

SHORT TAKES

Delhi records 142 new Covid cases

New Delhi: Delhi recorded 142 new Covid cases and two more deaths on Thursday, while the positivity rate stood at 0.22 per cent, authorities said. On February 9, no fatality from coronavirus infection was recorded in the national capital. The positivity rate on Thursday stood at 0.22 per cent, authorities said. Delhi had recorded 96 coronavirus cases on January 27, the lowest in over nine months, and for the first time, the count of daily incidences had stood below the 100-mark in that month. Also, on Friday and Sunday, the fatality counts were two on both days, same as on February 2. These new 142 cases came out of the 64,328 tests conducted the previous day, according to the latest bulletin issued by the Delhi health department. The total number of tests conducted the previous day, included 41,943 RT-PCR tests and 22,385 rapid antigen tests, the bulletin said. — PTI

Woman crushed to death by truck

New Delhi: A 22-year-old woman was crushed to death by a truck after she fell off a scooter in Mayur Vihar area on Thursday, police said. The deceased, Swati, is a resident of Rajbir Colony in Kondli area, they said. The police said that she was returning home from G.B. Pant Hospital, where her father had died on Thursday morning. During enquiry, it emerged that the woman, who was travelling with her neighbour, fell off the scooter which hit a speed breaker on Ghazipur nala road near Chilla village, and died after a truck came from behind and ran over her, a senior police officer said. The truck driver escaped from the spot, he said. The injured woman was taken to a nearby hospital, where she was declared brought dead, the officer added. Deputy commissioner of police (East) Deepak Yadav said that a case has been registered under various sections of the IPC at the Mayur Vihar police station and efforts are being made to trace the truck driver.

Jual Oram launches 'Turn Around India'

New Delhi: 'Turn Around India: 2020- Surmounting Past Legacy' — a book on creating economic awareness among masses authored by R.P. Gupta was launched today by Mr Jual Oram, hon'ble M.P. & chairperson standing committee on defence. The book provides a practical and viable option for reviving Indian economy for creating new jobs and enlarging public income and also, the structural reforms such as fiscal and monetary stimuli for overcoming economic crisis arising due to pandemic. 'Turn Around India: 2020' is an intimate narrative of Gupta's experiences and how he attained success through sheer hard work and determination. Published by Himalaya Publishing House, the book highlights the required modes and strategies to transform India into a vibrant economy and among the most developed nations of the world.

FIR AGAINST HARYANVI SINGER SAPNA BHASKAR HARI SHARMA

NEW DELHI

The Economic Offences Wing of Delhi Police has registered an FIR against the Haryanvi singer Sapna Choudhary and others on charges of alleged misappropriation of funds, cheating and criminal conspiracy. Police said that on Wednesday the FIR was registered after a complaint was received from Pawan Chawla, the director of P&M Movies Private Limited, a firm engaged in the business of celebrity management and events. According to the FIR, Choudhary approached Chawla in March 2018 through a common friend after her exit from a popular reality show and showed a keen interest to work with the firm to get financial stability. "After many discussions, an artist-management agreement was executed between Chawla and Choudhary in 2018. As per the terms & conditions, she was not allowed to work with or join any other company or have contact with any clients of the complainant.

Juvenile apprehended for sexually assaulting 2-yr-old

Man, his 3 childhood friends arrested for killing woman

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 11

A 16-year-old boy has been apprehended for allegedly sexually assaulting a minor boy in west Delhi's Subhash Nagar area, police said on Thursday.

The accused, a native of Bihar, had been working as a domestic help at the victim's house for the last two-and-half years, they said. The matter was reported on Tuesday by the victim's father who alleged that his two-year-old son was sexually assaulted by his domestic help, police said. In his complaint, the victim's father alleged that the domestic help took his son from his wife and assured her that he would make him sleep.

When his wife got busy with household chores, the accused took his son to the first floor. After a while, when his wife went upstairs to check on their son, she found the room locked from inside and her son crying and screaming, the father alleged.

She got the door unlocked and found her son bleeding

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 11

A 21-year-old man has been arrested along with his three childhood friends for allegedly killing a woman who was pressuring him to get married to her, police said on Thursday.

The accused Sumit Kumar, a driver by profession, hatched a conspiracy along with his three friends — Ravi, Arun and Amit — to kill the 32-year-old woman, they said.

from his private parts. When she confronted the domestic help, he fled, the complainant alleged.

The child was taken to a hospital and a case was registered, a senior police officer said. Since the accused was from Bihar, we apprehended that he may leave Delhi soon. So, several teams were formed

The woman was pressuring Kumar to get married to her although she was already married, officials said.

Kumar offered his friends ₹1 lakh to kill the woman and also convinced them to rob the cash and jewellery in her house, police said.

The trio killed the woman on February 8, when she was alone in her house in southwest Delhi's Kishangarh. She had moved in with her husband to the rented flat on February 1.

and intensive search was carried out at interstate bus stands as well as railway stations, he said.

Technical surveillance was also mounted and the boy was apprehended on Wednesday morning from outside the New Delhi railway station while he was trying to leave the city, he said.

Petrol price close to ₹88-mark in Delhi, diesel near ₹78-level

▶ PETROL PRICE was increased by 25 paise per litre and diesel by 30 paise a litre, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers

ing a reduction in excise duty to cool rates from their record highs.

Rates have risen as international oil prices touched \$61 per barrel for the first time in more than a year on improving demand outlook amid the global rollout of Covid vaccines, he said.

Central and state taxes make up for over 61 per cent of the retail selling price of petrol and about 56 per cent of diesel.

Retail petrol rates have risen by ₹18.26 per litre since mid-March 2020 after the government raised taxes by a record margin to mop up gains arising from fall in international oil prices. Diesel rates have gone up by ₹15.74.

— PTI

BCI: Decision to scrap one-year LLM to operate from 2022-23

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, FEB. 11

In a breather to law students studying in one-year Master of law across the country, the Bar Council of India, on Thursday, informed the Supreme Court that its decision to scrap the one-year post graduate degree course in law will come into force from the academic year 2022-23. Recording the statement by Manan Kumar Mishra, the chairman of the Bar Council of India (BCI), a bench comprising Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde, Justice A.S. Bopanna, and Justice V. Ramasubramanian did not

pass any interim order.

However, the court sought response from the BCI on a petition by the Consortium of National Law Universities (NLU) challenging the BCI's decision to scrap the one-year LLM programme and derecognise foreign LLM.

The court gave BCI four weeks' time to respond to the petitions by the Consortium of NLUs and two law students.

BCI's decision that the post-graduate course in law (LL.M) has to be of two years spread over four semesters triggered a storm in all the national law universities and other academic institutions

imparting one-year LLM courses after five years' BA LL.B.

The system of having just one year's LLM after five years' BA LL.B is viewed to be disadvantageous to those who take up the study of law in three years' course after completing graduation and then have to study for another two years for their Masters' degree in law. The BCI's Legal Education (Post Graduate, Doctoral, Executive, Vocational, Clinical and other Continuing Education) Rules, 2020, scrapping the one-year LLM course were notified in the official gazette on January 4, 2021.

SC junks plea on preventing sale of fake Covid vaccines

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 11

The Supreme Court, on Thursday, threw out a petition seeking a direction to the Centre to prevent the sale of fake coronavirus vaccines in the country by framing "strict" guidelines on their distribution to the public.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde, Justice A.S. Bopanna, and Justice V. Ramasubramanian told the PIL petitioner; lawyer Vishal Tiwari, that it cannot pass general directions though it understood the "motivation" behind the PIL. "We understand your motivation, but you file a concrete case. We cannot pass general directions. We are not a legislature," Chief Justice Bobde

told Mr Tiwari while rejecting his plea.

The PIL petitioner lawyer referred to a global alert by the Interpol to the law enforcement agencies of 192 member countries to be prepared for the organised crime networks targeting Covid vaccines, both physically and online. Mr Tiwari had sought issuance of strict guidelines by the Centre "to prevent the chances of fake and counterfeit corona vaccine selling, circulating, and advertising by any organisation, company, or online apps."

His petition had also sought directions to the government agencies to run an awareness programme for the safety of the citizens against the dangers of the fake corona vaccine.

Protesting unions to hold 'kisan mahapanchayats'

New Delhi, Feb. 11: The Samyukta Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of protesting farmer unions, on Thursday announced that "kisan mahapanchayats" will be organised across the country in the coming days against the Centre's three agri laws.

The morcha made it clear that it will not call off the ongoing protest until its demands to repeal the laws and bring legal guarantee for minimum support price on their crops are met.

In a statement, the protesting farmers' body said that its teams are planning the programmes of the state-wise mahapanchayats.

The move comes a day after it announced a four-hour nationwide "rail roko" (rail blockade) on February 18 to press for their demands.

Protesting farmer leader Darshan Pal said a mahapanchayat will be held in Moadabad (Uttar Pradesh) on Friday, followed by Bahadurgarh bypass (Haryana) on February 13, Sri Ganganagar (Rajasthan) on February 18,



Farmers raise slogans at Ghazipur border during their ongoing protest against farm laws in New Delhi on Thursday.

— PTI

Sonakshi shares video reciting poem in support of farmers

Mumbai, Feb. 11:

Doubling down on her support to the farmers protesting against the three agri laws passed by the Centre, actor Sonakshi Sinha has narrated a heartfelt poem, described as a "tribute to the hands that feed us".

The 33-year-old actor, who first expressed solidarity with the farmers last week, shared a video on Instagram on Wednesday evening to share her thoughts about the protesting farmers.

The 1 minute 19 second-long clip captures the visuals of the distressed farmers, who have gathered at various border points of Delhi since November last year as part of their protest against the Centre's farm laws. — PTI

19 and Silkar (Rajasthan) on February 23.

Further, a team of 600



Sonakshi Sinha

Stand-up comic Noah shines spotlight on farmers protest

Mumbai, Feb. 11:

Stand-up comic and late night show host Trevor Noah is the latest international personality from the entertainment industry to highlight the ongoing farmers agitation.

Through his popular TV programme "The Daily Show", the Emmy-winning presenter on Wednesday night explained the origins of the farmers' protest, their demands and the subsequent global support the agitation has received.

On February 2, a tweet by pop star Rihanna triggered a wave of support for the protesting farmers by a number of global personalities, activists and politicians.

"Why are India's farmers protesting? The government tried to change the decades-old agriculture laws and that's when the manure hit the fan," Noah tweeted, along with the video link.

In the show's segment "If you don't know, now you know", which ran over eight minutes, the 36-year-old South African comic pieced together news clippings to provide a holistic view of the protest.

The video clip also mentioned the burning of effigies of Rihanna and Swedish teen climate activist Greta Thunberg, who had voiced her support. Thousands of farmers have been camping at Delhi's borders since November demanding the repeal of three new agriculture laws that they say will end the minimum support price (MSP) based procurement of crops like wheat and paddy by the government and usher in big corporates into the farm sector. — PTI

▶ THE LEADERS of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha, leading the protest, have reiterated to continue the agitation indefinitely till the Modi government scraps the three contentious farm laws and extends a legal guarantee of the MSP for crops

Khatri associated with managing logistics at the Singhu Border protest site. To increase security measures and keep miscreants at bay, 100 CCTV cameras with digital video recorders are being installed at the main stage used by the Morcha and also at some identified spots across the protest site's stretch on the GT Karnal Road.

"We are also readying a control room behind the main stage for monitoring and keeping a tab on the happenings here as a lot of people come and go everyday," Khatri said.

Further, a team of 600

Thousands of farmers, mostly from Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, have been camping at the three Delhi border points — Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur — for over 75 days.

In a statement, Pal alleged that the government is not serious to fulfil the "fair and genuine" farmers' demand of "karza mukti, pura daam".

The unions also claimed that the Haryana government has proposed to install CCTV cameras at the Tikri border protest site.

Meanwhile, Swaraj India leader Yogendra Yadav, who has been actively involved in the agitation, issued a statement terming as "baseless" the allegation made by Congress member Ravneet Singh Bittu blaming him for the Republic Day violence in the national capital.

Speaking in the Lok Sabha on February 9, Bittu claimed that Yadav had incited the farmers which led to the violence on January 26.

— PTI

Farmers improve facilities, infra to prepare for prolonged protest

volunteers has been raised for patrolling the protest site, managing traffic and keeping a watch at night. These volunteers have been provided with easily identifiable green jackets and identity cards, he said.

Work is also on to install large LCD screens at 10 vantage points, at a distance of 700-800 metres, to enable the protesting farmers to watch activities like speeches of the leaders from the main stage.

"We will also use these points as pit stops for ambulances and teams of volunteers to coordinate traffic management, patrolling and response in case of any emergency," Khatri said.

In order to deal with any disruption in internet service as was done recently by the government, the Morcha is also hiring a separate optical fibre line for wifi facility, Khatri said.

— PTI



Different flowers bloom in the Mughal Gardens during a press preview, ahead of its opening for the public from Feb. 13 at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on Thursday.

— PTI

Air quality 'poor' in Ghaziabad, Noida, Faridabad

Noida, Feb. 11: The average air quality was recorded in the "very poor" category in Ghaziabad, Noida and Greater Noida on Thursday, while it was "poor" in Gurgaon and Faridabad for the second consecutive day, data issued by a government agency showed.

