



JAISHANKAR CALLS
FOR REFORMS TO
DEAL WITH TERROR

P5



WIFE OF DRUG
KINGPIN 'EL CHAPO'
ARRESTED

P9



IRAN IMPOSES
CURBS ON UN
NUKE INSPECTIONS

P10



ROOT TO MATES:
BEWARE OF
INDIAN SPIN

P12

WEATHER

Mainly clear sky. Mist/shallow fog in the morning. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 31 and 12 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: NIL

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Max: 100% Min: 36%

TEMPERATURE

Max: 31.5°C (+7) Min: 10.7°C (0)
SUN RISES SUN SETS
06:50 hrs 18:18 hrs
MOON RISES MOON SETS
15:14 hrs 05:32 hrs

THUMBNAILS



Indian Secular Front activists protest against farm laws and fuel price hike, in Kolkata on Tuesday.

ANAGHA BANIK

Six killed in Karnataka blast: Six people were killed when the gelatin sticks they were trying to dispose of clandestinely exploded accidentally at a stone quarry site in a village in Chikkaballapur in Karnataka on Tuesday, police said. The government has ordered a CIB probe into the blast. Police said preliminary investigation indicated use of petroleum gel and Ammonium Nitrate in the quarry that was operating clandestinely and was closed a few days ago following raids.

P4

Lakha Sidhana attends public meeting: Lakha Sidhana, who is wanted in connection with the violence in Delhi on Republic Day, on Tuesday attended a public meeting in Punjab's Bathinda in support of the ongoing farmers' agitation against the Centre's agri laws. A video clip showed him seated on the dais. He had given a call for the public meeting in Bathinda's Mehraj village last week. There was speculation whether Sidhana would take part in the public meeting as he is wanted by the Delhi Police.

'Scanty, sketchy evidence': Disha gets bail in toolkit case

SNS & AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, 23 FEBRUARY

A Delhi court on Tuesday granted bail to climate activist Disha Ravi in the toolkit case, considering the "scanty and sketchy evidence on record".

"Considering the scanty and sketchy evidence on record, I do not find any palpable reason to breach the rule of bail for a 22-year-old girl who has absolutely no criminal antecedents," Additional Sessions Judge Dharmender Rana noted.

Ravi has been directed to not leave the country, and cooperate with the ongoing investigation as a condition for grant of bail.

She faces charges of conspiracy and sedition in the 'Toolkit' conspiracy case related to the farmers' agitation and was arrested from Bengaluru on February 13.



carry out nefarious activity," Additional Solicitor General SVRaju told the court, adding that these organisations are connected to the Khalistani movement.

Ravi's counsel Advocate Shuddhbir Agarwal, however, claimed there is no evidence linking the toolkit to the violence during the farmers' march on January 26.

Shantanu moves court for anticipatory bail: Shantanu Mukul, who is accused along with Disha Ravi in connection with allegedly being involved in sharing a "toolkit" on social media related to the farmers' protest, Tuesday moved a Delhi court seeking anticipatory bail.

The application moved by Mukul is likely to come up for hearing Wednesday before Additional Sessions Judge Dharmender Rana.

UNWAVERING



Protesting farmers observe 'Padi Sambhal Jatta day' in memory of Sardar Ajit Singh on his birth anniversary, at Ghazipur border, in the Capital on Tuesday.

CBI examines Abhishek's wife in coal pilferage case

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 23 FEBRUARY

The CBI today interrogated Rujira Banerjee Narula, wife of Trinamul Congress MP and West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew, Abhishek Banerjee, for over an hour in connection with the coal smuggling scam.

An eight-member team led by an officer in the rank of superintendent of police, today interrogated Rujira at her residence at Harish Chatterjee Street in connection with the alleged beneficiaries of the money trail in the coal mining scam that the agency suspected was stashed in many overseas accounts.

