 members by the end of the year. Till date, IPV has announced 55 deals. PTI

Social media rules may raise compliance cost: Ind execs

Government has emphasised that the new rules will not curb creativity, and freedom of speech

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 FEBRUARY

The new social media intermediary rules could raise compliance costs for players, making it difficult for smaller companies to compete against bigger giants like Facebook, according to industry watchers.

The new rules, announced last week, distinguish between 'social media intermediaries' and 'significant social media intermediaries' with 50 lakh registered users as the threshold for the categorisation.

Significant social media intermediaries will have to follow additional due diligence, including the appointment of a chief compliance officer, nodal contact person and resident grievance officer - with all three officials residing in India.

Large players like Facebook have said they are studying the rules. While many in the sector have lauded the new regulations, saying these aim to address concerns like grievance redressal, fake news and



online safety of users, a section of the industry has aired concerns around increased compliance cost that could be challenging for smaller players.

Software Freedom Law Centre (SFLC) founder Mishu Choudhary said the rules call for an undue burden and compliance and 'ensure only larger players with funds and wherewithal of big legal teams are the only ones who will be left to offer services'.

"(This could result in) increasing the barrier for entry and raising compliance

"We want to connect everyone in the country to the LPG network."

TARUN KAPOOR
OIL SECRETARY

business

Macroeconomic data, bond yield to set tone for markets this week

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 FEBRUARY

the Union Budget presentation on February 1, the stock market closed in the red in the week gone by. The benchmark indices Nifty-50 & BSE Sensex slumped over 3 percent during the week, and on Friday, the 30-share BSE Sensex crashed about 1,940 points to post its biggest single-day fall in nearly ten months.

The domestic equity market witnessed a massive sell-off amid a global correction led by a sharp spike in global bond yields along with a sudden increase in COVID-19 cases in a few Indian states.

"What we are seeing in the Indian market is a knee jerk reaction to the rise in global bond yields. In the immediate future, Indian markets could also bear the brunt of global correction but as time goes it could recoup and stand out," Rsumik Oza, Executive Vice President and Head of Fundamental Research at Kotak Securities, said.

Further, Oza noted that due to the strong accumulation of reserves, RBI could be in a better position to handle any currency weakness being caused by rising bond yields and potential FPI outflows.

and its group firms.

Telegram did not respond to queries on the impact of the new rules on the platform.

Industry observers noted that players like Telegram and others may not have senior officials based in India and that they will now have to take a series of steps to ensure compliance with the new norms as their business scales up and user base grows in India.

According to the amended IT rules, social media and streaming companies will be required to take down contentious content quicker, appoint grievance redressal officers and assist in investigations.

The "Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code" designed to curb misuse of social media platforms require players like WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter as well as streaming services such as Netflix, YouTube and Amazon Prime Video to appoint executives to coordinate with law enforcement, disclose the first originator of

provocative content and remove, within 24 hours, content depicting nudity or morphed pictures of women.

Any contentious content flagged by the government or legal order has to be taken down within 36 hours.

An industry executive, who did not wish to be named, said some companies may choose to protect the privacy of users and challenge these rules in court. Also, the industry feels that there needs to be clarity on nuances like how long do users have to be active to be counted as registered users, and what happens if a platform drops below the threshold of 50 lakh registered users.

Rameesh Kailasam, CEO of IndiaTech.org, had also cautioned that while these rules are robust and elaborate, it may translate into a certain degree of cost and operational challenges with it.

Nasscom had noted that it is imperative that there is a balance between regulation and innovation as the world is in a phase of accelerated technology shifts.

After multiple rallies since

the yields up. This will slow capital inflows, he added.

Oza said the yield, which started the calendar year at 0.91 per cent, has now risen to 1.47 per cent. "It has led to bond yields rising across the globe."

Also, \$ 1.9-trillion stimulus coming from US government could lead to sharper recovery in the US GDP in this calendar year. "Markets are forward looking and trying to build in the scope of further rise in bond yields going forward in spite of the pick-up in vaccination," Oza said.

According to Oza, emerging market currencies need to be watched going forward.

Countries that see higher impact on their currencies could see higher FPI outflows, he added. Morningstar India Associate Director (Man-

Govt extends due date for filing GST annual returns

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 FEBRUARY

supplies made or received under different tax heads. GSTR-9C is a statement of reconciliation between GSTR-9 and the audited annual financial statement.

On the extension, AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan said, Even though it is a relatively small extension of 31 days but is sufficient for the tax professionals to complete the requisite filings. EY Tax Partner Abhishek Jain said most industry players were struggling to meet this statutory deadline and had represented to the government for an extension. Furnishing of the annual return is mandatory only for taxpayers with aggregate annual turnover above Rs 2 crore while reconciliation statement is to be furnished only by the registered persons having aggregate turnover above ₹ 5 crore.

FPIs net buyers for 2nd consecutive month in February; invest ₹23,663 cr

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 FEBRUARY

Remaining net buyers for second consecutive month in this calendar year, overseas investors pumped in ₹23,663 crore in Indian markets in February on account of positive sentiment due to the Union Budget 2021-22 and strong third quarter earnings.

Foreign portfolio investors (FPI) invested a net ₹25,787 crore into equities but pulled out ₹2,124 crore from the bonds market during 1-26 February, the depositories data showed.

This took the total net investment to ₹23,663 crore during the period under review.

Last month, the total net investment stood at ₹14,649 crore.

Rusmik Oza, executive vice-president and head (fundamental research) at Kotak Securities, said, "Most of the FPI flows this month can be attributed to the strong outcome of the Union Budget and third quarter earnings season." Besides, Geojit Financial

yields up. This will slow capital inflows, he added.

Oza said the yield, which started the calendar year at 0.91 per cent, has now risen to 1.47 per cent. "It has led to bond yields rising across the globe."

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Discoms' outstanding dues to power gencos rise nearly 24 pc to ₹1.36 lakh crore in Dec

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 FEBRUARY

Total dues owed by electricity distribution companies to power producers rose nearly 24 per cent to ₹1.36,966 crore in December 2020 compared to the same month a year ago, reflecting stress in the sector.

The distribution companies (discoms) owed a total of Rs 1,10,660 crore to power generation firms in December 2019, according to portal PRAAP-TI (Payment Ratification And Analysis in Power procurement for bringing Transparency in Invoicing of generators).

The portal was launched in May 2018 to bring in transparency in power purchase transactions between the generators and discoms. In December 2020, the total overdue amount, which was not cleared even after 45 days of grace period,



offered by generators, stood at Rs 1,27,498 crore as against Rs 97,835 crore in the year-ago period.

According to the latest data on the portal, total outstanding dues in December dipped on a month-on-month basis.

In November 2020, the total outstanding dues of discoms stood at Rs 1,40,741 crore. The overdue amount in Dec 2020 has decreased from Rs 1,27,539 crore in November 2020. Power

producers give 45 days to discoms to pay bills for electricity supply. After that, outstanding dues become overdue and generators charge penal interest on that in most cases.

To give relief to power generation companies (gencos), the Centre enforced a payment security mechanism from 1 August, 2019. Under this mechanism, discoms are required to open letters of credit for getting power supply. The central

JNPT, Deendayal ports offer discounts on vessel, cargo charges to boost trade at Chabahar port

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 FEBRUARY

government had also given some breathers to discoms for paying dues to power generating companies in view of the COVID-19-induced lockdown. The government had also waived penal charges for late payment of dues in the directive.

In May, the government announced Rs 90,000 crore liquidity infusion for discoms under which these utilities would get loans at economical rates from Power Finance Corporation (PFC) and REC Ltd. This was a government initiative to help gencos to remain afloat. Later, the liquidity infusion package was increased to Rs 1.2 lakh crore.

Discoms in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Haryana and Tamil Nadu account for the major portion of dues to power gencos, the data showed.

Located in Sistan-Balochistan province on the energy-rich Iran's southern coast, the port is being developed by India, Iran and Afghanistan to boost trade ties.

Chabahar Port lies outside the Persian Gulf and is easily accessed from India's western coast, bypassing Pakistan. To promote Shahid Beheshti Port of Chabahar, Iran Jawaharlal Nehru Port and Deendayal Port are providing discounts on vessel related charges and cargo related charges for the vessels going

and arriving from Shahid Beheshti," according to the ministry. For the past six months, a 50 per cent discount on terminal handling charges for transit containers has also been granted. "The flow of bulk cargo is steady. Transit cargo from Afghanistan is now picking up. The shipping line has assured us of weekly container service as volumes are on the rise," as per a document from the MoPWSW.