Pollutants PM 2.5 and PM 10 also remained in the air of the five immediate neighbours of Delhi, according to the air quality index (AQI) maintained by the CPCB. The average 24-hour AQI at 4 pm on Thursday was 345 in Ghaziabad, 313 in Noida, 358 in Greater Noida, 290 in Faridabad and 294 in Gurgaon, according to the CPCB's Sameer app. — PTI

sion, work began to create a new capital in the Raisina Hill area, the foundation stone of which was laid by the king on December 15, 1911. Sir Edwin Lutyens and Sir Herbert Baker laid out their plans for a new imperial capital, with the Viceroy's House (now Rashtrapati Bhavan) and the North Block and South Block as the centrepiece of "New Delhi", as the city was officially named in 1926. In 1921, during the Delhi leg of his India visit, the Duke of Connaught laid the foundation of the All India War Memorial on February 10 and the Council Chamber of the Parliament House, designed by Baker, two days later. — PTI



Workers fix the national flag near the India Gate in New Delhi.

George V, the then reigning monarch of the British Empire who held a grand durbar in Delhi in 1911, where he also announced the shifting of the imperial capital from Calcutta to Delhi. Following this deci-

India Gate foundation stone laid 100 years ago by Duke of Connaught

New Delhi, Feb. 11: Here's one for history buffs. After whom is iconic shopping centre Connaught Place named? Prince Arthur, the Duke of Connaught. That was easy. Here's a tough one. Who set the ball rolling for the construction of India Gate? Duke of Connaught again.

He laid the foundation stone of the All India War Memorial Arch in Delhi, or India Gate as it is now known, exactly 100 years ago on February 10 in 1921 during a visit to the country. The 42-metre-high sandstone monument, sometimes compared to the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, was opened after a decade. Ninety years on, it is still the centre of India's



SHORT TAKES

Pharmacy student kidnapped, rescued

Hyderabad: A pharmacy student, who was allegedly kidnapped by an autorickshaw driver and others while returning home from her college near here, has been rescued, police said on Thursday. The student, with head injuries, was found at an isolated place near some bushes in Yamnampet area on the city outskirts on Wednesday evening in a semi-unconscious condition, an hour after she was abducted, they said. She has been hospitalised and the doctors treating her said her condition was stable. Police said they were verifying if she was sexually assaulted though as of now as per her statement she is not saying that. Police said she boarded an auto while returning home on Wednesday evening, but after other passengers got down, the driver asked her to get into an auto but as that vehicle with other men took a different route she called her parents over the phone. — PTI

FIR against Bigg Boss fame Sapna

New Delhi: The Delhi Police's Economic Offences Wing has registered an FIR against Haryana singer Sapna Choudhary and others on charges of alleged misappropriation of funds, cheating and criminal conspiracy, officials said on Thursday. The FIR was registered against them on Wednesday as per a complaint by Pawan Chawla, the director of P&M Movies Pvt. Ltd, a firm engaged in the business of celebrity management and events, they said. According to the FIR, Choudhary approached Chawla in March 2018 through a common friend after her exit from a popular reality show and showed a keen interest to work with the firm to get financial stability. After several discussions, an artist-management agreement was executed between Chawla and Choudhary in 2018. — PTI

SC rejects bail plea of Akhil Gogoi

New Delhi: The Supreme Court denied bail on Thursday to activist Akhil Gogoi, who is lodged in a Guwahati jail for his alleged role in the violent anti-CAA protests in Assam. A bench of justices N.V. Ramana, Surya Kant and Aniruddha Bose dismissed Gogoi's bail plea, saying, "We will not consider the petition at this stage." The bench, however, told advocate Runamoni Bhuyan that the petitioner may approach the top court for bail once the trial starts. Gogoi has challenged a January 7 order of the Gauhati High Court, which rejected his bail plea in a case related to his alleged role in the violent protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) lodged by the National Investigation Agency (NIA). — PTI

THAKUR'S RS REMARK KICKS UP CONTROVERSY

New Delhi: Union minister Anurag Thakur on Thursday kicked a row in Rajya Sabha when he sought to extrapolate usage of the term "andolanjivi" by a Congress MP for Mahatma Gandhi, to ask if the Father of the Nation was a "shariantkari" (conspirator). K.C. Venugopal of the Congress while participating in the discussion on Budget for 2021-22 referred to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's comment of "andolanjivi" for farmers protest. Noting that the nation got freedom from the British through "andolans" (protests), he said by that logic Mahatma Gandhi should have been the biggest "andolanjivi". Intervening in the debate soon after Venugopal finished speaking, Thakur said criticism is fine but "I had not expected that a Congress MP and office-bearer will call Mahatma Gandhi a shariantkari (conspirator). Nothing can be more unfortunate than that." Congress members immediately protested no one called Gandhi conspirator. They rushed into the well of the House demanding an apology from Thakur. Bhubaneswar Kalita, who was in the chair, said he will examine the records and will expunge any word that is unparliamentary. But the Congress members were not satisfied and continued to protest. — PTI



Tribal community women perform during the ongoing snow festival at Gondhla village in Lahaul-Spiti on Thursday. — PTI

Maha gov denied nod to travel in state plane

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, FEB. 11

The Maharashtra government on Thursday denied the permission to use government aircraft for governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari's official visit to Uttarakhand. Mr Koshyari was informed about the lack of government clearance after he boarded the aircraft. Later he travelled in a private aircraft. The incident sparked political controversy as the move was seen as the government's reaction to the governor's indecision on 12 MLC candidates recommended by the government.

However, the government held officials of the governor's office responsible for the incident and said that the action will be taken against erring officials who failed to inform the governor about the state's non-clearance. Meanwhile, the sources in Raj Bhavan said that the permission to use the aircraft for Mr Koshyari was sought nine days in advance, but there was no response from the government. "Is it not the duty of the government to respond to the Governor office's proposal?" he asked. An official statement issued by Raj Bhavan said, "Governor of Maharashtra and Goa Bhagat Singh Koshyari is scheduled to preside over the official programme of the Valedictory Function of the 122nd Induction

Mandatory Covid negative report for those travelling from Kerala

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, FEB. 11

People coming from Kerala to Maharashtra will now have to undergo RT-PCR test. Owing to the rising number of Covid-19 cases in the southern state, the Maharashtra Government as a precautionary measure has made the test mandatory for travellers from Kerala.

Kerala is the fifth state to be included in Maharashtra's mandatory RT-PCR test list. To check the spread of the coronavirus, the western state has already made similar

test mandatory for people coming from Delhi, Goa, Gujarat and Rajasthan since November last year.

According to the state officials, the decision to extend Covid-19 guidelines to Kerala was taken due to the high rise in number of Covid-19 cases in the southern state. "As a precautionary measure, the Maharashtra government has decided to make the RT-PCR test mandatory for travellers from Kerala.

The test has to be done 72 hours before the commencement of travel," said a state official.

Training Programme of IAS officers at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration at Mussoorie, Uttarakhand at 10.00 am on Friday, 12 February 2021. In this connection, the Governor was scheduled to depart from CSIM Airport Mumbai for Dehradun at 10.00 am on Thursday 11th February 2021."

It also said that in preparation of the visit, the Governor's Secretariat had written to the government of Maharashtra authorities seeking permission for the use of Government Aircraft on 2nd February 2021. The office of the chief minister was also informed.

"Today, on 11th February 2021, the Governor reached the CSIM Airport at 10.00 am and boarded the government plane. However, the Governor was informed that the permission for the use of Government Aircraft had not been received," the statement said.

Post this, as per the governor's direction, tickets for Dehradun were booked on a commercial aircraft leaving Mumbai at 12.15 pm. In a clarification issued by chief minister office of Maharashtra, the government said that the governor office should have checked whether they have received the permission to use aircraft or not.

Valley shut partially on Butt death anniversary

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, FEB. 11

Life was disrupted again in most parts of Kashmir on Thursday due to a partial to complete shutdown observed to commemorate the 37th death anniversary of pro-independence leader Muhammad Maqbool Butt.

A similar strike had closed marketplaces and disrupted transport services in many areas of the Valley on the anniversary of the hanging of Parliament attack convict Muhammad Afzal Guru on Tuesday.

But, co-founder of Jammu Kashmir National Liberation Front (JKNLF), charged with murder of an Indian intelligence officer Amar Chand in Bomai area outside the Valley's north-western Sopore town way back in mid-1960s was executed in Delhi Tihar jail on February 11, 1984 and, like in the case of Guru who was hanged to death in the same jail on February 9, 2013, his mortal remains were buried inside the prison premises.

Neel Kanth Ganjoo, the judge who awarded capital punishment to Butt after an in-camera trial that took place inside the Srinagar Central Jail, was shot dead.

'Capable to destroy target sans physical hit' 'Swarm drone' ready for enemies: Naravane

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, FEB. 11

Indian Army Chief General M.M. Naravane said on Thursday the "swarm drone" demonstration last month was a message to adversaries that "the Indian Army is steadily inducting niche capabilities to enhance its combat proficiencies in multi-domain operations".

"Some of you would recall the swarm drone offensive striking multiple targets showcased during the Army Day Parade last month. Such swarms can overwhelm and effectively suppress enemy's Air Defence Capability, creating windows of opportunities for our strike elements," said Gen. Naravane during a webinar on *Multi-Domain Operations: Future of Conflicts*.

He pointed out that it is also no longer necessary to score a physical hit to destroy a target.

"Offensive capabilities in the digital domain can effectively neutralise satellites and networks, denying them at critical juncture to decisively alter the course of the conflict," said the Army chief.

For the first time at the annual Army Day parade, Indian Army last month

After Army Chief, Pak NSA pitches for talks

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, FEB. 11



M.M. Naravane

In a second thinly-veiled but rather tentative outreach this time to India within the past eight days after one by Pakistan's powerful Army chief last week, Pakistan's National Security Advisor (NSA) Moeed Yusuf has now said his country is hoping for India to create an "enabling environment" for peace, adding that to move forward for peace, one has to be "rational, not ideological". India had last week put the onus on Pakistan to "create an environment free of terrorism, hostility and violence" for peace. Despite the pitch for peace however, the Pakistani NSA sent confusing mixed signals

by continuing to make certain uncharitable and negative references to India, accusing it of "behaving like a rogue actor" and "being a spoiler in Afghanistan". Understandably therefore, going by all available indications, New Delhi isn't biting the bait, just yet. Speaking to the Turkish Anadolu news agency, the Pakistani NSA said, "Pakistan PM's (Imran Khan's) number one goal in the region is peace with everybody... Can you have economic security without peace in the region? ... If you want peace, we have to move forward. If we want to move forward, everybody has to be rational, not ideological.

demonstrated its offensive swarm drone capability by taking down a slew of supposed "targets" like tanks, terror camps, fuel dumps and a "suddenly" found helipad. The demonstration involved 75 indigenously developed drones which working autonomously located and destroyed these targets.

The baby Kamikaze drones detached from the mother drones and directly hit these targets in a suicide mission. These drones could travel upto 50 kilometers to destroy enemy targets. These drones used in the demonstration could also be used to drop emergency supplies to the soldiers.

Have faith in EVMs, says Ajit Pawar

Deputy CM rules out return of ballot papers in Maharashtra

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, FEB. 11



Ajit Pawar

Even as the demand for the use of ballot papers in elections is growing within the Maha Vikas Aghadi government in Maharashtra, deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar on Thursday said that he has complete faith in Electronic Voting

Machines (EVMs). Saying that it was not correct to blame the EVMs for the defeat in the elections, he made it clear that the state government does not want ballot papers in Maharashtra. "Everything is fine with people in any party if they



Nana Patole

get a majority. But they start alleging that EVMs were managed if they get routed. EVMs are working fine. I have complete faith in them. I have also contested several elections and has no problem with the voting being held through EVMs," Mr Pawar said on Thursday.

Citing the example of Congress' victory in Rajasthan and Punjab Assembly elections, the NCP leader said the party registered its victory and formed the government in both the states while the voting was conducted through EVMs.

Nana Patole, who recently resigned as Maharashtra Vidhan Sabha speaker, to become state Congress president, had asked the State Legislature to frame a law to give voters the option of using ballot papers besides EVMs in local governing bodies and Assembly polls.

When asked about Mr

Patole's statement, Mr Pawar said, "Each individual can have a different view. They think that way and I have said what I feel about the use of EVMs."

The NCP leader also said, the MVA government, in which the Shiv Sena and the Congress are the other two constituents, does not want the use of ballot papers in Maharashtra.

Reacting on Mr Pawar's comments, Mr Patole said that it was his individual right to demand for ballot papers and the state government should make such a provision for those who do not want EVMs to vote in the polls.

588 probes pending before CBI for 1 year

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 11

Around 588 regular cases (RCs) were pending investigation for over a year by the CBI as on December 31, 2020, Parliament was informed on Thursday.

According to a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha by the union Minister of State for Personnel Jitendra Singh, "As on December 31, 2019, CBI had 711 number of regular cases pending investigation for over a year; whereas, the figure of such cases as on December 31, 2020 was 588". There were six such cases against political persons in 2020, said the minister. The CBI investigates complex and voluminous cases against public servants, firms, banks, private persons, which at times pertain to very old transactions or incidents, said the minister.

Haasan to be his political party's permanent prez

Chennai, Feb. 11: The Kamal Haasan-led Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) on Thursday authorised its chief to decide on the party's electoral strategy for the coming Assembly polls and announced he will be its "permanent president."

Haasan has invested his talent, profession, wealth and fame for the welfare of the Tamil people, the party's General Convention, which met under him here, said.

"Mr Kamal Haasan will function as MNM's permanent president from today onwards, according to the request of the GC members," a resolution adopted at the meeting said.

Further, it unanimously authorised him to take a call on any party-related decisions.