Sources in the CBI said the interrogation which lasted for one and half hours, mainly revolved around her accounts in Thailand. Rujira was found to be not "forthcoming" in her reply and skirted many queries on the pretext of "beyond her knowledge", sources said. It was learnt that the CBI was in constant touch with the higher officials at Kolkata's Nizam Palace and briefed the entire interrogation details to the office over the telephone from Abhishek Banerjee's residence.

The CBI was learnt to have been armed with an eight-page questionnaire and quizzed Rujira regarding her several passports and on whether she holds any post in any company based in Thailand and the alleged dubious transactions that had taken place in her account based in that country.

The alleged channelisation of a large chunk of money into her Bangkok account was learnt to have raised eye-

brows of the CBI sleuths, who following the interrogation of suspects in the coal and cattle smuggling scams have come across certain leads of an existence of a businessman based in UAE, who had helped the alleged masterminds in coal mining scam to stash their ill-gotten money through a web of overseas accounts in foreign countries.

The statement given by Rujira Banerjee was recorded and would now be tallied with that of Menaka Gambhir, her sister, who was quizzed yesterday. Following in-depth analysis and evaluation of the statement recorded, the next course of action would be decided.

Earlier today a high drama preceded the CBI team's examination of Rujira as chief minister Mamata Banerjee went to her nephew Abhishek Banerjee's residence.

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Delhi court sends Deep Sidhu to 14-day JC

NEW DELHI, 23 FEBRUARY

A Delhi court on Tuesday sent actor-activist Deep Sidhu to judicial custody for 14 days in connection with the Red Fort violence on Republic Day during farmers' tractor parade against the Centre's three new agri laws.

Sidhu was produced before Metropolitan Magistrate Samarjeet Kaur on expiry of his 7-day police custody. He was produced before the magistrate in Tihar Jail, where he is currently lodged.

The court had first sent Sidhu to police custody on February 9 for seven days, after the police alleged he was one of the main instigators of the violent incidents at the Red Fort. His custody was further extended by seven days on February 16.

The police had said there are videos where Sidhu can be allegedly seen to be present at the site of the incident.

"He was instigating the crowd. He was also one of the main rioters. Several social media accounts need to be searched to identify the co-conspirators. Also his permanent address is given as Nagpur but several places need to be visited in Punjab and Haryana to unearth further details".

"He can be seen coming out with the person who hoisted the flag and congratulating him," the police had alleged.

Sidhu's counsel, however, had claimed he had nothing to do with the violence and was at the wrong place at the wrong time.

Sidhu has been arrested for several offences under the sections of Indian Penal Code and other Acts.

Habitat loss is leading to inbreeding of Indian tigers, study finds

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 23 FEBRUARY

While Indian tigers have the highest genetic variation compared to other subspecies of the feline across the world, their populations continue to be fragmented by loss of habitat, leading to inbreeding and potential loss of this diversity, says a new study that may inform conservation strategies.

"As human population started expanding, so also their signatures on the land. We know that some of these signatures would result in disrupting the ability of tigers to move," Uma Ramakrishnan, co-author of the research, published in the journal Molecular Biology



and Evolution, said.

According to Ramakrishnan, molecular ecologist and assistant professor at the National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bangalore, this habitat loss from human activities leads to tigers being "hemmed into their own protected area."

"Now they can only mate with the other tigers in their own population. Overtime, this will result in inbreeding, they will end up mating with their relatives," she explained.

"Whether this inbreeding compromises their fitness, their ability to survive, we do not yet know," the molecular ecologist added.

While genetic diversity across a population improves

their chances of survival in the future, the study said.

Population fragmentation of tigers can decrease this variation, and endanger them further.

Although tigers have received significant conservation attention, the scientists said very little is known about their evolutionary history and genomic variation, especially

for Indian tigers.

With 70 per cent of the

world's tigers living in India,

the researchers said understand the genetic diversity of tigers in the country is critical to the feline's conservation worldwide.

The results of their three-

year long study offer insights

into genomic variation in

tigers and the processes that have sculpted it.