Owing to the challenges in activation of the main agreement pertaining to Chabahar port, a formal Short Lease (Interim) Contract between India and Iran was signed on 6 May, 2018, with the incorporation of an Iranian SPV - India Ports Global Chabahar Free Zone (IPGCFZ) - for its implementation.

"The terms and conditions of this Contract are dif-

ferent than the 10-year Agreement. Under this Contract, India Ports Global Chabahar Free Zone (Iranian subsidiary of India Ports Global Ltd) took over the operations at berth length of 360 mts at Shahid Beheshti Port on 25th December 2018. IPGCFZ handled its first cargo on 30th December 2018," the document said. Till 31 January, 2021, about 123 vessels have berthed at the terminal and IPGCFZ has handled approximately 13,752 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent unit) and 18 lakh tonne of bulk / general cargo, it added.

Efforts are on to improve the traffic at Chabahar Port.

The Short Lease Contract has since been renewed till 25 June, 2021.

"We are now in possession of over 1,240 mts berth length and 70 Ha of back up area. Four post Panamax vessels can now simultaneously berth at our terminal," as per the shipping ministry document.

The ministry also said CONCOR has proposed to commence shipping service from the east and west coast of India to Vorsino terminal in Moscow via Shahid Beheshti port using INSTC (International North-South Transport Corridor) route.

This will be under multimodal using sea leg till Chabahar and thereafter by road and/or rail. It is under their internal approvals, as per the document.

On 6 May, 2015, a ministerial-level MoU on Chabahar Shahid Beheshti Port was signed between India and Iran and the historic agreement was executed on 23 May, 2016, in Tehran during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

1cr more free LPG connections in 2 years: Oil Secretary Tarun Kapoor

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 FEBRUARY

The free LPG connection scheme is one structural reform of the Modi government that has been internationally acclaimed for ridding indoor household pollution and improving women's health.

And now, the government plans to give one crore more free LPG connections to the needy over the next two years and make it easier to access cooking gas to achieve near 100 per cent penetration of the clean fuel in the country. Oil Secretary Tarun Kapoor said plans are in the works to provide LPG connection with

Insurance most preferred product to protect family

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 FEBRUARY

Insurance has become the most-preferred financial product to protect the family against health emergencies post the COVID-19 pandemic with more people inclined to invest in insurance products in the next six months, according to a survey from Tata AIA Life Insurance.

According to a consumer confidence survey on the impact of COVID-19 commissioned by research agency Nielsen, life insurance turned out to be the most preferred financial tool driven by the need to secure family's future financially and the concern around medical emergencies. The survey also found that most consumers would

like to buy life insurance in the next six months as part of their investment plans. The survey conducted on 1,369 respondents across nine centres revealed that during the pandemic, 51 per cent of the respondents invested in life insurance, while 48 per cent invested in health-related insurance solutions, which is higher than other financial asset classes.

More than half of the respondents said their views towards life insurance have changed positively due to the pandemic and 49 per cent want to invest in buying a life cover in the next six months and 40 per cent intends to invest in health insurance. The survey said 30 per cent of the people invested in life insurance

for the first time during the pandemic, while 26 per cent invested in health-related insurance solutions for the first time. Financial security against medical emergencies and expenses has become the topmost priority, with as many as 62 per cent mentioning about it and a majority of 84 per cent saying they are still concerned about self and family due to coronavirus.

61 per cent were worried about themselves/family and their top concern is the economic slowdown.

Among the other asset classes, one-third of the respondents said they invested in bank or company fixed deposits, and 30 per cent invested in mutual funds, while 24 per cent invested in stocks, 17 per cent invested in gold/digital gold. Life insurance has clearly emerged as the preferred financial asset as per our Covid sentiment study. There is a distinct shift towards considering life insurance as the primary source of future financial protection, followed by health and wellness solutions.



We are looking at the subjects and the kind of education that is very important in different parts of Bangladesh and setting universities accordingly

HIGHLIGHTING STEPS TAKEN BY HER FATHER BANGABANDHU TO MODERNISE EDUCATION SYSTEM OF THE COUNTRY

BANGLADESH PRIME MINISTER SHEIKH HASINA

The Statesman

NEW DELHI, MONDAY 01 MARCH 2021

09

Bangladesh police tear gas Opp protests

More than 500 protesters tried to form a human chain to protest the death of writer Mushtaq Ahmed, who collapsed in a high-security jail

THE STRAITS TIMES/ANN

DHAKA, 28 FEBRUARY

Dozens were injured on Sunday (Feb 28) as Bangladeshi police fired rubber bullets and tear gas at opposition activists to prevent new protests over the death of a writer in jail, police and a party official said.

"They did not take any permission (for the protests)," he added, defending the police's move to clear the protesters.

BNP spokesman Rizvi Ahmed said about 30 student activists of the party including a senior leader were injured in the clashes. Several policemen were also hurt, includ-

ing an officer who was rushed to hospital.

He said more than 500 protesters were at the press club, trying to form a human



chain to protest the death of writer Mushtaq Ahmed, who collapsed in a high-security prison north of Dhaka and died late Thursday.

He defended the party not having sought permission for the protests at the National Press Club, saying that historically no clearance was

needed to hold any rallies there.

"As they stood there for a human chain, (police) baton-charged indiscriminately," he added.

"It is a murder," he said of Mushtaq Ahmed's death. "We think the state is involved." International and local rights groups have demanded a swift probe into the death of the writer 10 months after he was arrested over comments posted on social media.

Ambassadors from 13 countries, including the United States, France, Britain, Canada and Germany, expressed "grave concern" over the case.

He had been detained under the controversial digital security laws that critics say are used to muzzle dissent.

Ahmed was denied bail at least six times.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Saturday shrugged off criticism of her government's rights record, international concern over the internet law and Ahmed's death.

Demonstrators have marched at Dhaka University over the last few days chanting slogans condemning the government's treatment of Mushtaq Ahmed as well as other writers, journalists and activists.

Israeli cargo ship docks at Dubai port after mysterious blast

DUBAI, 28 FEBRUARY

An Israeli-owned cargo ship that suffered a mysterious explosion in the Gulf of Oman came to Dubai's port for repairs on Sunday, days after the blast that revived security concerns in Mideast waterways amid heightened tensions with Iran.

An Associated Press journalist saw the hulking Israeli-owned *MV Helios Ray* sitting at dry dock facilities in Dubai. Although the crew was unharmed in the blast, the vessel sustained two holes on its port side and two on its starboard side just above the waterline, according to American defense officials.

It remains unclear what caused the blast, but the incident comes amid sharply rising tension between the U.S. and Iran over its unraveling 2015 nuclear deal. Iran has sought to pressure President Joe Biden's administration to grant the sanctions relief it received under the accord with world powers that former President Trump abandoned.

The blast on the ship Friday recalled a string of attacks on foreign oil tankers in 2019 which happened near the Strait of Hormuz, a key oil chokepoint that the U.S. Navy blamed on Iran. The *Helios Ray* had discharged cargo at various ports in the Persian Gulf before making its way out of the Middle East toward Singapore. The blast hit as the ship was sailing from the Saudi port Dammam out of the Gulf of Oman, forcing it to turn to Dubai.

AP

Remove me if you can: Oli challenges Prachanda

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

KATHMANDU, 28 FEBRUARY



Prime Minister Oli challenged Nepal Communist Party's Prachanda-led faction to table a vote of no confidence motion and endorse that

five-member constitutional bench led by Chief Justice Cholendra Shumsher last week annulled the Oli government's "unconstitutional" decision to dissolve the 275-member lower house of Parliament. The court ordered the government to summon the House session within the next 13 days.

The ruling party suffered a vertical split following Oli's decision to dissolve the lower house. "Remove me if you can. If I am ousted, I'll emerge

victorious with a two-thirds majority in the next election," Prime Minister Oli was quoted as saying by the paper.

Prachanda has been making efforts to garner support from the opposition Nepali Congress and Janata Samajabadi parties in an apparent bid to oust Oli from power.

Oli's Press Advisor Surya Thapa last week said the prime minister will not resign immediately and implement the Supreme Court's verdict against him by facing Parliament.

Oli is under pressure to step down following the court verdict. NCP Vice-president Bamdev Gautam, who maintained a balance between Oli and his rival Prachanda, last week urged the prime minister to step down.