This included electoral alliance, poll strategy and selection of candidates, among others, the party said.

A number of other resolutions were also adopted in the meeting, including opposing any efforts by the central BJP government to "impose Hindi and Sanskrit" on Tamil people. The MNM said it will resist any such move.

Referring to liquor sales



Kamal Haasan

being nationalised in the state, the party said it was not the job of the government to sell alcohol and demanded that free rehabilitation centres should be opened in all places.

With the election to state Assembly likely in the next two months, the party urged the Election Commission to prevent distribution of money and gifts and ensure free and fair polls. — PTI

SC to hear Odisha's plea against AP today

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, FEB. 11

The Supreme Court will hear on Friday Odisha's plea for contempt action against Andhra Pradesh allegedly for violating 2006 undertaking of status quo and transgressing into its three villages for holding panchayat elections in the wake of local bodies election in rural areas underway in the State (Andhra Pradesh).

While Andhra Pradesh is holding elections in three villages of the Kotiya Panchayat in Koraput district, Odisha has claimed that these villages belong to it and they have existing elected bodies.

Both Andhra Pradesh and Odisha have been claiming their rights over the Kotiya panchayat which comprises 28 villages.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde agreed to hear the contempt plea on a mentioning by senior lawyer Vikas Singh appearing for Odisha seeking urgent listing of the matter.

₹100cr, additional staff of 50 cyber experts sanctioned

Govt to give IB's cyber unit more teeth

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 11

After taking a tough stand against micro-blogging site Twitter, Government has decided to further strengthen the Cyber Crime Unit of Intelligence Bureau to closely monitor anti-social propaganda on social media platforms. Sources said an immediate allocation of Rs 100 crore and an additional staff of 50 cyber experts have been sanctioned for IB's Cyber Unit.

Following an intense

A LIST OF almost 400 twitter handles being operated from Pakistan and its intelligence agencies to foment trouble during farmers agitation were identified and shared with Delhi Police

farmers agitation, cyber experts in the IB have been closely monitoring activity on the social media as it is suspected subversive elements based abroad are trying to take advantage of the current situation by

reading false propaganda against the Government.

A list of almost 400 twitter handles being operated from Pakistan and its intelligence agencies to foment trouble during farmers agitation were identified and shared with Delhi Police following which necessary corrective action was taken by security agencies.

In addition, Centre has also asked Twitter to suspend almost 1500 accounts but the micro-blogging site has so far

POSTGRADUATE INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL EDUCATION & RESEARCH, CHANDIGARH

CORRIGENDUM

Ref : Open E-Tender Notice No. PI (EP)/20-21/09

Following change is made:-

1. The tender item is at Sr. No.09 (High Energy Linear Accelerator for Nehrur Extension Block.) the bid submission dates and bid opening dates have been amended from to Bid Submission date 22.02.2021 and Bid Opening date 23.02.2021. All other details will remain the same.

PROFESSOR IN-CHARGE (EP)

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SHORT TAKES

1-YEAR-OLD DIES
AFTER FALLING
INTO BOREWELLAKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO
BHUBANSWAR, FEB. 11

A one-year-old girl died after falling into a borewell pit at Goapala village in Balasore district on Thursday morning. The victim was identified as Sarojini Naik, daughter of one Saniya Naik of the village.

As per reports, Sarojini's mother had come to visit her relative's house at Goapala a few days ago.

On Thursday morning, while the digging of the borewell was underway near the house, Sarojini who was playing nearby, fell into the well accidentally.

Some people present at the spot noticed her slipping into the borewell pit and immediately called for help. Neighbours and her family members rushed to the spot and rescued her from the well.

Though she was later taken to Khaira Hospital, the doctors declared her dead on arrival, added reports. The body was sent for post-mortem.

GOVT: OVER 26,121
INDIAN WEBSITES
HACKED IN 2020

New Delhi, Feb. 11: Over 26,100 Indian websites were hacked during 2020, compared to 24,768 websites attacked in the previous year, Parliament was informed on Thursday.

As per the information reported to and tracked by Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), a total number of 17,560; 24,768 and 26,121 Indian websites were hacked during the year 2018, 2019 and 2020, respectively, minister of state for communications and information technology Sanjay Dhotre said in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha.

"There have been attempts from time to time to launch cyber attacks on Indian cyberspace," he added.

Mr Dhotre said it has been observed that attackers are compromising computer systems located in different parts of the world and use masquerading techniques and hidden servers to hide the identity of actual systems from which the attacks are being launched.

"According to the logs analysed and made available to CERT-In, the Internet Protocol (IP) addresses of the computers from where the attacks appear to be originated belong to various countries including Algeria, Brazil, China, France, Indonesia, Netherlands, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Serbia, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, USA, Vietnam etc," the minister said.

Mr Sanjay Dhotre noted that CERT-In devises response measures in coordination with its counterpart agencies in foreign countries for resolution of incidents involving systems outside the country.

Rescue ops
restart

■ **Continued from Page 1**
Srinagar: However, the centre of operations, after the Sunday disaster in the border district of Chamoli, remains the large tunnel where an estimated 30-35 workers are believed to have been trapped after the Alakananda river hurtled down in spate as a result of a possible glacier burst or avalanche in the Himalayas. The rescuers are "hoping against hope" to find the workers of Tapovan power project, who are missing for over four days now. With every minute passing, concern about the safety of these men is mounting. Officials on the ground said the continuous accumulation of slush and silt inside the tunnel is the biggest hurdle for the rescuers.

"Heavy machines have removed more slush from the tunnel the whole night. A joint team of ITBP, NDRF, SDRF and sister agencies entered the tunnel this morning. The tunnel is approachable till about 120 metres but more slush and water coming from inside the tunnel is making the way ahead difficult," ITBP spokesman Vivek Kumar Pandey said.

Measures like drilling to take oxygen to those trapped inside the tunnel are being contemplated. The over 1,500-metre tunnel has become the focal point of rescue operations, even as thw family members of those trapped inside spend hours outside with bated breath to hear some good news about their relatives.

CAA will be implemented
after vaccination: Shah

Home minister tells Mamata Banerjee she won't be CM after April

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, FEB. 11

Determined to fulfill the BJP's key poll promise to the refugees about their citizenship, Union home minister Amit Shah on Thursday declared that the Citizenship Amendment Act implementation would get underway as soon as the Covid-19 pandemic and its vaccination drive ends.

Using CAA as the BJP's trump card against the ruling Trinamul Congress in poll-bound West Bengal, Mr Shah, who was on a day's state visit after cancelling his two tours last month, made the announcement with full confidence before the Matua community, a sizeable votebank of the Hindu migrants now with the BJP, at their bastion in Thakurnagar of North 24 Parganas, to placate their discontent over the long delay in the CAA implementation.

"In 2018, we promised that we, if elected again in 2019, would amend the citizenship laws to give Indian citizenship to our Matua brothers. The Matuas voted us to power. Modi government was formed again. Without wasting time, we introduced CAA which now exists. In between corona spread," Mr Shah told the rally before he lambasted Banerjee for her fierce opposition to CAA.

"Mamatadi started alleging it was a false promise



Union home minister Amit Shah at a public meeting at Thakurnagar in Thakurnagar on Thursday. — PTI

which would never be fulfilled. Betting her life, she vowed to stop it so that it would not happen even if we would have tried. Mamatadi, we are those who fulfill what they promise. We have initiated the CAA. Today I am making a promise on this holy land. As soon as the vaccination drive ends and there is relief from Corona, the BJP government will undertake the task of giving you citizenship," he said showing his resolve.

Mr Shah also asked Mamata, "It is an enactment of the parliament. How can you stop it? Anyway, you will not be in

a position to stop it because after April you will no longer be the CM, Mamatadi!" Slamming the previous governments at the Centre, Mr Shah said, "The people from the Matua community, Namashudras and others live here. They migrated here as refugees from Bangladesh. They did not get their citizenship and honour even though 70 years have passed. When partition happened, the Congress leaders claimed of giving them citizenship and honour and hug them too. Forget hugging, they did not give citizenship."

Shah: Didi will
chant 'Jai Shri
Ram' before
polls are overAGE CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, FEB. 11

Union home minister Amit Shah on Thursday asserted that West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, who has been planning to contest the Assembly Election from more than one seat, would start chanting 'Jai Shri Ram' before the end of the polls.

"The environment in Bengal has been made such that *Jai Shri Ram* slogan is an offence! f 'Jai Shri Ram is not chanted in India, will it be raised in Pakistan? Why does Mamatadi feel insulted hearing this? I can promise you, Mamatadi will also chant *Jai Shri Ram* by the time polls are over," Mr Shah said at a rally in Coochbehar.

Before launching the fourth Rath Yatra, he told the CM, "This Parivartan Yatra is for bringing Parivartan in the situation of Bengal. This is to stop infiltration which Mamatadi Didi can not. This Parivartan Yatra is aimed at ending the misrule of Bua-Bhatija and usher in employment to the jobless and welfare for the farmers."

aren't welcome."

According to an official handout issued after the January 7 meeting, around one thousand players from different parts of the country are expected to participate in various games which include snow skiing, snowboarding, cross country, snow show, snow cycling and other snow-based pastime during the event. It said, "(In order) to provide accommodation facilities to the athletes, VIPs, technical staff, escorting officials and others, the Advisor asked the officials of Tourism department, JK Sports Council, J&K Tourism Development Corporation and Winter Games Association to make the appropriate arrangements for the same at the earliest".

■ **ACCORDING TO** an official handout, around one thousand players from different parts of the country are expected to participate in various games which include snow skiing, snowboarding, cross country, snow show, snow cycling and other snow-based pastime during the event

advance." Tanvir Sadiq, who has served as an advisor to Mr Abdullah and is also a former spokesperson of the NC, asked, "What sort of tourism promotion policy is this where the government forces bookings to be cancelled?" He urged the authorities to "spare a thought for those people who booked rooms weeks ago only to be told they

J&K seeks cancellation of pre-bookings
at Gulmarg for Khelo India players' stayYUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, FEB. 11

In a strange move, the authorities in Jammu and Kashmir have asked the hoteliers, cottage owners and other accommodation providers at Gulmarg to cancel all pre-bookings in order to make boarding and lodging facilities available to players and officials who would be arriving in the Valley's premier ski resort at a height of 2,650 metres (8,694 ft) for Khelo India National Winter Games later this month.

"You're requested to ensure that the boarding and lodging facility is provided to the athletes and officials during the event (being held from February 25 to March 3). Further, all pre-bookings if any on

this account may be cancelled," reads a letter written to sub-divisional magistrate Gulmarg by additional deputy commissioner of Baramulla district. In this connection, the letter refers to a meeting held on January 7 under the chairmanship of Farooq Khan, advisor to J&K Lieutenant Governor, to review the arrangements for the event.

Reacting to it, former chief minister and leader of opposition National Conference (NC) Omar Abdullah tweeted, "The games are a welcome addition to our calendar but its mindless application of government writ when the games become a reason to cancel hotel bookings & inconvenience tourists who have booked flights & made their plans well in

J&K HC rejects plea
seeking enactment of
law on cow slaughter

Court puts onus on lawmakers

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, FEB. 11

The Jammu and Kashmir high court has refused to entertain a PIL seeking a direction to the government to enact a law prohibiting cow slaughter in the Union Territory. The PIL had also sought a direction from the court to make the slaughter of cows in J&K a cognizable offence with strict punishment.

A division bench of Chief Justice Pankaj Mithal and Justice Rajnesh Oswal while disposing of the PIL filed by an NGO, Animals Value Environment (SAVE), through its chairperson Devinder Kour Madan, asked it to raise its grievance before J&K's Chief Secretary (CS) by submitting a comprehensive representation in this regard. The official, the court said, on consideration of the representation "will do the needful".

The NGO actually wanted re-enactment of a 124-year-old law that banned the slaughter of cow and other bovine animals and sale of beef in J&K but was annulled with the erstwhile state being formally stripped of its special status and split up

into two UTs on October 31, 2019, nearly three months after the Centre withdrew the State's special status it enjoyed under Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution.

Sections 298-A, 298-B, 298-C and 298-D of the erstwhile state's own Ranbir Penal Code (RPC) also declared slaughter of bovine animals including cow and the sale of beef punishable offences. The beef ban was one of the 153 state laws repealed by the Centre under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019. The RPC has since been replaced by Indian Penal Code (IPC).

After hearing the counsel of the petitioner S.S. Ahmad and J&K's advocate-general D.C. Raina, the court said, "It is settled law that no writ of mandamus would lie for issuing directions for enacting a particular law. It is for the lawmakers i.e. the legislature of the UT of J&K to enact a law on a given subject. The said task cannot be given to any of the respondents".

Since there is no legislature in place in J&K presently, the court held that "at the moment no such law can be considered for being enacted".

Farmers warned...

■ **Continued from Page 1**
who attended the mahapanchayat. The SKM is the umbrella body of the protesting farmers' unions.

This was also the first time in the ongoing agitation that Bharatiya Kisan Union (Ekta Ugrahan) members also joined the event. Though the outfit was coordinating with the SKM on a regular basis, it has never shared the stage with the Morcha, neither in Punjab nor at the Delhi borders.

BKU (Ekta Ugrahan) general secretary Sukhdev Singh Kokrikalan said: "Though we had been organising our protests independently after coordinating with SKM, when the cause is big and there are efforts on to create a divide, we had to give a message of unity and hence we are part of this mahapanchayat. After all, everyone is protesting for the repeal of the farm laws as of

now." The Punjab mahapanchayat also holds immense political significance as the state government has been openly supporting the farmers' agitation, unlike the BJP governments in Haryana and UP. Punjab will hold local body polls later this week. The farmers' protests have been a talking point even in the local body elections. The Aam Aadmi Party and the Shiromani Akali Dal are the two main Opposition parties in Punjab and they have already extended their support to the farmers' agitation.