Based on the results, the scientists believe there have been relatively recent divergences between subspecies, and intense population bottlenecks that may have contributed to inbred individuals.

According to the NCBS scientist, maintaining structural connectivity, enabling tigers to move between protected areas, for example having densely populated human settlements would not work. Further, there also needs to be functional con-

nectivity, that tigers do actually move," Ramakrishnan added.

In the study, the scientists sequenced whole genomes from 65 individual tigers from four subspecies of the feline, and conducted a variety of population genomic analyses that quantify genetic variability.

They investigated the partitioning of genetic variation, possible impacts of inbreeding, and demographic history, and possible signatures of local adaptation.

While the total genomic variation in Indian tigers was higher than in other subspecies,

the study found that several individual tigers in the country had low variation, suggesting possible inbreeding.

The artificial lake continues

to be a hot topic of debate

among scientists and adminis

trators and an object of fear

among locals. A team of ITBP, SDRF and other agencies are presently camping at the lake site.

The administration is on alert after the Indian Meteorological Department forecast for light rainfall on 24, 25 and 26 February and moderate rainfall at Tapovan area on 27 February.

Meanwhile, the Uttarakhand government has issued a notification authorising officials to declare "presumed dead" 136 people still missing after the flash flood in Chamoli district over two weeks ago. Sixty-eight bodies have so far been recovered after the February 7 disaster possibly triggered by an avalanche.

U'khand: 136 missing 'presumed dead'

SNS & PTI

DEHRADUN, 23 FEBRUARY

The Indo-Tibetan Border Police, SDRF and other sister organisations on Tuesday launched an operation at the artificial lake, which was formed after the recent flash flood-triggered landslide flow of the Rishiganga river, in Chamoli. To increase the volume of water at the Rishiganga near Murunda, the team removed tree trunks that were blocking the flow.

The artificial lake continues to be a hot topic of debate among scientists and administrators and an object of fear

among locals. A team of ITBP, SDRF and other agencies are presently camping at the lake site.

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People do not like them. Hills are very sensitive areas... One should not take any step that disrupts peace in the Hills...

WEST BENGAL TOURISM MINISTER GAUTAM DEB
TAKING A DIG AT THE BJP

1 held for several ATM thefts

PTI

NEW DELHI, 23 FEBRUARY

A 34-year-old man who was wanted in several cases of ATM thefts in Delhi has been arrested, police said on Tuesday.

Shamshad was sentenced to life imprisonment in the Daula Kuan rape case of 2010 and was absconding after jumping parole, police said.

Acting on a tip-off, a trap was laid near the Gokulpuri metro station in Wazirabad in north Delhi on Monday and Shamshad was cornered. He

whipped out his pistol and opened fire, but was later overpowered, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Pramod Singh Kushwah said.

Shamshad is a member of a gang of robbers who allegedly looted cash worth Rs 1.35 lakh from 12 ATMs over two months, the DCP said.

The suspects used to spray black paint on CCTV cameras after entering the booths, open the ATMs with the help of gas cutters and remove the cash cabins, the officer said, adding that remaining five associates of Shamshad had

been identified.

Shamshad was involved in around 16 criminal cases, including attempt to murder, abduction, rape, Arms Act and Cattle Smuggling Act, in Delhi and Haryana.

Shamshad and his four other associates had raped a woman in Delhi in November 2010. All five accused were arrested and convicted for life imprisonment, police added.

He was released from jail on parole last April as a part of an exercise to decongest jails due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Shamshad had

Classified

LEGAL NOTICES

IN THE COURT OF SH. SUDHIR PARMAR Additional District and Sessions Judge, Gurugram
Kallaperumal M.P.
Versus
General Public
CIS - PROB/08/2021
Peshi - 22-03-2021
NOTICE THROUGH PUBLICATION

To,
General Public.