NO COMPLIANCE



People gather at the Darsena dei Navigli, in Milan on Sunday as police vans blocked entrance to Milan's trendy Navigli neighbourhood after the mayor announced increased patrols to prevent gatherings to curb Covid cases during a spring-like weekend.

AGENCY

Myanmar ambassador to UN sacked after anti-army speech

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

NAY PYI TAW, 28 FEBRUARY

In an emotional speech, Kyaw Moe Tun said no-one should co-operate with the military until it handed back power to the democratically elected government, the BBC reported

eral Assembly on Friday, Kyaw Moe Tun urged the international community to use "any means necessary to take action" against the military to help "restore the democracy", saying he was representing Suu Kyi's ousted government.

In a further show of defiance, Kyaw Moe Tun held up three fingers, a gesture against authoritarian rule that has been adopted by anti-coup protesters in the country.

Myanmar's state television announced his removal on Saturday, saying he had "betrayed the country and spoken for an unofficial organization which doesn't represent the country and had abused the power and responsibilities of an ambassador".

Further protests were held in several cities with water cannon reportedly deployed and journalists among dozens detained.

The speech was met with applause and Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the new US envoy to the body, was among those praising his remarks as "courageous".

In a post on his Facebook page, Tan Sri Muhyiddin said he received on Sunday statutory declarations (SD) from Julau MP Larry Sng Wei Shien and Tebrau MP Steven Choong Shiau Yoon stating their support for his Perikatan Nasional government.

The declarations were handed over after a gathering of the Cabinet in administrative capital Putrajaya to mark the one-year anniversary of the PN administration.

Two Opp MPs back Malay PM, restoring majority

THE STRAITS TIMES/ANN

KUALA LUMPUR, 28 FEBRUARY

from two opposition MPs stating their support for the PN government, "Mr Muhyiddin said on Sunday. "This support will certainly strengthen the PN government in its efforts and planning to manage the Covid-19 pandemic and revive the country's economy," he added.

The move comes days after King Sultan Abdullah Ahmad Shah said Parliament can convene during a state of emergency, a move that could allow the opposition to launch a fresh no-confidence vote against Muhyiddin.

On Muhyiddin's advice, the King had in January declared a nationwide state of emergency that could last till Aug 1, as Malaysia struggled to control Covid-19 cases.

After invoking emergency powers, he suspended parliamentary sittings, which also resulted in a confidence vote against him being stalled.

HK detains 47 pro-democracy activists on subversion charges

ASSOCIATED PRESS

HONG KONG, 28 FEBRUARY

Hong Kong police on Sunday detained 47 pro-democracy activists on charges of conspiracy to commit subversion under the city's national security law.

The former lawmakers and democracy advocates had been previously arrested in a sweeping police operation in January but were released. They have been detained again and will appear in court on Monday, police said in a statement.

They allegedly violated the new national security law that was imposed by Beijing for participating in unconstitutional election primaries for the semi-autonomous Chinese territory's legislature last year.

The defendants include 39 men and eight women aged between 23 and 64,

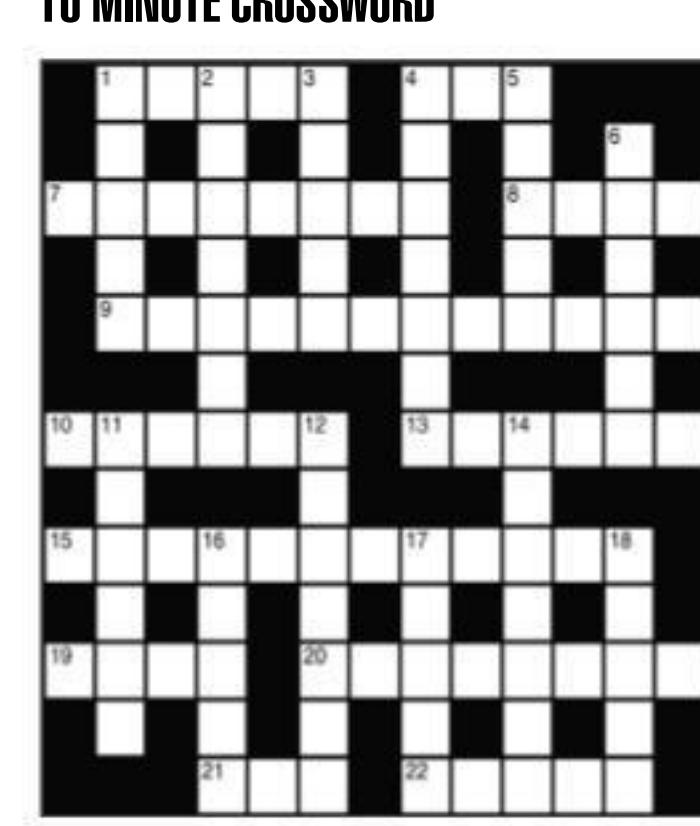


Beijing imposed the national security law last June to quell dissent following months of anti-government protests in 2019.

Authorities said that the activists' participation was part of a plan to paralyse the city's legislature and subvert state power. Among those arrested on Sunday was former lawmaker Eddie Chu. A post on his official Twitter account confirmed that he was being charged for conspiracy to commit subversion and that his bail was denied.

LEISURE

10 MINUTE CROSSWORD



CROSSWORD
ACROSS
1 Travel payments (5)
4 Relatives (3)
7 Omit (5,3)
8 Rich soil (4)
9 Cheated (5-7)
10 Hydrophobia (6)
13 Small and delicate (6)
15 On the other hand (12)
19 Cab (4)
20 Period after sunset (8)
21 Playing (3)
22 Taxonomic group (5)

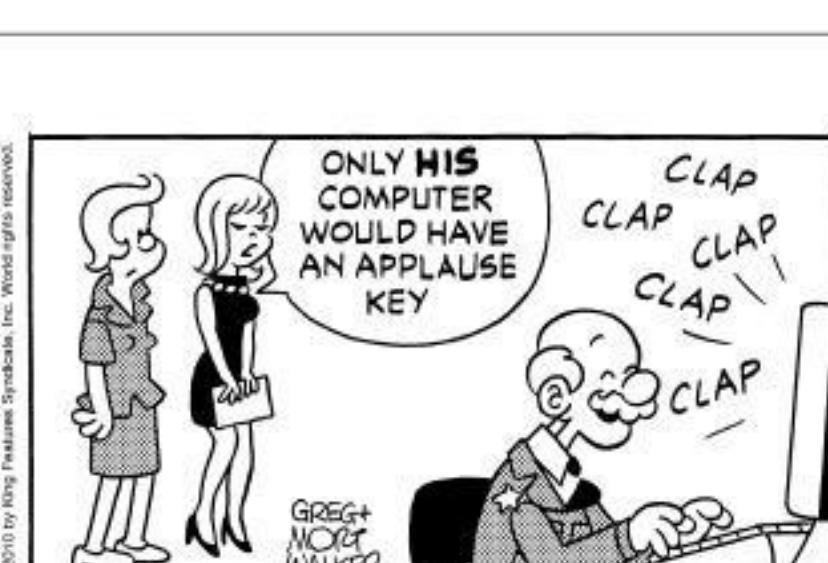
SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD

DOWN
12 Golden syrup, 15 Odd, 16 Dismantle, 19 Fraternal, 20 Aid, 21 Ado, 22 Eddy, 9 Deed, 11 Fluctuate,

By arrangement with The Independent
Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required

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BEETLE BAILEY/Mort Walker



RED EYE/Bill Yates & Mel Casson



DADDY DAZE/John Kovaleski



NEED TO KNOW

HOSPITALS

22586262, 22585007

RAILWAY INQUIRY

General Inquiry 139

Toll Free Nos. 1800112511

SMS Inquiry Nos. 57886, 54959, 5676747

ROADWAYS INQUIRY

■ ISBT (General Inquiry):

23868836, 23865181

■ Haryana Roadways: 23861262, City Office 43513185, Call Centre 09910383838, 18001803838, Reservation 43513186; Indigo Airlines Air

port 011-25671580; Terminal I-23860562

■ Rajasthan Roadways 23571579, 18001803838

■ JET AIRWAYS Flight Inquiry and Reservation 09910383838

■ EMIRATES Flight Inquiry and Reservation 3773377

■ U.P. Roadways 23868709

FLIGHT INQUIRY

■ AIR INDIA Flight Inquiry and Reservation 18001801407

25656421/25656431 Reservation

41528181 (Airport)