At the mahapanchayat, the union leaders vowed to fight the Narendra Modi government till it reaches a definitive conclusion on the issue of the farm laws. Mr Dhaner even praised Bharatiya Kisan Union's Rakesh Tikait for giving a new lease of life to the struggle.

Mr Dhaner said: "It is no longer a fight of only

■ **Continued from Page 1**
agreed that both sides should achieve complete disengagement at the earliest and abide fully by the bilateral agreements and protocols," said Mr Singh. He said that by now the Chinese side is also fully aware of India's resolve. "It is therefore our expectation that the Chinese side will work with us in full sincerity to resolve

these remaining issues," said the defence minister. Sources said that tanks and armoured vehicles are been pulled back from the south bank of Pangong Tso and there is a thinning of troops from the northern banks of the lake. The Indian Army is also expected to leave the strategic heights on the Kailash range which it occupied in late August on

Rahul attacks Centre
in LS over farm laws

Govt ready to talk openly, amend them, if needed: Rajnath

New Delhi, Feb. 11: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday alleged that the three contentious farm laws will allow industrialists to buy unlimited quantities of foodgrains and "break the spine of farmers" even as Union defence Minister Rajnath Singh said the government is ready to talk openly on these laws and amend them, if need.

A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Lok Sabha staunchly defended the newly enacted agri laws and supported private enterprises and greater investment in agriculture sector, Gandhi stepped up the attack, alleging that these laws will destroy India's food security system and will hurt the rural economy. "The intent of the three laws is to allow industrialists to buy unlimited quantities of foodgrains and hoard them as much as they want," Mr Gandhi said in Lok Sabha.

Asserting that the laws were enacted to ensure the right price to the farmers for their produce and help them sell their produce anywhere in the country, Mr Singh said, "an atmosphere of confusion has been created" and



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in the Lok Sabha during the Budget Session of Parliament on Thursday. — PTI

it is being claimed that the wholesale market will no longer exist, the MSP system will come to an end and the land of the farmers would be mortgaged.

The farmers were "misled" and these confusions were created by people with "vested interests", Mr Singh said while participating at an online event organised by the Madhya Pradesh government.

Bihar chief minister and JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar also backed the laws, saying these legislations are in the interest of farmers and not against them.

Speaking to reporters after meeting Mr Modi, Mr Kumar said his party is with the government on

the issue and that the Centre has opted for the right path by holding talks with the farmer unions agitating against the three laws. "Hopefully, the issue will be resolved soon," the BJP ally said.

Thousands of farmers are protesting on various Delhi borders for more than two months demanding a complete repeal of the three laws, which they find pro-corporate and against the existing mandi and MSP procurement systems. However, the government has rejected these apprehensions as baseless, though at least 11 rounds of talks between the two sides have failed to end the stalemate. — PTI

70L people
vaccinated
in 26 daysAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 11

With over 70 lakh people vaccinated against Covid-19 in less than a month, India's immunization is one of the fastest in the world, Union Health Ministry said on Thursday. India accomplished this feat in only 26 days, while it took 27 days for the US and 48 days for the UK to reach the same figures. India was also the fastest to touch the 6 million mark a few days back.

India had 12,923 fresh cases and 108 deaths in the last 24 hours. However, 17 states and UTs have reported no Covid-19 death in the last one day. These are Telangana, Assam, Haryana, Odisha, Uttarakhand, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Lakshadweep, Ladakh, Sikkim, Manipur, Mizoram, A&N Islands, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli.

Mantri warning to Twitter

■ **Continued from Page 1**
strongly objected to foreign celebrities and politicians using social media platforms to support the farmers' protests and criticise the Narendra Modi government.

"We respect the social media, it has empowered the common man and plays an important role in the Digital India campaign. We respect criticism, you can criticise the PM or the government, which are a part of the Constitution. But if the social media is misused to spread violence, fake news or hatred, then action will be taken... Even the EC has said this regarding the misuse of social media for influencing elections... You (social media) work in India, you have millions of followers, we respect that. Earn money but you will have to abide by the Indian Constitution and follow Indian laws," said Mr Prasad, replying to supplementaries on the

social media manipulation of public opinion and media manipulative survey.

Mr Prasad's statement on the Rajya Sabha floor came a day after his ministry rebuked Twitter for not complying with its orders to take down inflammatory content after the Republic Day violence and the farmers' unions' protests.

The government, he said, was committed to the freedom of the media and the rights of individuals but it was equally concerned about safety, security, and law and order in the country.

Equating the Red Fort violence on the Republic Day with the United States Capitol Hill riots, Mr Prasad said while the social media companies took immediate action when riots erupted on Capitol Hill in Washington, they failed to take similar action when the farm bill protesters ran riot at Red Fort on the Republic Day.

India, China agreed to LAC pullback

■ **Continued from Page 1**
agreed that both sides should achieve complete disengagement at the earliest and abide fully by the bilateral agreements and protocols," said Mr Singh. He said that by now the Chinese side is also fully aware of India's resolve. "It is therefore our expectation that the Chinese side will work with us in full sincerity to resolve

these remaining issues," said the defence minister. Sources said that tanks and armoured vehicles are been pulled back from the south bank of Pangong Tso and there is a thinning of troops from the northern banks of the lake. The Indian Army is also expected to leave the strategic heights on the Kailash range which it occupied in late August on

the south bank of the lake in the Chushul sector, in the second phase after verified disengagement action by the Chinese side. The defence minister said India has consistently maintained that while bilateral relations can develop in parallel with discussions on resolving the boundary question, any serious disturbance in peace and tranquility

along the LAC in the border areas is bound to have adverse implications for the direction of our bilateral ties. Mr Singh said that the actions by the Chinese side since last year have seriously disturbed peace and tranquility. "Consequently, they have also had an impact on the overall relationship," said the defence minister. The disengagement in

Pangong Tso is significant as it was the most contentious standoff points between India and China since May 2020.

In May last year, China had occupied the area between Finger 4 and 8 on the northern bank of Pangong Tso where Indian troops used to patrol. Indian and Chinese troops had brutally clashed in the Finger area.

THE ASIAN AGE

12 FEBRUARY 2021

Twitter’s snub of Centre’s selective outrage timely

The fundamental issue with freedom of expression is either you have it or you don't. While there is no arguing against the fact that such freedom may be subject to reasonable restrictions, particularly with reference to communal harmony and public safety being threatened by inciters of violence and disorder, government action cannot be selective in acting only on the basis of its sensitivities being outraged by criticism. The spat with social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp may have been caused by suspicions over their neutrality when it comes to issues cropping up in India. But the government is seen to be acting like a bully in its plaintive calls for action to be taken against all critics in a blanket manner that is reminiscent of a totalitarian approach that had led to democratic disasters in India.

The government's fear of its image abroad being hammered by celebrities with a large following on the social media has led to it calling for Twitter to take down nearly 1,200 accounts following tweets on farmer protests. Some of those accounts may be backed by Pakistan or Khalistan sympathisers, and sported ridiculously hateful hashtags like “farmers’ genocide”. Orders to take them down are legitimate and may have already been acted upon. To insist on a virtual blanket ban on one side of the arguments in support of the farmers, which might be more universal among Indians than the government may imagine, is what makes government action suspicious in the eyes of the votaries of free speech and expression. In a free world, Indian developers are free, too, to set up microblogging platforms like Koo.

To insist on a virtual blanket ban on one side of the arguments in support of the farmers is what makes government action suspicious

There was widespread praise for Twitter when it chose to act against Donald Trump for actively encouraging his acolytes to attempt an armed insurrection on Capitol Hill. It must also do so when inspired actions of vicious users and automated bots aimed at disruption are brought to its attention. Behind Twitter's espousal of the foundational principle of free expression may lie social media's monetisation of hate but free expressions of hate are a sign of the times which have armed individuals with handles and megaphones on media platforms to rant on. India is beset by the same phenomenon and may have no extraordinary case for protection or idealistic treatment. It has chosen the Internet as a right of the people even if it has been known to act selectively as on the borders of Delhi hosting the farmers' protests and in Kashmir, which went without 4G connectivity for more than a year.

It is in the modern war between perception and reality that issues like differential treatment of violence on Capitol Hill and the storming of the Red Fort crop up. Again, these are part of the perils of living in an interconnected age in which opinion is free and, perhaps, even overrated as billions enjoy the freedom of presenting their personal thoughts to the world. The threat to jail Twitter's Indian employees is, however, part of a worrisome pattern of the current regime, which has contemplated similar repressive action against a politician and several journalists with only the top court standing between them and arrests. It is in this context that Twitter's disinclination to take down handles of politicians and journalists must be viewed and praised as supporting essential freedom of expression.

PM’s red herring

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's criticism in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday of those who “abuse the private sector” sounded more like being in a dark room and looking for a black cat that isn't there than raising a point for the nation to discuss. His advice of caution against “returning the nation to the babus” was equally intriguing.

This country has long scrapped the licence-permit-babu raj and ushered in an era where the private sector has been viewed as creators of employment and wealth. No government in the last three decades has chosen to ignore them; they did everything possible to promote them instead in the form of policy frameworks and easing of regulatory mechanisms. Even state governments run by political thoughts of all hues vied with one another offering freebies and sops to “unleash the entrepreneurial spirit of the youth”. Mr Modi took special care to ensure that India made a quantum jump in its position on the Index of Ease of Doing Business within a couple of years of his assuming power even when the country's positions in terms of indices on hunger or freedom of thought suffered.

The public sector units were hardly a choice of any government during the liberalisation period. Even brilliant performers were put on the auction block while several others were bled dry by the governments; many have been put on their deathbed by governmental interventions that stopped them from competing with the private sector. Mr Modi's fears of the nation going back to the babus, thus, sound rather misplaced.

The Prime Minister has spoken in the backdrop of the farming community agitating against new laws which, it fears, would make them captive players of the private corporates with deep pockets. The government should rather address their fears than demonising those who raise them.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



Simultaneous polls to be a blow to smaller parties

Sanjay Kumar

A few months ago, in a meeting with returning officers, Prime Minister Narendra Modi once again advocated the holding of simultaneous elections both for the Lok Sabha and the state Assemblies in India. He had expressed the desire for holding simultaneous elections for Lok Sabha and state Assemblies even in his first term as the Prime Minister. It is important to note that this time he not only reiterated his view but also made a more aggressive advocacy for holding simultaneous elections. He stated “this is not an issue of debate; this is a necessity for India”. It is important to recall that when this was advocated a few years ago, there were lots of debates on this issue amongst journalists, analysts and stake holders. The arguments put forward both for and against this proposal were on grounds of feasibility, legality and polity related to the large issue of possible impact on Party system in India.

The arguments put forward in favour of holding simultaneous election are minimising expenses for holding elections and expediting the developmental work of the government. There is merit in these two arguments, and hardly any disagreement — but should these be the only considerations for pushing for a case of holding simultaneous elections? Is there a need for careful thinking about its impact on the larger issue of the party system in India? There is also the question of feasibility, how this can even be implemented in a federal country like India with

states having elected governments and enjoying constitutional powers. There is also issue about what would happen if there is a premature fall of the government in any state; will the state be put under governor's rule and elections held only when the next cycle of elections is due? At the moment every state is under its own cycle of election, what happens to state governments elected by popular vote only a couple of years ago when the simultaneous election system is being implemented? Will putting a state under the governor's rule for a very long time by making provisions for that after amending the Constitution not be against democratic principles?

But beyond those issues, there is the larger issue of its impact on the nature of the party system; there is a possibility of a few political parties, especially the national parties, dominating both the national as well as state politics. Some stronger regional parties may still be able to survive in the state, but slowly and gradually, many smaller parties would disappear from the political map of India. Simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the state Assemblies will be of great disadvantage to the regional parties.

Evidences suggest that a very large number of voters tend to vote for the same party when elections to both the state Assembly and the Lok Sabha are held simultaneously or within a gap with six months of holding the latter election. Voters tend to vote for the same party in the Assembly election for which they had voted during the Lok Sabha

election, though there are a few exceptions. The national parties are in an advantageous position. The dominant regional parties also enjoy this advantage but smaller regional parties are at the receiving end. If simultaneous elections are held, Indian politics will come to be dominated by the national parties. A few regional parties and many smaller regional parties will disappear, as the people's voting choices would largely be influenced by how parties are likely to play a role in national politics. Holding simultaneous elections would mean the expansion of the dominance of national parties and slow and gradual shrinking of the political space for regional parties.

Evidence suggests that till now there have been 111 instances of the state Assembly election in various states being held along with the Lok Sabha election. In these elections held in different years, a total of 387 national parties contested elections. Of these, in the case of 263 national parties (69 per cent), the difference in their vote share for the Lok Sabha and Assembly election was less than three per cent, in case of another 19 per cent national parties, the vote share difference for the two elections was between three and six per cent. Evidences also suggest, even when the state Assembly elections were held within six months of holding the Lok Sabha election, voters overwhelmingly tended to vote for the same party both for the Lok Sabha and state Assembly elections. Of

Will putting a state under the governor's rule for a very long time by making provisions to that end by amending the Constitution not be against democratic principles?

the 501 national parties for which data was compiled which fit the case of the state Assembly elections being held within a gap of six months, in 68 per cent of the cases the national parties polled a more or less similar percentage of votes, the variation in vote-share being less than three percent. The situation does not change much with regard to the people's choice for the dominant regional parties when elections were either held simultaneously or if the state Assembly elections were held within a gap of six months from holding the Lok Sabha elections. When the state Assembly and Lok Sabha elections were held simultaneously, 79 per cent of the dominant regional parties polled a more or less similar vote percentage, within a less than three per cent variation in vote share. Similarly, when state Assembly elections were held within a gap of less than six months, the variation in vote share of 75 per cent of the dominant regional parties, which contested both these elections, was less than three per cent in both these elections.