In above titled case, the defendant(s)/respondent(s) could not be served. It is ordered that defendant(s)/respondent(s) should appear in person or through counsel on 22-03-2021 at 10:00 a.m. For details log on to https://highcourtnd.gov.in/itsr=district_notice&district=gurugram.

Additional District and Sessions Judge, Gurugram

Seal of the Court

IN THE COURT OF SH. AMIT GUPTA ACJ/CCJ/ARC (South East) Saket Courts, New Delhi SS-19/2021

In the matter of :
1. Mr. Rahul Sehgal, s/o Late Sh. Prem Sehgal, r/o House No. B364, New Friends Colony, Srinivaspuri S.O., South Delhi, Delhi-110065.

Contact No. +91 9810194861.
2. Mrs. Sangeeta Mahajan, w/o Mr. Rajesh Mahajan, r/o House No. C-4, Friends Colony East, Sector 10, Noida S.O., South Delhi, Delhi-110065.

Contact No. +91 981084651.
Petitioners

Versus

1. The State (Govt. of NCT of Delhi)

2. Bajaj Finance Limited Having its registered address at 3rd Floor, Panchsheel Tech Park, Plot 43/1, 43/2, 44/2, Viman Nagar, Pune, Maharashtra-411014.

Email: vijay@bajajfinserv.com

Whereas, an application U/s 372 of the Indian Succession Act, 1925 has been made by Rahul Sehgal & Ors., successor of Late Prem Sehgal for grant of Succession Certificate in respect of debts/securities of deceased.

And whereas the said applicant shall come for hearing on 06-04-2021 at 10:00 a.m.

Therefore, the public at large is informed that if any person has objection to the grant of Succession Certificate in favour of the said applicant, he may appear and file objections in writing, in person or through duly appointed pleader, on the said date and time.

Given under my hand and Seal on 18-02-2021.

ACJ/CCJ/ARC (South East) Saket Courts, New Delhi

Seal of the Court

IN THE COURT OF SH. UMED SINGH GREWAL Addl. District Judge-02 (West)

Room No. 1, 1st Floor

Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi

PC No. 10/2021

Adesh Arora

Versus

State & Ors.

CITATION UNDER SECTION 283(2) OF SUCCESSION ACT, 1925

Whereas an application

under the Indian Succession Act, 1925, for grant of Probate of the Will or for Letters of Administration, in the estate of Late Sh. Anil Kumar Arora, w/o Late Sh. Madan Lal Arora, r/o 47/A, Ram Nagar, Gurugram died on 26th September 1998 at Gurgaon and Late Sh. Anil Kumar, s/o Late Sh. V.P. Kalra, r/o 1 East Avenue Road, Punjabi Bagh, Delhi died on 19th October 1997 at Delhi has been made by Sh. Adesh Arora, s/o Sh. Madan Lal Arora, r/o 47/A, Ram Nagar, Gurugram died on 26th September 1998 at Gurgaon and Late Sh. Anil Kumar, s/o Late Sh. V.P. Kalra, r/o 1 East Avenue Road, Punjabi Bagh, Delhi died on 19th October 1997 at Delhi has been made by Sh. Adesh Arora, s/o Sh. Madan Lal Arora, r/o 47/A, Ram Nagar, Gurugram died on 26th September 1998 at Gurgaon and Late Sh. Anil Kumar, s/o Late Sh. V.P. Kalra, r/o 1 East Avenue Road, Punjabi Bagh, Delhi died on 19th October 1997 at Delhi has been made by Sh. Adesh Arora, s/o Sh. 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This is a big hike and will give them more motivation to work.

MoS ANIMAL RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT SWAPAN DEBNATH

ON HIKE IN INCENTIVES OF 'FRIEND OF ANIMALS' IN BENGAL

Capt orders curbs in Punjab amid fresh Covid spike

CM puts cap on indoor, outdoor gatherings from 1 March; asks administration, police to get pro-active

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 23 FEBRUARY

A mid growing concern over the rising Covid trend in Punjab, Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh on Tuesday ordered restrictions afresh, putting a cap on indoor gathering up to 100 and on outdoor gathering up to 200 persons from 1 March.