■ Air Canada Flight Inquiry and Reservation 23466262 (City)

25652294 (Airport)

■ Kuwait Airways Flight Inquiry and Reservation 23354373

■ INDIGO AIRLINES New Delhi

City Office 43513185, Call Centre 09910383838, 18001803838, Reservation 43513186; Indigo Airlines Air

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■ Rajasthan Roadways 23571579, 18001803838

■ JET AIRWAYS Flight Inquiry and Reservation 09910383838

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■ U.P. Roadways 23868709

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■ AIR INDIA Flight Inquiry and Reservation 18001801407

25656421/25656431 Reservation

41528181 (Airport)

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25652294 (Airport)

■ Kuwait Airways Flight Inquiry and Reservation 23354373

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■ Rajasthan Roadways 23571579, 18001803838

■ JET AIRWAYS Flight Inquiry and Reservation 09910383838



*Some countries buy vaccines three or four times more than they need.
This means that someone (else) would not (be able to) receive the jab.*

AZERBAIJANI PRESIDENT ILHAM ALIEV

EXPRESSING CONCERN OVER WHAT HE BELIEVES IS AN APPARENT DISPARITY IN GLOBAL VACCINE DISTRIBUTION

WEATHER

CITY	MAX (°C)	MIN (°C)
SINGAPORE	32	25 CL
HONG KONG	22	16 CL
TOKYO	18	06 CL
LONDON	11	03 S
DUBAI	27	19 S
SAN FRANCISCO	19	07 S
NEW YORK	11	-4 R
MOSCOW	03	02 CL

S=sunny, CL= clear,
H=hazy, R=rainy...

THUMBNAILS



Hundreds protest in the streets against Covid-19 curbs. In Copenhagen on Sunday.

AGENCIES

Five dead in China gas leak: At least five people died and eight others fell sick after inhaling toxic gases leaked from a chemical fibre plant in northeast China's Jilin Province, officials said on Sunday. The accident happened late Saturday in the city of Jilin. The eight people who fell sick are in hospital and stated to be stable. PTI

JUI-F cleric, 2 others killed in attack in Pak: A prominent local Pakistani cleric associated with Maulana Fazlur Rehman's Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl has been shot dead along with his son and a seminary student by unknown gunmen on the outskirts of Islamabad. The cleric was associated with the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl which is leading the Opposition's alliance seeking PM Imran Khan's resignation. PTI

10 killed in Mexico shooting

MEXICO CITY, 28 FEBRUARY

Ten men were killed and a woman and two boys were wounded in a shooting attack on a home in western Mexico Saturday.

Prosecutors of Jalisco said the bullet-ridden bodies of the 10 men were found by police on the sidewalk in front of the home. Another wounded boy was found inside, and a woman and another boy were located at a local hospital. The prosecutors' office said the attack was carried out by unidentified assailants travelling in an SUV.

The state is home to the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, one of Mexico's most violent and powerful. More bodies have been found in clandestine burial pits in Jalisco than in any other state in recent years. The cartel has been fighting a breakaway faction in and around Guadalajara. Earlier this month, police found 18 plastic bags full of hacked-up body parts on the outskirts of the state capital. AP

I never made advances toward Ms. Bennett nor did I ever intend to act in anyway that was inappropriate, Cuomos statement said. The last thing I would ever have wanted was to make her feel any of the things that are being reported.

Cuomo, however, said he had authorized an outside review of Bennett's allegations.

The governor's special counsel, Beth Garvey, said that review would be conducted by a former federal

In recent weeks, he has been assailed over revela-

US gets third Covid vaccine as FDA approves J&J's single dose

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

WASHINGTON, 28 FEBRUARY

The US Food and Drug Administration has approved Johnson and Johnson's Covid-19 vaccine that works with just one dose instead of two for emergency use, giving Americans third jab to fight the pandemic that has claimed over half a million lives in the country.

President Joe Biden described the FDA's approval as an encouraging development in efforts to end the Covid-19 crisis and said this is exciting news for all US citizens.

The Johnson and Johnson vaccine, which works with one dose instead of two, got approval on Saturday, the third vaccine cleared in the country after emergency use authorisation (EUA) was given to two-dose shots from Pfizer and Moderna last year.

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require two shots within two weeks, J&J's one-dose regimen eliminates the need for patients to return for a second dose and it can be stored at refrigerator temperatures for months.

"Today, after a rigorous, open, and objective scientific review process, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued an emergency use authorisation (EUA) was given to two-dose shots from Pfizer and Moderna's vaccines that

Johnson and Johnson) vaccine," Biden said.

The EUA allows the Janssen Covid-19 vaccine to be distributed in the US for use in individuals of 18 years of age or older. Unlike the other two approved vaccines, the Johnson and Johnson vaccine is administered as a single dose.

Preliminary results from a large trial in the US, Latin America and South Africa suggested J&J's vaccine was safe and offered strong protection against moderate to severe Covid-19.

The FDA said J&J's vaccine offers strong protection against what matters most: serious illness, hospitalisations and death. One dose was 85 per cent protective against the most severe Covid-19 illness, in the massive study that spanned three continents - protection that remained strong even in countries such as South Africa, where the variants of most concern are spreading.



*Some countries buy vaccines three or four times more than they need.
This means that someone (else) would not (be able to) receive the jab.*

AZERBAIJANI PRESIDENT ILHAM ALIEV

EXPRESSING CONCERN OVER WHAT HE BELIEVES IS AN APPARENT DISPARITY IN GLOBAL VACCINE DISTRIBUTION

Biden team readies infra pkg after Covid Bill

Lawmakers are laying groundwork for the top legislative priority, a long-sought boost to nation's roads, bridges that could run into GOP resistance

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, 28 FEBRUARY

Looking beyond the \$1.9 trillion Covid relief Bill, President Joe Biden and lawmakers are laying the groundwork for another top legislative priority, a long-sought boost to the nation's roads, bridges and other infrastructure that could run into Republican resistance to a hefty price tag.

Biden and his team have begun discussions on the possible outlines of an infrastructure package with members of Congress, particularly mindful that Texas' recent struggles with power outages and water shortages after a brutal winter storm present an opportunity for agreement on sustained spending on infrastructure.

Gina McCarthy, Biden's national climate adviser, said that the deadly winter storm in Texas should be a wake-up call for the need for energy systems and other infrastructure that are more reliable and resilient.

The infrastructure is not built to withstand these extreme weather conditions, said Liz Sherwood-Randall, a

homeland security aide to the president. We know that we can't just react to extreme weather events. We need to plan for them and prepare for them.

A White House proposal could come out in March.

Now is the time to be aggressive, said Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, a former South Bend, Indiana, mayor who knows potholes.

At a conference with state and local highway officials Thursday, he referred to the often-promised, never-achieved mega-initiative on roads, bridges and the like from the Trump era.

I know you are among those who are working and waiting most patiently, or maybe impatiently, for the moment when Infrastructure Week will no longer be a kind of Groundhog's Day promise but actually be something that delivers generational investments, he said.

Much of America's infrastructure roads, bridges, public drinking and water systems, dams, airports, mass transit systems and more is in need of major restoration after years of underfunding, according to the American Society of Civil Engineers.

AGGRESSIVE REFORMS

► Gina McCarthy, Biden's national climate adviser, said that the deadly winter storm in Texas should be a wake-up call for the need for energy systems and other infrastructure that are more reliable and resilient.

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► Much of America's infrastructure roads, bridges, public drinking and water systems, dams, airports, mass transit systems and more is in need of major restoration after years of underfunding, according to the American Society of Civil Engineers



Civil Engineers. In its 2017 Infrastructure Report Card, it gave the national infrastructure an overall grade of D+.

Both chambers of Congress will use as starting points their unsuccessful efforts to get infrastructure bills through the last session.

Democrats passed a USD 1.5 trillion package in the House last year, but it went nowhere with the Trump administration and the Repub-

blican-led Senate. A Senate panel approved narrower bipartisan legislation in 2019 focused on reauthorizing federal transportation programs.

It, too, flamed out as the U.S. turned its focus to elections and COVID-19.

Biden has talked bigger numbers, and some Democrats are now urging him to bypass Republicans in the closely divided Congress to address a broader range of pri-

orities urged by interest groups.

During the presidential campaign, Biden pledged to deploy \$2 trillion on infrastructure and clean energy, but the White House has not ruled out an even higher price tag.