There are arguments put forward against regional parties; some even argue for restricting the number of political parties in India. In my view, regional parties provide a platform to many Indians who have felt marginalised in the social and political sphere for decades. It provides an opportunity to such people to play a role in politics, no matter if these smaller regional parties succeed or not. Simultaneous elections would put smaller regional parties in a disadvantageous position, ultimately leading to overwhelming dominance of the political parties that are already predominant.

The writer is a professor at Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and a political analyst. Views expressed are personal.

LETTERS

JOB WHIFF IN ‘CIVILITY’

Apropos your editorial “Modi and Azad: Civility back” (Feb. 11), emotional speeches and mutual respect, as shown by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad, on the occasion of the latter's retirement will surely be remembered for the civility that used to be the hallmark of political behaviour in the good old days. The question is whether the PM has in his mind some special assignment for Mr Azad who belongs to Kashmir and had been chief minister of the erstwhile Jammu & Kashmir state.

M.C. Joshi
Lucknow

DON'T LOWER GUARD

THE BEGINNING of the phased disengagement at Pangong Tso Area by India and China could bring the curtains down on a nine-month-long standoff along the Line of Actual Control in Eastern Ladakh. The three-step process began with the moving of frontline tanks and armoured units. China claimed that the frontline troops from both sides along the Pangong Tso had disengaged, and we expect official word from the Indian side soon. Pulling back of armoured units from the frontline augurs well and could considerably ease tensions.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

MATTER OF RESOLVE

THE USSR LABOURED under a state-driven command economy but the rise of smarter private competition from Japan and South Korea decimated its economy. Subsequent to the liberalisation of the 1990s, a second phase follow up on our PSUs remained tardy and disinvestment a reluctant attempt to paste a thin capitalist veneer on our welfare economy. Having now made up its mind, the government must realise its PSU privatisation targets.

R. Narayanan
Mumbai

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

Tarun Chugh



A Budget of aspirations, self-reliance

The first Union Budget of this decade comes at a time that our nation is commemorating the 75th year of Indian Independence, 60 years of Goa's accession to India, 50 years of the 1971 India-Pakistan War, eight censuses of Independent India (and also the first digital census), India's turn at the BRICS presidency, the Chandrayaan-3 mission and the celebration of Haridwar Maha Kumbh. Under this scenario, India has a vital role to play as a major Asian economic power in the new world order in the post-Covid era.

The Union Budget 2021-22, along with the myriad mini-budgets, including the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana and the Atma Nirbhar Bharat packages, presented by the finance minister to stabilise the economy during a critical pandemic period, has prepared our country to move in the right direction.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Budget addresses the imperative of resetting priorities and identifies the emergence of opportunities by devoting an “all-inclusive Budget” as a guide to a “self-reliant India”.

The development of any nation depends on transportation networks

and the way in which they are maintained. One of the most crucial announcements in the Budget was with regard to infrastructure development projects, across various states and Union territories.

For connecting the areas and maintaining smooth flow of traffic, the construction of new roads is a must. The infrastructure projects are not just connectivity specific, like the proposed highway works and upgrade of the existing 675 km Kolkata-Siliguri highway bisecting the state of West Bengal, but also employment-generating opportunities.

Further, as Union territories receive 100 per cent of their funding from the central government, long-stalled projects are being revived and new welfare projects implemented.

The budget has provisioned ₹30,757 crore for Jammu and Kashmir, the highest among UTs. The announcement of a maiden gas pipeline in J&K has further rekindled hopes for the revival of the project that, due to a paucity of funds and the lack of an administrative push, showed no progress for a decade. This gas pipeline project will create a base for increased beneficiary coverage under the Ujjwala

Yojana as well as decrease carbon footprint by increasing utilisation of clean fuel for cooking purposes.

This connectivity upgrade also envisions the development of modern fishing harbours and fish landing centres along the banks of rivers and waterways. The government has provisioned for developing five major fishing harbours — Kochi, Chennai, Visakhapatnam, Paradip and Petuaghat — as hubs of economic activity. The development of fishing harbours would help in exploitation of rich fishing grounds, create adequate infrastructure for operation of mechanised fishing vessels, mitigate navigation hazards, save fishermen's lives and fishing vessels from the rough seas, make for the handling of fish and crustaceans in hygienic conditions, and, thereby, enhance export earnings.

The first-ever paperless Budget also gave a major boost to the start-up ecosystem in India, with the objective of encouraging entrepreneurship and fostering growth. Recently, 11 Indian start-ups managed to bag a unicorn tag in a pandemic year when they crossed the US \$1 billion valuation mark.

Prime Minister Modi has averred that start-ups are changing the demo-

graphic characteristics of today's businesses. Further, start-ups played a major role in ensuring availability of sanitizers, PPE kits and related supply chains, and fulfilled a sterling role in meeting local needs like grocery, medicine delivery at doorstep, transportation of frontline workers and online study material. The Budget provided a boost to start-up investments by extending the eligibility for claiming tax holidays for start-ups along with a capital gains exemption for investment in start-ups till March 31, 2022.

Mr Modi has ushered in a wave of behavioural change among people with the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. The pandemic made swachhta an integral lifestyle and a practice that has seen increased community participation.

For further swachhta of urban India, the government raised the focus on complete faecal sludge management and waste water treatment, source segregation of garbage, reduction in single-use plastic, reduction in air pollution by effectively managing waste from construction and demolition activities and bioremediation of all legacy dump sites. The Urban Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0 is being implemented with a total financial allocation of

₹1,41,678 crores over a period of five years.

Amidst a global pandemic, India's overall allocation for health and well-being increased by 137 per cent in the financial year 2021-22, thus boosting the capacity of the healthcare system to detect and cure new diseases.

Underscoring the importance of strengthening healthcare infrastructure, the government launched the PM Atma Nirbhar Swasth Bharat Yojana, with an outlay of about ₹64,180 crore over six years. The scheme will concentrate on bridging the health infrastructure gap at the village, block and panchayat levels and integrate them with centralised healthcare facilities.

Today, India has indigenously manufactured a vaccine and has begun medically safeguarding not only its own citizens against Covid-19, but also those of 100 or more countries under its Vaccine Maitri outreach. Our nation has strengthened its ethos of vasudhaiva kutumbakam while turning a crisis into an opportunity for developing “self-reliance” and presented a budget with an eye on future growth.

The writer is national general secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Party

SHORT TAKES

7.7-MAGNITUDE
QUAKE LEADS TO
SMALL TSUNAMI

Noumea, Feb. 11: A 7.7-magnitude earthquake struck in the South Pacific on Thursday, generating a small tsunami that caused no damage to island nations in the region before authorities gave the all clear.

The quake struck at just after midnight on Thursday local time (1320 GMT Wednesday) about 415 kilometres east of Vao in New Caledonia at a depth of 10 kilometres, according to the US Geological Survey. The US government's NSW Pacific Tsunami Warning Center said "hazardous tsunami waves" were forecast for some coasts. It said waves reaching between 0.3 and one metre above the tide level were possible for Fiji, New Zealand and Vanuatu. A wave of 0.3 metres struck Fiji, according to the Twitter feed of the island nation's seismology department.

PAK TEST-FIRES
CRUISE MISSILE,
3RD IN 3 WEEKS

Islamabad, Feb. 11: Pakistan on Thursday conducted a successful training launch of a surface-to-surface cruise missile which can strike targets up to 450 kilometres, the Army said, the country's third missile test in three weeks. The Babar missile "is capable of engaging targets at land and sea with high precision," the Army said in a statement, adding that the missile was launched from a state-of-the-art multi-tube launch vehicle.

It said that the Babar cruise missile has a range of 450 kilometers. Senior scientists and defence officials witnessed the training launch and acknowledged the standards of training and operational preparedness of the Army Strategic Forces. Raza Samar, chief of National Engineering and Science Commission, said that the launch showed the "proficient handling of the weapon system in the field and fulfillment of all laid down training parameters".

PORN MOGUL
LARRY FLYNT
DEAD AT 78

Los Angeles, Feb. 11: US porn mogul Larry Flynt, best known as the publisher of *Hustler Magazine* and a self-styled free-speech champion, died in Los Angeles Wednesday aged 78, his spokeswoman said.

"He passed quietly in his sleep at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center with his wife Liz and daughter Theresa by his side," said Minda Gowen in a statement, referring to the Los Angeles hospital.

Flynt died "from the recent onset of a sudden illness," the statement added, without specifying the cause. Various US media outlets have reported Flynt died from heart failure.

A self-described "smut peddler with a heart," Flynt rose from abject poverty to run a vast adult entertainment empire. He published the first issue of *Hustler Magazine* in 1974. Sales skyrocketed a year later when it ran a nude photo of former first lady Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis sunbathing on vacation, and Flynt raked in his first million.

FAKING EVEREST
SUMMIT: NEPAL
BANS 3 INDIANS

Kathmandu, Feb. 11: Nepal has banned two Indian climbers and their team leader from carrying out any mountaineering expeditions in the country for six years after a probe found that they faked their Mt Everest summit in 2016, according to a media report on Thursday. Indian nationals Narendra Singh Yadav and Seema Rani Goswami received expedition certificates during the spring season of 2016 without successfully climbing the world's highest mountain, the *Himalayan Times* reported, quoting a spokesperson of the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation.

Both the climbers had received the certificates of climbing the 8,848.86m (29,032 ft) mountain by submitting false details to the Department of Tourism. Their certificates have been revoked, the ministry said. After receiving a complaint about the fake ascent, the ministry had formed a committee to investigate the matter.

"The investigation has confirmed that both of them had obtained certificates by giving false details," the spokesperson was quoted as saying by the daily.

Biden talks tough
in first call to Xi

Slams China's unfair trade, crackdown in HK

Washington/Beijing, Feb. 11: US President Joe Biden has expressed his "fundamental concerns" about China's coercive and unfair economic practices, its crackdown in Hong Kong, human rights abuses in Xinjiang and increasingly assertive actions in the region, as he spoke with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping for the first time since taking office.

The phone call between the two leaders came hours after the Pentagon announced a task force on China. This was the first phone call between the two leaders after Biden was sworn in as the 46th President of the United States on January 20. During the phone call, Biden shared his greetings and well wishes with the Chinese people on the occasion of Lunar New Year on Friday. Biden affirmed his priorities of protecting the American people's security, prosperity, health, and way of life, and preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific, the White House said in a readout of the call.

China claims almost all of the 1.3 million square-mile South China Sea as its sovereign territory. China has been building military bases on artificial islands in the region also claimed by Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam. "President Biden under-

● **BIDEN AFFIRMED** his priorities of protecting the American people's security, prosperity, health, and way of life, and preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific, the White House said in a readout of the call.

scored his fundamental concerns about Beijing's coercive and unfair economic practices, the crackdown in Hong Kong, human rights abuses in Xinjiang, and increasingly assertive actions in the region, including toward Taiwan," the White House said. The militaries of China and India have been engaged in a tense standoff in eastern Ladakh since early May last year. Biden had earlier said he would not immediately cancel the trade agreement that former president Donald Trump struck with China nor take steps to remove tariffs on Chinese exports.

His administration is planning a sweeping review of the previous Trump administration's posture toward China, including its crackdown on unfair trade practices and antagonistic military activities in Asia.

China has faced severe criticism from Western countries, including the US, over persistent reports of the mass detention of Uighurs and other minorities in Xinjiang.

Biden administration officials have also condemned China's attacks on pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong. China has ramped up a crackdown in Hong Kong after imposing a new law against subversion following major protests in the city.

The two countries also have differences over Taiwan. China resents US support for Taiwan, which Beijing views as a rebel province that must be reunified with the mainland, even by force. During the phone call, Biden and Xi also exchanged views on countering the Covid-19 pandemic, and the shared challenges of global health security, climate change, and preventing weapons proliferation.

"Biden is committed to pursuing practical, results-oriented engagements when it advances the interests of the American people and those of our allies," the White House said. On his part, President Xi struck a conciliatory tone by saying that the growth of the China-US relations has been the most important development in international relations over the past half-century and more. Xi stressed that China and the US gain from cooperation and lose from confrontation.

Cooperation is the only right choice for both sides, state-run *Xinhua* news agency reported.

—PTI

LUKASHENKO
VOWS TO DEFEAT
REBELLION

Kyiv, Feb. 11: Belarus' authoritarian leader on Thursday denounced six months of protests against his rule as a foreign-directed "rebellion" and vowed to resist the pressure. Speaking to 2,700 participants of the All-Belarus People's Assembly, President Alexander Lukashenko charged that "very powerful forces" abroad were behind the protests. Lukashenko didn't elaborate, but over the past several months he has repeatedly accused the West of fomenting the protests.

"We must stand up to them no matter what, and this year will be decisive," he said. Lukashenko convened the gathering to discuss plans for the country's development, but the opposition has denounced it as an attempt to shore up his rule and soothe public anger with vague promises of reforms. Mass protests have gripped the ex-Soviet nation of 9.5 million people since official results from the Aug. 9 presidential election gave Lukashenko a landslide victory.