Chairing a high-level virtual meeting to review the situation, the CM also authorised the deputy commissioners (DCs) to impose night curfew in hot spots in their districts if needed, with micro containment strategy to be adopted.

Capt Amarinder directed the police force to ensure strict enforcement of wearing of masks, along with notification of Covid monitors by all restaurants, marriage palaces, with the department of excise and taxation to be the nodal agency for it.

The CM said a decision on reducing occupancy in cine-



ma halls will be taken after 1 March. Private offices and restaurants would be encouraged to display last tests done

for all employees, he said. While directing increased testing, Capt Amarinder ordered mandatory testing of 15 con-

tacts per positive. He took note of the mortality audit findings that many of the deaths were happening within two to 14 days of hospitalisation. Citing cases of some deaths at home, he directed the health department to ensure proper monitoring of home isolation cases, especially those patients with comorbidities.

Earlier, in a brief presentation, health secretary Hussan Lal informed the meeting that the districts of Amritsar, Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Patiala, SAS Nagar and SBS Nagar had shown a spike in positivity rate in recent days, triggering concerns over a possible fresh coronavirus wave in the state.

On the vaccination front, he disclosed that there had so far been 61 cases of minor adverse events following immunisation, while 6 severe and 14 serious cases had been reported. All had since recovered, he added.

Dr KK Talwar, who is heading the Punjab government's expert group on Covid, said a

detailed analysis was being done on the recent spike in positivity rate, which suggested an increase in cases among young people.

At the current rate, the positivity could go up to four per cent in two weeks, translating into 800 cases per day, he said, stressing the need for urgent preventive steps.

Chief secretary Vinni Mahajan ruled out re-closure of government schools and said the department concerned was taking all steps to ensure the safety of students. Education secretary Krishan Kumar said teachers have been designated nodal officers in schools to instruct students on the proper use of masks etc and ensure adherence to Covid-appropriate behaviour.

These steps have come as a significant number of cases had been reported from the recently reopened schools, especially in Ludhiana with a positivity rate of 3.1 per cent and in Bathinda with a positivity rate of 2.9 per cent.

Jai Ram Cabinet clears decks for municipal polls on party symbols

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 23 FEBRUARY

HP Cabinet decides to amend the Himachal Pradesh Municipal Corporation Act, 1994 and Himachal Pradesh Municipal Corporation Elections Rules, 2012

The Himachal Pradesh Cabinet on Tuesday decided to amend the Himachal Pradesh Municipal Corporation Act, 1994 and Himachal Pradesh Municipal Corporation Elections Rules, 2012.

The amendments will pave the way for conducting elections to state Municipal Corporations on party symbols, provide reservation for OBCs (Other Backward Castes), provision of disqualification on grounds of defection and strengthen provisions of no-contingency motion etc.

The cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur here, also gave its nod to the Governor's Address to be delivered during the budget session of HP Assembly.

An official spokesman said the cabinet gave its approval to provide government land on lease basis at the rate of one Rupee per month for a period of 99 years in Maiwa Dhaulukan Tehsil Paonta Sahib district Sirsa measuring 122.08 bighas in favour of Dr YS Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry Nauni at Dhaura Kuan for establish-

ment of Regional Horticulture Research and Training Station for the benefit of the farmers.

He said the cabinet gave consent to construct additional accommodation at Rest House Sundernagar in Mandi district at a cost of Rs. 3.90 crore to provide better boarding and lodging facilities to the employees and general public during official tours.

The cabinet also decided to extend Special Land Acquisition Unit at Nalagarh in Solan district and also engage staff on re-employment/fixed emoluments basis for a period of one year from 1 January, 2021 as the land acquisition work in the stretch of Baddi-Nalagarh road length of 18 kilometers under Project Director NHAI Shimla was being done by Land Acquisition Collector Nalagarh.