McCarthy said Biden's upcoming plan will specifically aim at job creation, such as with investments to boost workers that have been left behind by closed coal mines or power plants, as well as communi-

Russia sends Navalny to notorious penal camp

THE STRAITS TIMES/ANN

MOSCOW, 28 FEBRUARY



Russian Opposition leader Alexey Navalny, who survived a chemical poisoning last year that he called a Kremlin attempt to kill him, has begun serving his two-and-a-half-year sentence at a notorious penal camp.

Navalny, who was removed from his Moscow jail cell on Thursday, is being held at a detention facility in the prison in the Vladimir region, about 100km east of the Russian capital. Alexey Melnikov, secretary of the civil oversight commission of Moscow, told Bloomberg.

President Vladimir Putin's most prominent critic lost an appeal 20 Feb over a court decision to convert a 2014 suspended sentence into incarceration for breaking his probation terms. That was the last

obstacle keeping the 44-year-old from being sent to a prison outside Moscow.

The jail, where inmates are housed in barracks and typically do manual labour, is classified as a "red zone" where the administration controls every aspect of life. It's a tough penal camp with very strict rules, to put it mildly,"

said Eva Merkacheva, a member of a civic-oversight group for the prison system.

Konstantin Kotov, an opposition activist who was freed in December after 11 1/2 years at the same prison, said he was subjected to constant intimidation. This included repeated punishment for so-called infringements such as not saluting a prison guard or borrowing someone's gloves - with those that his relatives sent him not being delivered - as well as isolating him from other inmates.

"Alexey is going to have a very difficult time," Kotov said. "The administration keeps tabs on your every move." While his case was so high-profile that no violence was used against him, from the very first day I came under extreme psychological pressure," he said.

The activist's lawyer, Maria Eismont, got access to Kotov within a day and a half of his arrival at the jail but he'd already agreed to give up his right to confidential conversations with her, she said.

"If I was the prison service and I wanted to make Navalny's life as hellish as possible, I'd send him precisely to this camp," Eismont added. The head of the Russian Prison Service, Alexander Kalashnikov, said there's "no threat" to Navalny's "life" in prison.

Navalny received the sentence for failing to check in with the authorities while recovering in Germany from the near-fatal nerve agent attack in August. Western governments have also blamed the Kremlin for the poisoning, while Russian authorities deny any role.

Citing concerns about his safety in prison, the European Court of Human Rights had called on Russia to release Navalny before his case was considered. Russian officials rejected that request.

Supreme Court could put new limits on voting rights lawsuits

WASHINGTON, 28 FEBRUARY

Eight years after carving the heart out of a landmark voting rights law, the Supreme Court is looking at putting new limits on efforts to combat racial discrimination in voting. The justices are taking up a case about Arizona restrictions on ballot collection and another policy that penalizes voters who cast ballots in the wrong precinct.

The high court's consideration comes as Republican officials in the state and around the country have proposed more than 150 measures, following last year's elections, to restrict voting access that civil rights groups say would disproportionately affect Black and Hispanic voters. A broad Supreme Court ruling would make it harder to fight those efforts in court. Arguments are set for Tuesday.

It would be taking away the main tool we have left now, to protect voters against racial discrimination, said Myrna Perez, director of the Brennan Center for Justice's voting rights and elections program.

Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich, a Republican, said the high court case is about ballot integrity, not discrimination. This is about protecting the franchise, not disenfranchising anyone, said Brnovich, who will argue the case on Tuesday.

President Joe Biden narrowly won Arizona last year, and since 2018, the state has elected two Democratic senators. The justices will be reviewing an appeals court ruling against a 2016 Arizona law that limits who can return early ballots for another person and against a separate state policy of discarding ballots if a voter goes to the wrong precinct.

AP

Experts concerned about Pope trip to Iraq

ASSOCIATED PRESS

VATICAN CITY, 28 FEBRUARY



Infectious disease experts are expressing concern about Pope Francis' upcoming trip to Iraq, given a sharp rise in coronavirus infections there, a fragile health care system and the unavoidable likelihood that Iraqis will crowd to see him.

No one wants to tell Francis to call it off, and the Iraqi government has every interest in showing off its relative stability by welcoming the first pope to the birthplace of Abraham.

The March 5 trip will provide a sorely-needed spiritual boost to Iraq's beleaguered Christians while furthering the Vatican's bridge-building efforts with the Muslim world.

But from a purely epidemiological standpoint, as well as the public health message it sends, a papal trip to Iraq amidst a global pandemic is not advisable, health experts say. They note that wars, economic crises and an exodus of Iraqi professionals

have devastated the country's hospital system, while studies show most of Iraq's new Covid-19 infections are the highly-contagious variant first identified in Britain. I just don't think it's a good idea,

said Dr. Navid Madani, virologist and founding director of the Center for Science Health Education in the Middle East and North Africa at Harvard Medical School's Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

The Iranian-born Madani co-authored an article in The Lancet last year on the region's uneven response to Covid-19, noting that Iraq, Syria and Yemen were poorly placed to cope given they are still struggling with extremist insurgencies and have 40 million people who need humanitarian aid.

In a telephone interview, Madani said Middle Easterners are known for their hospitality, and cautioned that the enthusiasm among Iraqis of welcoming a peace-maker like Francis to a neglected, war-torn part of the world might lead to inadvertent violations of virus control measures.

This could potentially lead to unsafe or superspreading risks, she said.

Dr Bharat Pankhania, an infectious disease control expert at the University of Exeter College of Medicine, concurred. It's a perfect storm for generating lots of cases which you won't be able to deal with, he said.

Organisers promise to enforce mask mandates, social distancing and limitations on participation in papal events, with the possibility of

increased testing sites, two Iraqi government officials said.

The health care protocols are critical but can be managed, one government official told The Associated Press, speaking on condition of anonymity.

And the Vatican has taken its own precautions, with the 84-year-old pope, his 20-member Vatican entourage and 70-plus journalists on the papal plane all vaccinated.

But the Iraqis who will be gathering in the north, center and south of the country to attend Francis' indoor and outdoor Masses, hear his speeches, participate in his prayer meetings and organize the logistics of a complicated trip, are not.

And that, scientists say, is the problem.

We are in the middle of a global pandemic. And it is important to get the correct messages out, Pankhania said. The correct messages are the less interactions with fellow human beings, the better.

</div

Media versus media in Assam

The recent abduction of two engineers by militants has opened a can of worms



The two abducted engineers

NAVA THAKURIA

If one asks a general question in Assam who morally supports separatist armed militants, the probable answer may be the mainstream media (precisely satellite news channels). It has been derived from a number of incidents where so-called experienced journalists have taken a stand in favour of outlawed militants -- notably, the United Liberation Front of Assam's self-styled military commander, Pares Barua.

It once again came to public notice recently when two individuals were abducted by Ulfa (Independent rebels). They threatened to take extreme steps if the ransom demanded was not paid by their employers. The militant group issued statements, which most Guwahati-based newspapers and news channels published or aired.

Some news channels aired a soundbite of Barua where he "proudly" declared that if negotiations with the employers of both individuals failed, action would be taken against them. In one shocking statement,

Barua even said that the first action would be taken against the person from outside Assam (read Bihar) and only afterwards, would it be the turn for the Assamese one.

All the aforementioned events began with the abduction of Pranab Kumar Gogoi and Ram Kumar -- employees of the Haryana-based Quippo Oil and Gas Infrastructure Limited -- from the Diyun drilling locality in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh on 21 December 2020.

The Ulfa (I), in association with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (K), issued a statement in Assamese during the last week of January asserting that punitive action would be taken against both engineers if the oil company failed to pay the ransom amount by 16 February. It hinted that the process of negotiations with company officials were ongoing.

However, they soon declared that talks with Quippo officials had failed and hence, they would act on Gogoi, who hails from Sivasagar in eastern Assam, and Kumar, hailing from Kha-

garia of Bihar, as per the resolution. The militants also imposed a ban on the company across western parts of the South-east Asian region, or in other words, North-east India. It asked employees to abandon the company and thereby, created panic among families and relatives.

Following public outrage, Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal, also in charge of the home portfolio, appealed to the outfit to release them on humanitarian grounds. The government's stand was, however, clear that necessary initiatives were on track to rescue both the abducted individuals.

A number of social organisations, namely the Patriotic People's Front Assam, Assam Public Works, All Assam Engineers' Association etc, advocated the release of Gogoi and Kumar without any harm to them. Noted Assamese intellectual Dr Hirun Gohain, senior lawyer DN Chakrabarty and social activist Abhijit Sarma, among others, criticised the militant outfit for its continued intimidations.