The main opposition candidate, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, and her supporters have dismissed the result as rigged, and some poll workers also have described manipulations of the vote. Authorities have cracked down hard on the largely peaceful demonstrations, the biggest of which attracted up to 200,000 people.

Police have used stun grenades, tear gas and truncheons to disperse the rallies.

—AP



Activists take part in a protest outside United Nations University in Tokyo on Thursday, against the February 1 coup by Myanmar's military.

—AFP

Nations curb Myanmar ties

Seoul, Feb. 11: A growing number of governments are curbing diplomatic ties with Myanmar and increasing economic pressure on its military over the coup last week that erased the fragile democratic progress in the long-oppressed Southeast Asian nation.

President Joe Biden said Wednesday he was issuing an executive order that will prevent Myanmar's generals from accessing \$1 billion in assets in the United States, and promised more measures. The US was among many Western governments that lifted most sanctions in the past decade to encourage democratic transition as Myanmar's military rulers were taking gradual steps toward civilian rule — changes that proved temporary with the ousting of the elected government and detentions of Nobel Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and others.

● **US PRESIDENT Joe Biden said Wednesday he was issuing an executive order that will prevent Myanmar's generals from accessing \$1 billion in assets in the United States, and promised more measures.**

One of the strongest reactions came from New Zealand, which has suspended all military and high-level political contact with the country and pledged to block any aid that could go to its military government or benefit its leaders. It also placed a travel ban on Myanmar's new military rulers. "We do not recognise the legitimacy of the military-led government and we call on the military to immediately release all detained political leaders and restore civilian rule," Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta said Tuesday.

In Washington, Biden

said his actions were aimed at freeing US assets that benefit Myanmar's military leaders while maintaining support for health care programmes, civil society groups and other areas. The US already has sanctions in place against some Myanmar military leaders over the killings and persecution of minority Rohingya Muslims. There has so far been no change in the level of US diplomatic representation in Myanmar, where Thomas Vajda continues as ambassador.

In Brussels, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said European foreign ministers will meet Feb. 22 to review the 27-nation bloc's relations with Myanmar and explore ways to increase economic pressure. Its options could include sanctions targeting individuals and businesses owned by Myanmar's military as well as cuts in development assistance.

Since 2014, the EU has granted Myanmar almost 700 million euros (\$850 million). Borrell said the EU's special system for granting least-developed countries duty-free and quota-free access to all products except arms and ammunition could also be reassessed.

"We now need to develop a robust response to this unacceptable seizure of power, which reverses 10 years of democratic transition," he said, adding that the review would examine "how closely we work with the government and its institutions from a legal, financial and technical perspective, as well as the impact on beneficiaries." The UN Human Rights Council, the 47-member-state body based in Geneva, has scheduled a special session on Friday to consider the human rights implications of the crisis in Myanmar.

—AP

IAEA: Iran has started
producing uranium metal
Tehran starts drill
near Iraqi border

Berlin, Feb. 11: The United Nations' atomic watchdog agency said Wednesday its inspectors have confirmed that Iran has begun the production of uranium metal — another violation of the 2015 landmark nuclear deal with world powers.

International Atomic Energy Agency head Rafael Grossi told member nations that his inspectors had confirmed February 8 that a small amount of uranium metal, 3.6 grams, had been produced at Iran's Isfahan plant, the Vienna-based organisation said.

Uranium metal can also be used for a nuclear bomb and research on its production is specifically prohibited under the nuclear deal — the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action — that Tehran signed with Germany, France, Britain, China, Russia and the United States in 2015.

Iran had previously announced the move, saying its plans to conduct research and development on uranium metal production were part of its "declared aim to design an improved type of fuel," according to the IAEA. Since the unilateral American withdrawal from the deal in 2018, the other members have been work-

Tehran, Feb. 11: Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard Thursday began a ground forces drill near Iraqi border, state TV reported. The report said the annual exercise dubbed the "great prophet" is ongoing in southwest of the country and has aimed at readiness and assessment of forces.

Drones, helicopters will be used in the drill, too. In recent months, Iran has increased its military drills as the country tries to pressure President Joe

Biden over the nuclear accord, which he has said America could reenter.

In January the Guard conducted a drill and launched anti-warship ballistic missiles at a simulated target in the Indian Ocean.

A week before that, Iran's navy fired cruise missiles as part of a naval drill in the Gulf of Oman, state media reported, under surveillance of what appeared to be a US nuclear submarine.

—AP

ing to try and preserve the accord. Tehran has been using violations of the deal to put pressure on the other signatories to provide more incentives to Iran to offset crippling American sanctions reimposed after the US pull-out. The ultimate goal of the deal is to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear bomb, something it insists it does not want to do.

Iran now has enough enriched uranium to make a bomb, but nowhere near the amount

it had before the nuclear deal was signed. The latest move by Tehran further complicates the efforts of the other member nations to entice the US to return to the deal — something President Joe Biden has indicated he would be open to. When Iran announced its plans in January to produce uranium metal, the German, French and British foreign ministries issued a joint statement saying they were "deeply concerned."

—AP

CANINE | COMPANION

It's established pets are attuned to interest owners show

Dogs play more when humans watch

Washington, Feb. 11: Pet dogs are far more likely to play with one another when their owner is present and being attentive, according to a new study, raising the intriguing possibility that they are putting on a show for our benefit. That our canine companions are keenly attuned to the level of interest humans are showing them is well established, Lindsay Mehrkam, an animal behaviourist and lead author of the paper that appeared in *Animal Cognition*, said.

"But we weren't aware of any research that has really shown the effect of a human audience impacting species typical behaviour, in this case dog-dog play," Mehrkam, an assistant professor of psychology at Monmouth University, oversaw an experiment involving 10 pairs of pet dogs that had lived together for at least six months.

The duos ordinarily engaged in play at least once a day, according to their owners. The researchers videotaped the dog pairs under three conditions: Where the owner was ab-

sent, where the owner was present but ignoring them, and where the owner was present and showering them with attention in the form of verbal praise and petting.

To ensure the experiment was robust, they ran each of the conditions three times over the course of several days.

"We found overall that the availability of owner attention did in fact facilitate play," said Mehrkam, with human attention increasing both the frequency and intensity of behav-

iours like bowing, hip nudges, wrestling, chasing, gentle bites and so on.

"It's really quite striking that dogs who have the chance to play with each other whenever they want to, nonetheless are much more likely to get up off their butts and start playing when a person is just paying attention to them," said co-author Clive Wynne of Arizona State University. The researchers offered several ideas for what might be driving the effect. One possibility is that an owner's attention

might be a reward the dogs are seeking, like young children pleading with their parents to watch them as they show off what they can do.

The dogs might have also learned that playing among themselves leads to bigger prizes, such as the owner joining in the fun, or taking them outside.

Or, their owner might provide the dogs a sense of safety, because although animals use play to strengthen bonds, it can sometimes turn tense and lead to aggression.

—AFP



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51,531.52	0.43
Nifty 50	15,173.30	0.44
S&P 500*	3,914.48	0.12
Dollar (₹)	72.86	-0.02
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.79	-0.01
Euro (₹)	88.29	0.005
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,509.36	0.07
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	61.35	-0.20
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.962	-0.80
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.145	-0.007

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Average salary to increase 6.4% in 2021: Survey

Salaries in India are projected to rise by an average of 6.4 per cent in 2021 against the actual increase of 5.9 per cent in 2020, says a Willis Towers Watson survey. It said average salary increase of 6.4 per cent in 2021 translates to a median increase of 7 per cent. "There is an increased optimism on business recovery, but it is yet to translate into the salary increment budget," said Rajul Mathur, India consulting head talent & rewards.

Sun Pharma, Shanghvi settle case with Sebi



Sun Pharma settled with the Sebi a case of alleged violation of listing obligation and disclosure requirements. Sun Pharma paid over Rs 56.11 lakh towards settlement charges and Dilip Shanghvi paid Rs 62.35 lakh. Directors Sudhir V. Valia and Sailesh T. Desai paid Rs 37.41 lakh each and K. Subramanian had to remit a settlement amount of Rs 36.97 lakh. CFO Uday Baldota and compliance officers Sunil Ajmera also paid.

Indians spend highest time on smartphones

The average time spent by Indians on smartphones is the highest in the world and the duration for watching short videos is likely to rise four-fold by 2025, Nokia said in a report. It found that India ranked second in the world after Finland in terms of broadband usage on mobile phones and the data traffic in the country has increased 63 times over the last five years. India consumed close to 10,000 petabytes in December 2020.

ACC profit up 73% at ₹472 cr in Dec. quarter

Cement maker ACC Ltd reported a 72.88 per cent increase in consolidated net profit to Rs 472.44 crore for the fourth quarter ended December 31. ACC, which follows the January-December financial year cycle, had posted a profit of Rs 273.28 crore in the year-ago quarter. Total revenue from operations rose 2.08 per cent to Rs 4,144.72 crore from Rs 4,060.31 crore. Revenue from cement was up 4.63 per cent.

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Gross delinquencies also increase substantially MFI loan portfolio sees double-digit rise in Q3

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 11

The gross loan portfolio of micro lenders has grown in double-digits in the December quarter over the previous quarter, but gross delinquencies have also moved up. The gross loan portfolio (GLP) of all lenders recorded a growth of 16 per cent during the December quarter to Rs 2,27,893 crore compared with Rs 1,96,820 crore in the year-ago quarter. The GLP of all lenders in the previous quarter, September 2020, was marginally higher at Rs 2,27,843 crore. However, delinquencies during the October-December period reached disturbing levels of 13 per cent, higher than the post-



demonetisation levels. As per data from Sa Dhan, portfolio at risk for more than 30 days, or PAR-30, has deteriorated to 13.23 per cent from 4.48 per cent in September 2020 and 1.89 per cent in June 2020. PAR-30 was just 1.78 per cent in March 2020. PAR-60 has moved up 8

per cent and PAR-90 to 4.9 per cent in the December 2020 quarter. Even during the post-demonetisation quarters, delinquencies were much lower. In the quarter ended March 2017, PAR-30 was 10.56 per cent. PAR-180, which technically is a non-performing asset, had moved up from

1.23 per cent in March 2017 to 6.7 per cent in the September quarter and 6.14 per cent in December quarter of 2017.

In 2017, in the aftermath of the demonetisation, liquidity of the borrowers was badly affected. Further, the rumours about loan waivers had affected the collections, which eventually led to large-scale write-offs of micro loans then.

However, Sa Dhan believes that things might not move to such a level this time. "The economic recovery has started happening and the collections have improved. Further, the micro finance industry had put up better checks and balances to avoid such a situation," said Somesh Dayal, associate director, Sa-Dhan.

Grofers mulls US listing via merger

BAIJU KALESH &
ANTO ANTONY
FEB. 11



firm at about \$1 billion, another person said.

Deliberations are at an early stage and the company could decide not to proceed with the plan, the people said. A representative for Grofers declined to comment.

The Spacs trend is rapid-

ly spreading beyond the US, with blank-cheque companies springing up in recent months to focus on targets in Asia, or with ties to the region. James Murdoch and former president of Walt Disney Asia Pacific Uday Shankar are seeking a blank-cheque vehicle to acquire Asian companies, Bloomberg News reported this week.

Grofers sells grocery and daily household products from cooking oil to Indian spices to shoppers in more than 27 cities, according to its website. Its eight in-

house brands make up the majority of the products it sells to the roughly three million people who have downloaded its app.

SoftBank's Vision Fund led an investment round of more than \$200 million into the company in 2019, along with Tiger Global, Sequoia Capital and KTB.

In a post-earnings presentation on Tuesday, SoftBank Group Corp founder Masayoshi Son said the company may see 10 to 20 public listings a year from its portfolio of 164 startups. —Bloomberg

ADITYA MITTAL NAMED CEO OF ARCELORMITTAL

New Delhi/
London, Feb. 11: Global steel giant ArcelorMittal on Thursday announced the appointment of Aditya Mittal as its CEO.



Aditya Mittal, son of steel baron Lakshmi N. Mittal, is the chief financial officer of the company, and will succeed his father in the new role.

In a statement, the Luxembourg-based steel maker said Lakshmi Mittal, who is currently chairman and CEO, will become the company's executive chairman and Aditya Mittal will become the CEO.

In this position, Lakshmi Mittal will continue to lead the board of directors and work together with the CEO and management team, it said.

The company added that Genuino Christino will now become its CFO. Christino joined the company in 2003 and has held the position of head of finance since 2016.

—PTI

BLUE STAR EYES GOVT'S VACCINE, ATMA NIRBHAR DRIVE, TO EXPAND CAPACITY

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, FEB. 11

Sensing a spike in demand for refrigeration products in the wake of the government's vaccination and Atma Nirbhar Bharat initiatives, air-conditioning major Blue Star on Thursday said it is doubling its capacity for commercial refrigeration products by setting up a new manufacturing plant in Maharashtra with an investment of Rs 130 crore.

The new factory at its existing facility at Wada in Thane district of Maharashtra will have an annual capacity to produce two lakh deep freezers and one lakh storage water coolers.

The factory could be commissioned by the year-end. "We have invested Rs 130 crore in setting up a new plant in Thane district as

the need for commercial refrigeration in India is increasingly becoming vital across industries—be it for pharmaceutical, healthcare, agriculture, hospitality, food processing and dairy, among others," B. Thiagarajan, MD, Blue Star, told *Financial Chronicle*.