The spokesman said the cabinet gave its approval to the Galwan martyr Ankush Thakur. It gave its approval for amendment in Mukhya Mantri Swavlamban Yojna 2019 to reduce the burden of loan on the entrepreneurs and the subsidy would be deposited in the term loan account of the borrower and would be adjusted only after three years.

HP govt withdraws 'Nati' pic from country liquor label after outrage

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 23 FEBRUARY

The Himachal Pradesh government on Tuesday withdrew the picture of Nati (folk dance) on the label of country liquor being sold in the state after certain sections of the society objected to it.

A spokesperson of HP Excise and Taxation department said the issue was brought to the notice of the department on 19 February 2021 through the media that sentiments of certain sections of society have

been hurt by the use of the picture of Nati on country liquor label. "Whenever a brand of liquor is approved by the department, it is done by taking into consideration the sentiments of any religion or caste in the state."

This brand has also been approved by the Department after completion of all legal formalities," he added.

He said in the neighbouring state of Punjab, brands depicting pictures of Bhagwan dhol and having the name of 'Punjabi Heer' were quite

prevalent in the state.

Similarly in Rajasthan, liquor was being sold in the market under the brand names 'Ghumar', 'Dhol Maru' which holds a very significant place in the cultural heritage of these states. "Although the approval to this brand has been given after considering all the legal aspects, keeping in view the sentiments of the people, the approval of the picture of Nati on the label of this particular brand has been withdrawn with immediate effect," he added.

While giving this information on Tuesday, a Haryana Police spokesperson informed

Haryana's 4th regional FSL gets operational

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 23 FEBRUARY

To expedite crime investigations, Haryana's fourth regional Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) has started functioning in Hisar.

Three such laboratories are already functional at Bhondsi in Gurugram, Sunaria in Rohtak and Moga in Panchkula, besides the main facility at Madhuban.

While giving this information on Tuesday, a Haryana Police spokesperson informed

that new regional FSL has started receiving samples/exhibits related to various criminal cases for examination in the Narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances (NDPS), Toxicology and Serology divisions from 12 February. He said that the new laboratory would receive samples from four districts of Hisar, Fatehabad, Sirsa and police district Hansi. The objective of establishing the regional lab is to ensure a more efficient investigation process using scientific methods.

Campaign to issue 'Golden Cards' under Ayushman Bharat Yojana continues in HP

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 23 FEBRUARY

Himachal Pradesh health secretary Amitabh Awasthi said that a special campaign is being carried out in the state under Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana to issue "Golden Cards".

He said that under this campaign, camps have been organized to issue cards and the department is also issuing cards by visiting the houses of eligible candidates.

Awasthi said that under this special campaign started from 19 November, 2020, Golden Cards have been issued to 29,660 families (6750 persons). Golden Cards have been issued to 74.2 percent families whereas in India this figure is 49.6 percent.

The Health department

has targeted to issue Golden Cards to the remaining families by 31 March, 2021.

The Secretary Health said that Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana was launched by the Government of India on 23 September, 2018.

This ambitious scheme is also being implemented in Himachal Pradesh from 23 September, 2018. Under the scheme, there is a provision of free treatment facility upto rupees five lakh on hospitalization.

He said that at present 200 hospitals in the state are registered under this scheme, out of which 64 are private hospitals. Beneficiaries can also avail free medical treatment facility anywhere in the hospitals registered by other states or Union Territories

across India.

He said that for this scheme families have been selected based on the social, economic caste census, 2011 and National Health Insurance scheme (2014-15) and about 1579 representations have been included for free treatment.

Day-care surgeries have also been included in it. Under the scheme the eligible families have been selected by the Government of India and about 4,78,985 families are eligible in the state out of which Golden Cards of 3,56,372 families have been made.

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Members of KPMTC protest in a rally against the government's order for private schools to charge only 70 pc of the tuition fees in Bengaluru on Tuesday.