A forum of nationalist citizens in

North-east India, the PPFA stated that the peace-loving people of Assam would never forgive Ulfa militants for any misadventure. The forum also urged Guwahati-based media outlets not to glorify militants by beaming continued coverage on Barua.

Meanwhile, social media users unanimously condemned the militant leader, who is understood to be hiding somewhere along the Myanmar-China border, for insurgent activities. Many posts (some were even unparliamentary) abused Barua, calling him a coward and "tout for Bangladeshi". News channels were also criticised vehemently for giving space to the "criminal".

But all such outbursts did not prevent Guwahati Press Club from organising a virtual media interaction with Barua, who was supposed to be available from an undisclosed location. The club committee readied everything by 6.30 pm on 21 February. Some office-bearers were clearly visible in the live footage of various news channels as they were eagerly waiting for Barua's expected phone call.

From the dais of the GPC auditorium in Guwahati's Ambari, one office-bearer received the call from Barua and was supposed to transfer it to the sound system so that all reporters, who were present on the occasion, could listen to the militant leader's voice and then interact. But because of the arrival of some city police personnel, the programme was abruptly concluded.

"It is beyond doubt that the club committee desired to provide space to the militant leader who recently threatened to execute two Quippo employees. Both the abducted individuals are still under the Ulfa (I)'s custody," said Biswajit Nath, a Guwahati-based journalist, who lodged an FIR against the press club president and secretary.

Filing the complaint at Latashil police station on 23 February, he argued that the GPC committee had organised the formal interview with Barua at its own auditorium. The petitioner did not forget to mention that since 1998, a group of brave journalists and patriotic citizens, have been hoisting the national tricolour in the same club premises, defying the diktat of armed groups including Ulfa.

"They all took tremendous risks while paying tributes to martyrs of the freedom movement as militants had once threatened to punish participants of Independence Day and Republic Day celebrations," said Nath, while urging the police to take appropriate action against the litigants "so that the anti-national mentality can be discouraged in this part of the country".

The press club has legacy of anti-terror protests as its members raised their voices so that journalist Kamala Saikia's family, who was brutally killed by Ulfa militants on 9 August 1991, gets justice" said Rupam Barua, a senior journalist who mentioned about the protest march in a Facebook post. He expressed anger that the club had done nothing but mock the spirit of devoted journalists of yesteryears.

It is worth mentioning here that when the small group of journalists and patriotic citizens hoisted the tricolour at the club premises, no Guwahati-based news channel reported about it. Rather, they visibly reported the threats of militants, seemingly with an aim to terrorise common people. In the absence of social media, a decade ago, a few news outlets (including some newspapers) glorified the acts of militants.

Times change and now, the same television news channels are facing the public's wrath on social media for their misunderstood acts of journalism. The social media space is being gradually enriched by veteran journalists, authors and activists. A battle-line of a different kind is being drawn between mainstream media outlets and social media users in Assam.

The writer is the Guwahati-based Special Representative of *The Statesman*

PLUS POINTS

Best performer



Arunachal Pradesh has been adjudged the best performing state in implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme among the North-eastern states and hilly regions for achieving the highest percentage of Aadhaar-seeded beneficiaries for 2020-21. The percentage of Aadhaar-authenticated beneficiaries in the state is 98 per cent.

Union minister of agriculture and farmers' welfare Narendra Singh Tomar presented the award in a ceremony organised to celebrate the second anniversary of the PM-KISAN scheme, at New Delhi last week, says a report in the Guwahati-based *Assam Tribune*. Arunachal Pradesh agriculture minister Tage Taki and state nodal officer for PM-Kisan Idris Nyori received the award on behalf of the state.

Congratulating the state agriculture department on achieving the feat, chief minister Pema Khandu, wrote in a post on Twitter, "Farmer's welfare is our priority. Congratulations to department of agriculture for achieving 98% Aadhaar authentication of beneficiaries of PM-KISAN (sic)."

Meanwhile, agriculture minister Taki said that the award authenticates the efficient implementation of the scheme and sheer dedication of the entire team of officers and field functionaries of the state agriculture department who worked sincerely and tirelessly to achieve this milestone for the welfare of Arunachal Pradesh's farmers.

Under the PM-Kisan scheme, which was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 24 February 2019, an income support of Rs 6,000 every year is provided to all eligible landholding farmers' families across the country to enable them to take care of the expenses related to agriculture and allied activities as well as domestic needs.

Police-students clash

More than a dozen students protesting against the non-conduct of classes in their colleges were injured in Manipur as they clashed with police who used tear gas and baton charges to disperse demonstrators, says a report on *Newmai News*.

Classes in government colleges have remained suspended since 17 February after agitating teachers resorted to cease work strike as a form of intensifying their demand for implementation of Seventh UGC Pay and Regulations, 2018.

Irate over the non-conduct of classes in their recently reopened colleges, the students have been pressing the state government to bring a solution with the striking teachers to resume normal classes immediately. After the failure on the part of the state government to address their demands, a large number of students protested on the streets near their colleges.

In one of the protests by students of five colleges affiliated to Dhanamanjuri University, the students confronted a strong police team who used force to prevent them from protesting. The students and police first engaged in a physical struggle when the former attempted to stage the protest on the street, allegedly targeting the State Assembly where the budget session was in progress. In their bid to put the protesting students under control, the police used tear gas and baton charges.

Infighting



The BJP demanded a white paper on corruption from the National People's Party-led Meghalaya Democratic Alliance government, says a report in the *Assam Tribune*.

Significantly, the BJP is part of the NPP-led coalition government in Meghalaya. Two of its MLAs -- Cabinet minister AL Hek and Sanbor Shullai -- are supporting the state government. Both the MLAs, however, have kept mum on the state BJP unit's allegations.

"We want a white paper on corruption from the present government," state BJP president Ernest Mawrie (*in photo*) said, adding that if the present MDA government is clean as claimed, chief minister Conrad Sangma should not hesitate to accept the demand. He further said that the coalition government has not convened an MDA meeting so far to discuss issues related to corruption in the government, an issue that the BJP has been continuously raising.

Meanwhile, Sangma has rubbish the accusations made by the Meghalaya BJP unit and said that if anyone has any evidence of corruption in the government, they should come forward to furnish it so that action can be taken.

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

There are some books that immediately grab your attention by dint of their titles. Journalist Zafri Mudasser Nofil's *The Identity Quotient: The Story of the Assamese Muslims*, published by Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, is one such book.

The publication of the 179-page book could not have possibly come at a more opportune time with Assembly elections in Assam just a couple of

months away, setting the stage for the playing out of linguistic, ethnic and religious fault lines among voters. In recent times, the contentious issues of the National Register of Citizens and Citizenship Amendment Act have heated up the political cauldron in Assam, especially for its 10.7 million Muslim residents, who constitute 34.22 per cent of the state's total population of 31.2 million (as per the last census in 2011).

Identity politics in Assam, Zafri's debut book would like us to conclude,

began in 1836 when the Assamese language was replaced by Bangla in official communications and in education. Six years down the line, however, Assamese was restored as the official language with the help of American Baptist missionaries and Assamese "visionary" Anandaram Dhekial Phukan. But by that time, a sense of disquiet had already crept into the hearts of those whose mother tongue was Assamese.

Over the following decades, what sharply accentuated that feeling of

hurt were mainly economic backwardness, "geographical seclusion" (of the entire North-east) and "invasive and illegal migration from across the border". All that had the cumulative effect of giving birth to the movement against "foreigners" (read Bangla-speaking Hindu and Muslim migrants from across the border) from the late 1960s to its culmination in 1985 with the signing of the Assam Accord.

The replacing of Assamese as the official language and subsequent years of underdevelopment blended into what came to be known as *Axomiya jatiyotabadi* (Assamese nationalism). And that, along with the vote bank politics of regional and national parties, made migration from across the border a "volatile issue", as Assam's former police chief and poet Harekrishna Deka is quoted in the book as saying.

The author, who belongs to Dibrugarh in Assam, devotes two long and separate chapters on the controversial NRC and CAA issues, the fierce opposition to which contains strains of *Axomiya jatiyotabadi*. An interesting observation by Zafri is that "the opposition to CAA in Assam is more about how many get included because of the legislation, and not who are excluded."