Compared to the developed countries, commercial refrigeration adoption in India is only at a sub-5 per cent level, which translates into huge opportunities for Blue Star, he said.

Blue Star has launched "specifically designed, temperature-controlled refrigerators and transporters." This combined with the Aatmanirbhar Bharat push will unfold enormous opportunities for Blue Star, he pointed out.

(With inputs from Ravi Ranjan Prasad)

RAILTEL SETS ₹93-₹94 PRICE BAND FOR IPO

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, FEB. 11

RailTel Corporation Of India, a telecom infrastructure provider under the Ministry of Railways, has announced a public issue of shares by the Government of India in the price range of Rs 93-Rs 94 per share of Rs 10 face value. The issue aims to raise Rs 819.24 crore at the upper price band.

The initial public offering opens on February 16 and closes on February 18.

A company release said RailTel is one of the largest neutral telecom infrastructure providers in the country having a 59,098 route kilometres of optical fibre cable network that connects 5,929 railway stations as of January 31, 2021.

RailTel offers a diversified portfolio of telecom services and solutions, including leased lines services, e-office services and data centre services, large network hardware system integration, software and digital services to enterprises, public sector banks, defence organisations and educational institutions, operated through data centres located in Gurugram, Haryana and Secunderabad and Telangana. RailTel is also appointed by the Ministry of Railways for implementing the Hospital Management Information System.

The issue will comprise an offer for sale of up to 87.15 million equity shares by the GoI.

World is going electric and MNCs are upbeat

RUDY RUITENBERG
FEB. 11

Schneider Electric SE forecast higher profit for this year after a better-than-expected annual result and joined European rivals in predicting growth linked to the world going electric.

Adjusted operating profit before amortisation slipped to 3.93 billion euros (\$4.77 billion) last year, ahead of analysts' estimates, as demand for gear to power data centres and buildings helped blunt the impact of the coronavirus. The French company predicted earnings will jump as much as 15 per cent this year.

Schneider and rivals Siemens AG and ABB Ltd. have been among the best performers on their benchmark indexes during the pandemic. From rising data usage to connected buildings and electric vehicles, demand is surging for the companies' switches and automated controls. Electricity demand is expected to outpace all other fuels in the next 10 years, according to the International Energy Agency's main outlook.

"There's going to be a massive shift on the side of electricity," Schneider chief executive officer Jean-Pascal Tricoire said in an interview with BFM Business TV on Thursday. "The future will be electric, because all new technologies—be it electric vehicles, electronics, IT and buildings—will be electric."

Schneider forecast organic sales growth of 5 to 8 per cent in 2021. Its shares rose as much as 2.8 per cent and advanced 29 per cent last year.

Siemens last week raised its earnings outlook, while ABB reported better-than-expected revenue thanks to a rebound in Germany and China and rising orders linked to data centres, EV chargers and renewable energy. Smaller rival Legrand SA reported results on Thursday that were in line with expectations, with the fourth quarter "not matching the general trend in the sector for big profit beats," RBC analyst Wasi Rizvi said. Legrand predicted organic sales growth of 1 to 6 per cent, trailing Schneider's outlook.

Spending to modernise, expand and digitise grids will reach \$460 billion in 2030, the IEA forecasts. The agency expects network expansion to rise 80 per cent from the previous decade. Tricoire said electricity's share of energy consumption will double to 40 per cent in the next 20 years.

Rexel SA, which distributes electrical supplies, including Schneider and Legrand products, said full-year adjusted earnings fell by about a fifth to 526 million euros.

—Bloomberg

FUTURE-RELIANCE DEAL: AMAZON MOVES APEX COURT

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 11

After suffering a setback at the Delhi High Court's division bench, Amazon has approached the Supreme Court against the contested Rs 24,713-crore deal between Future Group and Reliance.

Amazon appealed against February 8 order of the division bench, which stayed the status quo order passed by a single judge of the court on February 2 asking Future Group and concerned authorities to maintain status quo in the Reliance-Future deal till it pronounces the final order.

The staying of the order of the single judge even temporarily and permitting further violation of the operative directions in the Emergency Arbitrator order would be difficult to reverse, Amazon said in its appeal. Amazon has been seeking enforcement of the arbitrator award.

Passenger vehicle sales up 11% in Jan: Siam

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, FEB. 11

The Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers or Siam said on Thursday that the wholesales of passenger vehicles from factories to dealerships in India in January rose for the sixth straight month, helped by robust demand for utility vehicles.

Domestic wholesales of passenger vehicles rose 11.4 per cent year-on-year to 2.77 lakh units last month, according to the Siam.

While car sales fell 1.16 per cent over the year earlier to 1.53 lakh units, utility vehicles jumped 37.26 per cent to 1.12 lakh units—also the sixth straight month of pick-up for the segment.

Total two-wheeler sales, too, rose 6.63 per cent at 14.29 lakh units for the sixth month in a row.

Motorcycle sales increased 5.1 per cent to 9.16 lakh units while scooter sales were also up 9.06 per cent at 4.54 lakh units.

Three-wheeler sales, however, declined by 56.76



per cent to 26,335 units as compared with 60,903 units in January last year.

Vehicle sales across categories rose by 4.97 per cent to 17.32 lakh units last month as against 16,50,812 units in the year ago period.

Siam releases sales data for commercial vehicles on a quarterly basis.

"Supply chain challenges, including rising price of steel, unavailability of semi-conductors, and higher container charges continue to be obstacles in smooth functioning of the industry," Rajesh Menon, director general, Siam, said.

The pandemic has fuelled demand for personal mobility. But automakers, battling several quarters of slowing sales, have not been able to keep up with supply.

ATMA NIRBHAR | AMERICA

Firms say country's share dwindling

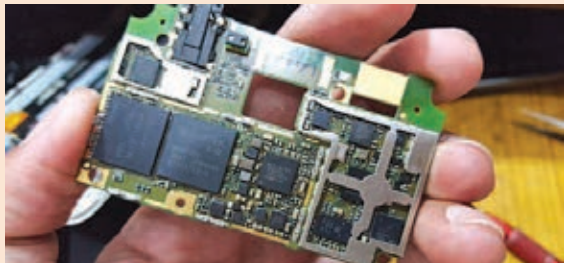
US chip makers lobby for local mfg

IAN KING
FEB. 11

The chief executive officers of chip companies including Intel Corp, Qualcomm Inc and Advanced Micro Devices Inc urged US President Joe Biden to support domestic production and stop the country from losing its edge in innovation.

The Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA) sent a letter on Thursday to Biden to include "substantial funding for incentives for semiconductor manufacturing, in the form of grants and/or tax credits" in his administration's stimulus package.

The letter, signed by Bob Swan of Intel, Steve



Mollenkopf of Qualcomm, Lisa Su of AMD and other members of the SIA board, highlighted that the country's share of chip manufacturing has dropped to 12 per cent from 37 per cent in 1990. "Our technology leadership is at risk in the race for pre-eminence in the technologies of the future, including artificial intelligence, 5G/6G,

and quantum computing," the letter said.

US companies mostly outsource production to Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co and South Korea's Samsung Electronics Co. That's becoming a national security issue as tensions rise between the US and China, which is investing heavily to expand its own chip industry.

—Bloomberg

HALDIRAM'S FIGHTS LOOK-ALIKE SITES

Hyderabad, Feb. 11: The Senior Division Civil Court of Nagpur has issued notices to Godaddy.com, Network Solutions and Nixi on a petition filed by Haldiram's Foods International Pvt Ltd against the domain registrars hosting various websites by the name Haldiram.

Haldiram's operates its website as www.haldirams.com. Many look-alike websites such as www.haldirams.in, www.haldiram.com, www.haldiramfranchise.com etc. are created by fraudsters and are taking money from various people on the pretext of giving dealership/distributorship of Haldiram's. The firm had also filed police complaints in this respect.

Business NOTE

SHORT TAKES

Sprinter Hima is policewoman

New Delhi: Star sprinter Hima Das, who is currently looking to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics, has been appointed as a Deputy Superintendent of Police by the Assam government. Hima thanked Assam Chief Minister and former Union Sports Minister Sarbananda Sonowal for the job, saying it will motivate her.

"I thank our Hon'ble Chief Minister @sarbanandsonwal sir @himantabiswa sir for my appointment as Deputy SP with @assampolice. The decision is a huge motivation for me. I look forward to be of service to my state and my nation. Jai Hind!" Hima said in a tweet.

Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju lauded Assam government for the decision. "Well done! Assam Cabinet, headed by CM @sarbanandsonwal Ji has decided to offer the post of DSP in Assam Police to sprinter queen @HimaDas81," Rijiju tweeted. — *PTI*

Tokyo chief Mori set to resign

Tokyo: Tokyo Olympics chief Yoshiro Mori is to resign after he sparked outrage in Japan and abroad by claiming that women talk too much in meetings, reports said Thursday. The decision comes after a barrage of criticism from politicians to sports stars, and is the latest headache for organisers as they battle public disquiet over plans to hold the Games this summer despite the pandemic.

Multiple Japanese media outlets, citing anonymous sources, said the 83-year-old has told officials he wishes to step down and will announce his resignation at a meeting of Games organisers on Friday. His most likely successor is Saburo Kawabuchi, an 84-year-old long-time sports administrator, local media reported. — *AFP*

Rizwan century sinks Proteas

Lahore: In-form wicketkeeper batsman Mohammad Rizwan's scintillating century helped Pakistan beat South Africa by 3 runs in the first Twenty20 International against South Africa in Lahore on Thursday. Rizwan smashed 104 for his maiden hundred to guide Pakistan to 169-6. In reply, South Africa fought hard but could only manage to score 166 for the loss of 6 wickets in the stipulated 20 overs.

Rizwan finished with 64-ball 104 not out comprising of six boundaries and seven sixes after South Africa won the toss and sent Pakistan in to bat at Gaddafi stadium.

Andile Phehlukwayo was the pick of South African bowlers with 2-33. — *Agency*

Brief scores: Pakistan 169/6 in 20 overs (M. Rizwan 104; Phehlukwayo 2/33) **bt South Africa 166/6** in 20 overs (Hendricks 54, Malan 44; Qadir 2/21).

Bonner bolsters WI on first day

Dhaka: Nkrumah Bonner scored an unbeaten half-century as the West Indies and Bangladesh shared the honours on the opening day of the second and final Test in Dhaka on Thursday. Bonner hit 74, guiding the West Indies to 223-5 at stumps after skipper Kraigg Brathwaite won the toss and elected to bat first at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Dhaka. Joshua Da Silva was unbeaten on 22 alongside Bonner at the close.

Pacer Abu Jayed (2-46) and left-arm spinner Taijul Islam (2-64) were the most successful bowlers for Bangladesh, who must win the match to avoid a defeat in the two-Test series. Brathwaite hit 47 from 122 balls as the West Indies seized the early momentum, before the hosts clawed their way back into the contest. — *AFP*

Brief scores, Day 1: West Indies 223/5 in 90 overs (N. Bonner batting 74, Brathwaite 47; A. Jayed 2/46) **vs Bangladesh.**

Live on TV

TENNIS

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

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SWEET VICTORY

Svitolina thrashes Gauff; Nadal makes 3rd round

Melbourne, Feb. 11: Defending champion Sofia Kenin exited the Australian Open in tears on Thursday as world number one Ashleigh Barty negotiated a sticky moment to reach the third round.

Meanwhile, Elina Svitolina lifted in the pivotal moments of the free-wheeling contest to move into the third round with a 6-4, 6-3 victory against teenage sensation Coco Gauff in one hour and 17 minutes at Rod Laver Arena.

Fifth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas also survived a five-set marathon with Australia's Thanasi Kokkinakis, a close friend of showman Nick Kyrgios, to maintain his hopes of a first major win.

With Rafael Nadal crushing the American Michael Mmoh 6-1, 6-4, 6-2 in his quest for the all-time Grand Slam titles record, Kenin and Barty topped the day-time bill — but their matches had very different outcomes.

Self-imposed pressure has weighed heavily on Kenin, 22, the world number four who was defending a Grand Slam title for the first time.

And after an emotional first-round win over wildcard Maddison Inglis, Kenin met her match in the in-form Estonian Kaia Kanepi, who ousted the American 6-3, 6-2.

While Kenin became just the third defending champion since 1970 to fail to reach the third round, Barty further lifted hopes of a first Australian winner since 1978.

Playing with her left thigh heavily strapped, the top seed Barty twice failed to serve out the win before ousting her 387th-ranked compatriot Daria Gavrilova 6-1, 7-6 (9/7).

Barty, who is unbeaten in seven matches after sitting out nearly all of last year, blamed the lapse on ring-rust.

Elsewhere, Medvedev, who turned 25 on Thursday, powered past the Spaniard Roberto Carballes Baena 6-2, 7-5, 6-1.

Meanwhile, the volatile Australian Nick Kyrgios had a raucous crowd willing him to a stirring 5-7, 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-4 victory over impressive young Frenchman Ugo Humbert at his favourite John Cain



Elina Svitolina of Ukraine makes a backhand return to Coco Gauff of United States during their second round match at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne on Thursday. Svitolina won 6-4, 6-3. — *AP*

Arena in a Wednesday night match.

Also, world number 192 Mackenzie McDonald beat Borna Coric 6-4, 6-2, 4-6, 6-4 to hand the Croatian 22nd seed the biggest upset of his career.

McDonald, 25, became the lowest-ranked tour-level winner against Coric, a US Open quarter-finalist last year, and reaches a Grand Slam third round for only the second time.