Tracing the evolution of Islam and Muslims in Assam, the author tells us that most of the Muslims in the state are converts. "Muslims started making their appearance in Assam in the medieval times", in the early 13th century. Delving into historical records, he says a man belonging to Assam's local Mech tribe -- who guided Qutubuddin Aibak's military general Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar, popularly known as Bakhtiyar Khalji, to its invasion of Assam (then known as Kamarupa) in 1206 AD -- "is believed to be the first person in the area to have embraced Islam".

The book divides the Muslims of Assam into mainly six groups -- Deshis of lower Assam, the Goriyas and Moriays of upper Assam, the Juhais, mainly comprising tea garden workers brought by the British from outside, the Syeds, and Bangla-speaking Muslims of Barak Valley. They are dealt with in detail. The

book segregates immigrant Muslims, who are termed as "miyas" in Assam, from the six main groups because most of them are of Bangladeshi origin and live in the "char" areas of rivers. Most importantly, the author proceeds to discuss these different Muslim groups from the point of view that "Muslims of Assam are different from (their co-religionists) in the rest of the country." To buttress his belief, he says, "Muslims (here) take pride in calling themselves Assamese first." According to the book, "Muslim settlers in Assam, after they had made this land their permanent home, adopted Assamese as their language and accepted local habits and customs that helped them identify themselves as locals."

The Muslims of Assam "unhesitatingly fought against the Mughal army that consisted of a good fraction of the followers of Islam, when the latter attempted to invade Assam." The author's assertion that Muslims of Assam are different from Muslims in the rest of India is likely to leave views divided on the extent of Muslims' integration with the social mainstream in other parts of India.

A great value addition to *The Identity Quotient* are chapters on Muslim culinary and food habits in Assam, contribution of Muslim writers and singers, the film fraternity in the state and marriage customs among Muslims, which are a combination of Islamic customs and "some traditions common among Assamese Hindus closely entwined." For instance, *sin-door* (vermillion) is still used by Deshi Muslims in seven districts of Assam, albeit symbolically, during marriage, a hangover from Hindu traditions, says the book with empirical evidence.

Quoting extensively from historical documents and interviewing leading Muslims in different fields, the expansive focus of the book on different aspects of the community in Assam makes it a must-read for students and researchers. But the price of Rs 595 could come in the way of the book becoming more easily accessible to a wider audience.

The daily star/ann



For more updates

LYON SLAMS CRITICS

Star Australia spinner Nathan Lyon (*in photo, left*) is baffled by all the hullabaloo over the Motera pitch, saying "everyone seems to start crying" when the ball starts spinning but no one speaks out when teams are bundled out for low scores on seaming tracks. Lyon gave a thumbs up to the curator. "We play on seaming wickets around the world and get bowled out for 47, 60. Nobody ever says a thing (about the pitch). But as soon as it starts spinning, everyone in the world seems to start crying about it," Lyon was quoted as saying by 'The West Australian'.

www.thestatesman.com

THUMBNAILS

Vinesh returns to mat with gold: Star Indian wrestler Vinesh Phogat on Sunday pinned 2017 world champion V Kaladzinskay to grab a gold medal at the Outstanding Ukrainian Wrestlers and Coaches Memorial tournament here, and returned to the mat in style after a long coronavirus-forced break. Vinesh opened up a 4-0 lead in the 53kg final with a throw which she initiated with a left-leg attack but Kaladzinskay made it 4-4 with her brilliant move.

Mary Kom to lead boxing team: Six-time world champion MC Mary Kom will spearhead a 14-member Indian boxing in the Boxam International tournament in Castellon, Spain from March 1 to 7. According to a release issued by the Boxing Federation of India (BFI), the Indian contingent left for Spain in early hours on Sunday. Besides Mary Kom, the team also has Commonwealth Games silver medalist Manish Kaushik (63kg).

Para athlete Nishad Kumar tests positive for COVID-19: Indian para athlete Nishad Kumar has tested positive for COVID-19 and shifted to a hospital as a precautionary measure, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) said on Sunday. Nishad Kumar had won a gold medal in the men's high jump T46/47 event at the Fazza World Para Athletics Grand Prix that was recently held in Dubai.

Archery gold: Indian para archer Rakesh Kumar stood on top of the podium in the Compound event while the pair of Harvinder Singh and Pooja grabbed gold in the recurve mixed team event at the Fazza world ranking tournament in Dubai. Rakesh defeated compatriot Shyam Sunder 143-135 in the final after his 143-138 semifinal win over Turkey's Ayan.

Mohammedan SC win: Pedro Manzi's brace – a long-range stunner and a header – helped Mohammedan SC pull off a miracle as they hand Real Kashmir their first defeat in the League season despite going down to 10 men at the VYBK Stadium on Sunday. The win helped Mohammedan SC book a top six spot in the league with 16 points from 10 matches.

Luuu to lead SA women in India: Sune Luuu will lead South Africa's women's team against India in the upcoming limited over series as regular skipper Dane Van Niekerk and Chloe Tryon will again miss the assignment due to injuries, the country's cricket board CSA said on Sunday. The visitors arrived in India on Saturday and are currently serving a six-day quarantine period.

Conchita Martnez tests positive: Former Wimbledon champion Conchita Martnez has tested positive for the coronavirus. Martnez said on social media on Saturday she is in quarantine at a hospital in Doha after the positive test on arrival in Qatar. Martnez is the coach of former world No. 1 Garbiñe Muguruza, who is set to play at the Qatar Open from Monday.

Iyer misses on 200 by 2 runs: Madhya Pradesh's Venkatesh Iyer, who was signed by the Kolkata Knight Riders in the 2021 Indian Premier League auction, missed out on his maiden 50-over double hundred by just two runs on Sunday. Iyer smashed 198 off 146 balls in the Vijay Hazare Trophy against Punjab before being run out, thus missing out on becoming the second player to score a double hundred this season after Mumbai's Prithvi Shaw.

Newcastle held: Newcastle was denied a crucial win in its relegation battle in the English Premier League as Ruben Neves earned Wolverhampton a 1-1 draw, the same score as the previous four matches between the teams.

'India calculated England's ineptitude against spin'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 FEBRUARY



India figured out England's general "ineptitude against spin" during the second Test in Chennai and used it to their advantage in the 'Pink Ball' game by unleashing a spin-heavy attack on a helpful track, says former Australia captain Ian Chappell (*in photo*).

Indian spin duo of Axar Patel and Ravichandran Ashwin claimed 11 and 7 wickets respectively to bowl out England for 112 and 81 in the two innings en route to their 10-wicket win in the third Test on Thursday.

This was after the 317-run triumph in the second Test in Chennai where the visitors too had found the going tough against spinners and were dismissed for 134 and 164.

"India's decision to select three spinners for the Test was prompted by England's batting on a tricky Chennai pitch, where their batsmen - Joe Root excepted - displayed a distinct ineptitude against spin," Chappell wrote in a column in 'ESPNcricinfo'.

"India correctly calculated that would result in men-

tal scarring and used it to their advantage."

Chappell said it was poor defence which led to England's collapse in the third Test.

"When faced with a serious spin challenge, the England batsmen didn't trust their defence, which eventually resulted in panicked attempts to attack the Indian spinners," he wrote.

"Their choice to reverse-sweep rather than to leave their crease to change the bowler's length is a classic example. How can a risky pre-mediated shot be less dangerous than what was previ-

ously a trusted technique to unsettle good spinners?" he questioned.

Chappell said "Shrewd use of footwork not only helps negate the spin but also puts a batsman in a position to direct the ball where he wants."

"To be fair, this is a skill to be learned at a young age. Which prompts the question: why is it not widely taught in England, where sweeping is misguidedly touted as the secret to playing spin successfully?"

Ollie Pope had decided to use his feet against the Indian spinners but Chappell

ICC Rankings: Rohit reaches career-best eighth rank

AGENCIES
DUBAI, 28 FEBRUARY

Opener Rohit Sharma touched his career-best eighth position in the ICC Test Batsmen's Rankings on Sunday with a six-place jump after his impressive show in India's 10-wicket win over England in the low-scoring third Test in Ahmedabad. Rohit top-scored in the first innings with 66 and remained unbeaten on 25 in the second to move ahead of compatriot Cheteshwar Pujara among others.

His rating points aggregate is 742, 20 more than his best of 722 in October 2019 when he was ranked 10th.

Player of the match Axar Patel and Ravichandran Ashwin have also made solid gains after playing a crucial role in India's win on a spin-friendly track.

Left-arm spinner Patel's 11-wicket match haul has helped him gain 30 slots to reach 38th position while off-spinner Ashwin's seven wickets have lifted him four places to

third position. England spinner Jack Leach has entered the top 30 for the first time, moving up three places to 28th after taking four wickets. Captain Joe Root's maiden five-wicket haul has lifted him 16 places to 72nd among bowlers while he is now joint-13th among all-rounders.

Opener Zak Crawley's knock of 53 in the first innings has helped him advance 15 places to 46th in what was the only notable gain for any of their batsmen.

Meanwhile, the ICC said that player rankings will move to a weekly updating system from March 2021 for both men and women.

"The change will not impact the way the rankings are calculated but what it means is that instead of frankings being updated at the end of a series (in ODIs and T20Is) or a Test match, they may be updated while a series or match is ongoing without performances in those matches being considered," ICC said in a release.

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AITA asks age fraud suspects to produce TW3 tests ahead of Nationals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 FEBRUARY

ducted. It will definitely be done," he said.

It has been learnt that the suspected players are from Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi.

Not only a group of parents met AITA officials in Delhi but many of them wrote e-mails to Dhupar in the last few days, pleading for action.

The 2020 Nationals could not be held due to coronavirus pandemic, so MSLTA, MPJA and HLTA are hosting the event next month.

Mumbai will host the Under-12 (March 8-14) and Under-16 competitions (May, 2021) while the Under-14 (March 14-22) event will be held in Aurangabad.

Indore will organise the Under-18 event from March 29. The men's and women's championships will be held in Gurugram from March 15. The TW3 method uses X-Rays of the left hand and wrist to examine the skeletal maturity of a person to determine their bone age.

In wrist scans, age is estimated by looking at 20 or so bones initially separated by cartilage, but which progressively move closer to one another until they fuse in the mature wrist.

One of the reasons for using left hand and wrist radiographs is that most people are right-handed, and therefore, the right hand is more likely to be injured than the left hand.

'ICC will get written assurance from BCCI regarding issuance of visas for our players'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KARACHI, 28 FEBRUARY



we will get our written confirmation by the end of next month." The PCB chief said it was their right to demand this assurance and no one can keep Pakistan out of the World Cup.

The World Test Championship final is slated at Lord's from June 18-22.

India needs at least a draw in the fourth and final Test against England in the ongoing four-Test series to set up a clash with New Zealand in the World Test Championship final. Pakistan was initially host of the Asia Cup but surrendered it to Sri Lanka after problems over India not being able to tour Pakistan for the tournament.

Mani also made it clear that Pakistan had no problems with the World T20 being held in India.

for the event and the COVID-19 pandemic situation. The ICC has already in a contingency planning decided the World T20 can also be moved to UAE if need arose," he said. Mani also said if India qualifies for the WTC final it would be impossible for the Asia Cup to be held this year as planned due to a clash of dates.

"The way things look most probably the Asia Cup will be postponed until 2023," he said.

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Hockey: India defeat Germany 6-1

AGENCIES
KREFELD (GERMANY),
28 FEBRUARY

Playing their first international match in over 12 months, the Indian Men's Hockey Team led by PR Sreejesh put up a scintillating show as they out-classed hosts Germany 6-1 in the first of their four-match Europe Tour on Sunday.

India's goal scorers were Nilakanta Sharma (13'), Vivek Sagar Prasad (27', 28'), Lalit Kumar Upadhyay (41'), Akashdeep Singh (42') and Harmanpreet Singh (47'), who outplayed the hosts and led their team to a winning start on their first assignment of 2021.

Hungry to perform, the Indian Men's hockey team played with an intent to win. They went on an attacking mode right from the start, putting pressure on the German line-up. After creating potential opportunities in the striking circle, India earned a penalty corner in the 13th minute of the first quarter, which saw midfielder Nilakanta Sharma breaking the deadlock for the visitors.

In the 3rd quarter, the hosts started off on the front foot again and earned as many as six PCs. However, the Indian PC defence led by Skipper PR Sreejesh held sway to thwart each of the German's attempt. Soon after a solid display in defence, Indian forwards Lalit Kumar Upadhyay and Akashdeep Singh netted scored brilliant goals in the 41st and 42nd minute, respectively, to put the World No. 4 Indian team in the driver's seat, leading the scoreline 5-1 at the end of the 3rd quarter.

"We won't let elder players compete in lower age categories. We have already sent mail to four players in the Under-12 category. We have demanded documents from them and also asked them to undergo TW3 test," AITA secretary general Anil Dhupar told PTI.

"We are framing rules to end this mess but unfortunately the Executive Committee meeting that was to be held in New Delhi today has been cancelled due to fresh travel conditions imposed."

"But we will do it when we meet next. It will be done in 10-15 days. Every state will have a designated laboratory where TW3 test will be conducted."

ISL semi-final line up: Mumbai City face FC Goa; ATK Mohun Bagan take on NorthEast United

AGENCIES
GOA, 28 FEBRUARY

Jahouh's free-kick fell to an unmarked Fall, who buried his header from an acute angle across the face of goal to put Mumbai ahead. The Mariners took control of the game soon after conceding but were forced to make a substitution in the 19th minute with Prabir Das replacing the injured Sandesh Jinghan.

Chances were far and few in between after the opening goal but it was from another set-piece that Mumbai doubled their advantage. Hernan Santana's free-kick rattled the underside of the crossbar and Ongbeye pounced on the rebound, heading into an empty net.

Mumbai started the second-half bright, piling pressure on the Bagan defence. The Mariners, on the other hand, hardly tested Mumbai keeper Amrinder Singh despite dominating possession after the break. The crossbar proved unlucky for Bagan again, denying Prabir a goal around the hour mark. The substitute lined up a shot from a distance that beat Mumbai keeper Amrinder but the ball fizzled out after striking the frame. Antonio Lopez Habas' side went all out in the closing stages of the game, hoping to script a comeback but Mumbai's backline stood firm, defending in numbers.

All FC Goa needed to progress to the playoffs was a draw. That they achieved with an efficient performance as they held Hyderabad FC to a goalless draw at the Fataora Stadium here on Sunday, setting a new Hero Indian Super League record for the longest unbeaten run in the process.

A brilliant defensive performance from Ivan Gonzalez and some crucial saves from Dheeraj Singh was enough for the Gaurs to get the point they needed.

They were lucky not to concede late in the game and a good show from Hyderabad was not enough to stop Juan Ferrando's men from qualifying for their fourth consecutive semifinals and extending their unbeaten run to 13 games.

Hyderabad are still unbeaten in 2021 and extended their unbeaten run to 12 games, but they had to settle for fifth on the table. Playing without their main players was always going to be difficult for Hyderabad. They missed the services of their regular scorer Arindane Santana (four yellow) upfront and Chinglensana Singh (red card) in defence. But the Nizams were up for the challenge and were able to

match their opponents.

HFC made it difficult for Goa with incessant pressing all over the pitch and had a few chances in the opening minutes. What they lacked was the poacher's instincts in the final third.

Goa, as usual, dominated possession and passing but they couldn't convert it into chances. The first half had zero shots on target as neither goalkeeper was called into action much.

Both sides have scored

more goals in the second session and Goa rang in an early warning when Alberto Noguera set Redeem Tlang free on the left. The winger covered some distance and crossed to Alexander Jesuraj, who was late to react.

Hero ISL 2020-21 Playoff fixtures:

Friday, March 5 - FCG vs Mumbai City FC - PPN Stadium, Fataora

Saturday, March 6 - NorthEast United FC vs ATK Mohun Bagan - GMC Stadium, Bambolim

Monday, March 8 - Mumbai City FC vs FC Goa - GMC Stadium, Bambolim

Tuesday, March 9 - ATK Mohun Bagan vs NorthEast United FC - PPN Stadium, Fataora

Saturday, March 13 - TBD - PPN Stadium, Fataora

Ronaldo scores but Juventus held 1-1 at Hellas Verona

AGENCIES
MILAN, 28 FEBRUARY

Injury-hit Juventus was held at Hellas Verona to 1-1 as its hopes of a record-extending 10th successive Serie A title took a blow.

Cristiano Ronaldo (*in photo*) broke the deadlock early in the second half but Antonn Bark leveled for Verona, which also hit the woodwork twice.

Third-placed Juventus missed the chance to close in on the top two. It was seven points below Serie A leader Inter Milan and three behind AC Milan. Verona remained ninth.

Both sides went close early on. Davide Faraoni's header was turned onto the right post by Juventus goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny less than 10 minutes in.