Later, Tsitsipas was not expected to be troubled by 267th-ranked Kokkinakis but the Aussie, roared on by Kyrgios, saved a fourth-

set match point before going down 6-7 (5/7), 6-4, 6-1, 6-7 (5/7), 6-4.

Sixth seed Karolina Pliskova of the Czech Republic had few problems in beating American Danielle Collins 7-5, 6-2.

DIVIJ, ANKITA CRASH OUT IN FIRST ROUNDS

India's Divij Sharan and Ankita Raina crashed out of the Australian Open men's and women's doubles events respectively, after suffering straight set defeats in the opening round here on Thursday.

Ankita, the third Indian woman tennis player to

secure a place in the main draw of a Grand Slam event, and her partner Mihaela Buzarnescu of Romania lost 3-6, 0-6 in just one hour and 17 minutes at the hands of Olivia Gadecki and Belinda Woolcock.

India's challenge also ended in the men's doubles competition after Divij and his Slovakian partner Igor Zelenay lost 1-6, 4-6 against the German combination of Yannick Hanfmann Kevin Krawietz in the first round match that lasted one hour and four minutes. — *Agencies*

SELECTED RESULTS

Men's singles second round: Rafael Nadal (ESP x2) bt Michael Mmoh (USA) 6-1, 6-4, 6-2; Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x5) bt Thanasi Kokkinakis (AUS) 6-7 (5/7), 6-4, 6-1, 6-7 (5/7), 6-4; Daniil Medvedev (RUS x4) bt Roberto Carballes (ESP) 6-2, 7-5, 6-1; Andrey Rublev (RUS x7) bt Thiago Monteiro (BRA) 6-4, 6-4, 7-6 (10/8); Nick Kyrgios (AUS) 5-7, 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-4; Ugo Humbert (FRA); Feliciano Lopez (ESP) bt Lorenzo Sonego (ITA x31) 5-7, 3-6, 6-3, 7-5, 6-4; Casper Ruud (NOR x24) bt Tommy Paul (USA) 3-6, 6-2, 6-4, 7-5; Radu Albot (MDA) bt Christopher O'Connell (AUS) 6-2, 7-5, 7-6 (10/8); Lloyd Harris (RSA) bt Alexei Popyrin (AUS) 6-2, 1-6, 6-3, 6-7 (5/7), 6-3; Mackenzie McDonald (USA) bt Borna Coric (CRO x22) 6-4, 6-2, 4-6, 6-4; Filip Krajinovic (SRB x28) bt Pablo Andujar (ESP) 6-2, 5-7, 6-1, 6-4; Mikael Ymer (SWE) bt Carlos Alcaraz (ESP) 2-6, 6-4, 6-4, 7-6 (7/5); Matteo Berrettini (ITA x9) bt Tomas Machac (CZE) 6-3, 6-2, 4-6, 6-3; Fabio Fognini (ITA x16) bt Salvatore Caruso (ITA) 4-6, 6-2, 2-6, 6-3, 7-6 (14/12); Alex De Minaur (AUS x21) bt Pablo Cuevas (URU) 6-3, 6-3, 7-5; Cameron Norrie (GBR) bt Roman Safiullin (RUS) 3-6, 7-5, 6-3, 7-6 (7/5).

Women's singles second round: Elina Svitolina (UKR x5) bt Coco Gauff (USA) 6-4, 6-3; Ashleigh Barty (AUS x1) bt Daria Gavrilova (AUS) 6-1, 7-6 (9/7); Kaia Kanepi (EST) bt Sofia Kenin (USA x4) 6-3, 6-2; Ekaterina Alexandrova (RUS x29) bt Barbora Krejickova (CZE) 6-3, 7-6 (7/4); Anett Kontaveit (EST x21) bt Heather Watson (GBR) 6-7 (5/7), 6-4, 6-2; Shelby Rogers (USA) bt Olga Danilovic (SRB) 6-2, 6-3; Belinda Bencic (SUI x11) bt Svetlana Kuznetsova (RUS) 7-5, 2-6, 6-4; Elise Mertens (BEL x18) bt Lin Zhu (CHN) 7-6 (10/8), 6-1; Karolina Muchova (CZE x25) bt Mona Barthel (GER) 6-4, 6-1; Karolina Pliskova (CZE x6) bt Danielle Collins (USA) 7-5, 6-2; Donna Vekic (CRO x28) bt Nadia Podoroska (ARG) 6-2, 6-2; Jennifer Brady (USA x22) bt Madison Brengle (USA) 6-1, 6-2; Kaja Juvan (SLO) bt Mayar Sherif (EGY) 3-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-3; Jessica Pegula (USA) bt Samantha Stosur (AUS) 6-0, 6-1; Kristina Mladenovic (FRA) bt Nao Hibino (JPN) 7-5, 6-1; Yulia Putintseva (KAZ x26) bt Alison Van Uytvanck (BEL) 6-4, 1-6, 6-2.

Everton eke out 5-4 win as City shatter Swansea

London, Feb. 11: Everton upped the pressure on Jose Mourinho with a thrilling 5-4 victory over Tottenham before extra-time to reach the FA Cup quarterfinals, as Manchester City eased into the last eight by beating Swansea 3-1 on Wednesday.

Mourinho's men made a bright start at Goodison Park as Davinson Sanchez headed them into the lead after just three minutes.

However, the defensive errors that have cost Tottenham dear in recent months were in evidence as Everton struck three times in seven minutes

just before half-time through Dominic Calvert-Lewin, Richarlison and Gylfi Sigurdsson's penalty.

Erik Lamela reduced Spurs' deficit in first-half stoppage time before another rare goal for Sanchez made it 3-3.

Richarlison then smashed home from a narrow angle to restore Everton's lead.

Harry Kane came all guns blazing to Tottenham's rescue with 83rd minute goal which was further cancelled by Everton's Bernard in 97th minute which earned them a super victory.

Meanwhile, the defending from both sides will encourage City, who also face Everton in the Premier League next Wednesday, after they broke the English football record for consecutive wins by a top-flight club.

Kyle Walker, Raheem Sterling and Gabriel Jesus were on target for City, who extended their winning run in all competitions to 15 games with a 3-1 success over Swansea.

Victory was also Pep Guardiola's 200th in 268 games as City boss, with his side still on course for a historic quadruple of trophies. — *AFP*

Foakes hopes for spinning tracks

C. SANTOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, FEB. 11

When Ben Foakes made a sensational Test debut by scoring a century and winning the man of the series award against Sri Lanka in November 2018, he was expected to get a longer run in the England team. But the wicket-keeper batsman played just four more matches before he was dropped following a lacklustre West Indies tour in 2019. Since then, as the understudy of Jos Buttler, Foakes has hopped from one bio-bubble to another, hoping to get another opportunity.

The 27-year-old's two-year wait will finally end when England take on India in the second Test that begins here on Saturday. It's an enforced change as England's No.1 keeper Buttler has flown home as part of their rotation policy.

Foakes said he would love to have the same kind of impact he had in his debut series. "Of course, it was frustrating to sit out for a while. Over the last two years, I haven't played as much as I would have liked to. So, I am just trying to put myself in a good position. Hopefully, I will be able to contribute," said Foakes.

Having lost their first home Test since February 2017, India will be eager to hit back. With India 0-1 down, Foakes expects a spinning track for the second Test. "Obviously, it's an avenue that India would like to go down. Actually, I found it quite tricky to read the wicket. The pitch looks different to the last one — a darker soil. I think it might play a bit low and slow. The previous pitch played really well for about three days. I think there is a potential that it will spin earlier. But we will wait to see what happens on the opening day," said Foakes.

ENGLAND SUFFER SETBACK AS ARCHER IS OUT

AGE CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 11

England suffered a major setback on Thursday as their fast bowler Jofra Archer has been ruled out of the second Test with an injury. The second match begins at the M. A. Chidambaram Stadium here on Saturday.

"Archer will miss the Test after having an injection in his right elbow. The injection follows discomfort the fast bowler experienced during the first Test," said an ECB release.

England, however, are hoping that Archer would be available for the third Test in Ahmedabad. "The issue is not related to any previous injury and it is hoped the treatment will allow the condition to settle down quickly, allowing the player to return to action in time for the third Test in Ahmedabad," the release added. In Archer's absence, Stuart Broad is likely to share the new ball with James Anderson.

With a ringside view, wicket-keeper plays a key role in taking the DRS reviews. Foakes said DRS calls are going to be really challenging on turning wickets. "I think on turning wickets, the keeper comes into the game with such a good view. One of those things I haven't done too much. I think I did alright in Sri Lanka in 2018. One of those things I am not quite experienced and you try in the nets and have a look while standing back and get more experienced," further added Foakes.

BACK IN INDIA NETS, AXAR GEARS UP FOR TEST DEBUT

AGE CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 11

Axar Patel moved a step closer to making his Test debut as he resumed bowling in India nets on Thursday. A knee injury had ruled the left-arm spinner out of the opening Test against England.

Axar's presence is expected to bolster the spin bowling department as Virat Kohli wasn't pleased with the way left-arm spinner Shahbaz Nadeem and offie Washington Sundar leaked runs in the first Test that India lost by 227 runs.

Shahbaz and Washington failed to support India's frontline bowlers by maintaining pressure. Shahbaz had a match-haul of four wickets, but conceded 233 runs with an economy rate of around four per over. Washington went wicketless in the first innings and bowled just one over in the second.

"As a bowling unit, we didn't bowl well collectively. If you consider the fast bowlers and Ashwin, then yes, we bowled consistently and in good areas. But if Washi and Shahbaz had also bowled such economical spells, then you create more pressure, and you cut out 80-90 runs from the opposition," Kohli had said.

While Axar is set to replace Shahbaz in the playing XI, Washington might retain his place for his batting ability. He has scored two half-centuries in the last four innings. His unbeaten 85 in the first innings helped India fight back against England.

Kumble comes to Jaffer's rescue

New Delhi, Feb. 11: Spin legend Anil Kumble on Thursday extended support to his former India teammate Wasim Jaffer after the Cricket Association of Uttarakhand (CAU) alleged that he had tried to force religion-based selections as the state team's coach.

Jaffer, who quit as Uttarakhand coach owing to a dispute with the state association, on Wednesday rejected allegations by the cricket association's officials that he favoured Muslim players in the team. He got support from Kumble, a former India captain and coach who currently heads the ICC's cricket committee.

"With you Wasim. Did the right thing. Unfortunately it's the players who'll miss your mentor ship," Kumble wrote on his Twitter handle.

The 42-year-old Jaffer, who played 31 Tests for India and is a celebrated name in domestic cricket, said the charge levelled by CAU's secretary Mahim Verma in a media report,

had caused him immense pain. "...jo communal angle *Jagaya* (the communal angle that has been brought up), that is very, very sad," Jaffer said in a virtual press conference on Wednesday.

"They levelled an allegation that I am in favour of Iqbal Abdulla, I wanted to make Iqbal Abdulla as the captain, which is absolutely wrong," he asserted.

The leading run-getter in Ranji Trophy also dismissed allegations that he brought Maulvis (Muslim religious scholars) to the team's training.

"First of all they said the Maulavis came there in a bio-bubble and we offered Namaz. Let me tell you one thing, the Maulavi, Maulana, who came on two or three Fridays during the camp in Dehradun, I had not called him."

"It was Iqbal Abdulla (Uttarakhand player) who sought mine and the manager's permission only for the Friday prayer," he said referring to the 31-year-old all-rounder, who has competed in the IPL. — *PTI*

Team India revs up for Asian Le Mans

AGE CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 11

Racing Team India will take its first step on the road to the 24 Hours of Le Mans this weekend when it makes its debut at the season-opening round of the Asian Le Mans Series in Dubai.

The all-Indian squad of Narain Karthikeyan, Arjun Maini and Naveen Rao will compete in the LMP2 category over two, four-hour-long races at the Dubai Autodrome on Saturday and Sunday before the series moves to Abu Dhabi's Yas Marina circuit for another round of two, four-hour races on February 19 and 20.

Racing Team India's Dubai debut will make it



The car in which Narain Karthikeyan, Arjun Maini and Naveen Rao will compete in the Asian Le Mans Series at the Dubai Autodrome over the weekend.

the first outfit with an all-Indian driver line-up to compete in international endurance racing. If it secures an invitation to the 24 Hours of Le Mans in June, it will become the first Indian team to take part in the iconic endurance classic at the

Circuit de la Sarthe in France.

"Le Mans is like the whole Formula One championship in 24 hours. It's all about endurance, preserving the car and getting a great set up and work as a team. The pit-stops need to be right, the

driver changes, et al. The challenges are so many including driving at night at the speed of 300km every lap. It is the toughest race in the world without a doubt," Karthikeyan told a press conference on Thursday.

"We are all experienced but nothing prepares you for Le Mans. Anything can happen but it's a great challenge and we're up to it. To represent India is a very proud moment for all of us. I have flown the flag for our country across various motorsport disciplines from Formula One to NASCAR and SuperGT racing. I've raced at the 24 Hours of Le Mans once before, and it was an incredible experience," Karthikeyan added.

"As for the weekend ahead, I'm looking forward to it. Our package has also been quick through testing. There's a lot of speed in the car and I'm confident we can deliver a strong result on our debut," Karthikeyan said.

"This is a phenomenal step ahead," said Sanjay Sharma, Head-Motor-sport, JK Tyre, which is one of the team partners.

"At JK Tyre we have been steadfast supporters of Indian motorsport over many decades. We are confident Racing Team India has what it takes to be successful and race at Le Mans which would deliver the breakthrough that Indian motorsport needs," he added.