AGENCY

CPI(M) leader B Raghavan dies at 69: Former MLA, B Raghavan, who was undergoing treatment for Covid-19, died at 4.45 a.m. today, party sources said. Raghavan and his family was admitted to the Paripally Medical College in Kollam. He was later shifted to the government medical college in Thiruvananthapuram after his health condition worsened due to pneumonia.

PTI

Bail plea rejected: A special court rejected the bail application of PDP leader Waheed Parra, saying the charges against him were "grave, serious and heinous in nature".

PTI

K'taka border issue: Ker CM writes to PM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
T'PURAM, 23 FEBRUARY

Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Tuesday requested for urgent intervention of the Centre on the new Covid-19 restrictions imposed by the Karnataka government on the entry of people.

In a letter sent to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he said many people including stu-

Blast at K'taka quarry site: 6 killed

Men went in a vehicle to dispose of explosives when it went off accidentally; Govt orders CID probe

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BENGALURU/CHIKKABALLAPUR,
23 FEBRUARY

Six people were killed when the gelatin sticks that they were trying to dispose of exploded accidentally at a stone quarry site in a village here early on Tuesday, police said.

The government has ordered a CID probe into the blast.

Police said preliminary investigation indicated use of petroleum gel and Ammonium Nitrate in the quarry that was operating clandestinely and was closed a few days ago following raids.

The incident comes close on the heels of a similar blast at a quarry site in Yediyurappa's hometown of Shivamogga on 22 January, which left six dead.

Karnataka health minister K Sudhakar, who represents the Chikkaballapur constituency, visited the spot and said the bodies of the victims were badly mutilated and scattered all over the place.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted his condolences to the families of the victims of the blast.

"Pained by the loss of lives due to a mishap at Chikka-



Karnataka Police investigating the blast site.

ballapur in Karnataka. Condolences to the bereaved families. Praying that the injured recover quickly," he said.

Expressing shock over the incident, chief minister B S Yediyurappa said he has ordered a thorough investigation into the case and directed the officials to take stringent action against the guilty.

A high-level investigation into the incident is underway and stringent action will be taken against the guilty," he added.

".....Whoever is involved in illegal activities, we will take merciless action," he said.

Karnataka home minister B S Bommai ordered a CID inquiry into the blast after visiting the spot.

According to police, the

incident took place at Hirnagavalli near Peresandra. Quarrying was stopped by the police on 7 February following complaints from the locals against rampant use of gelatin sticks. Yet, it continued clandestinely following which another raid was carried out a few days ago and the contractor was warned not to use gelatin anymore. The men working there went in a vehicle to dispose of the explosives early Tuesday when it went off accidentally.

The driver of the vehicle who escaped with severe injuries in the legs and hand told police that the victims took him along carrying a bag with them. They were holding a bag and asked me to drive the vehicle to the forest. I remained seated in the vehicle but the door was

open. They went to a secluded place and suddenly the blast occurred," the driver said.

According to a statement issued by Bommai's office, Sri Shirdi Sai Agencies owned the quarry spread over six acres.

While the mining was taking place in three acres, the rest of the area had the stone crushing facility.

Karnataka mines and Geology minister Murugesh R Nirani said in a series of tweets that the government has been taking stringent measures against illegal mining activities, transportation and storage of explosives used for mining. "It's rather very unfortunate that the blast occurred in Chikkaballapur before the wounds of the Shivamogga blast have healed," Nirani said. The government will leave no stone unturned in ensuring the safety of people in the mining areas, he said, adding a thorough probe will be conducted to ascertain the cause of the explosion and those responsible will be punished. Nirani further said the government will provide all necessary assistance to the kin of the deceased and injured. Praying for the speedy recovery of the injured, he said senior officials were already at the spot for investigation.

Two dead, five missing after blast, fire at factory in Bharuch

PTI

BHARUCH, 23 FEBRUARY

Two workers died, 23 were injured and five were still missing after a massive fire erupted following an explosion at a chemical factory in the Bharuch district of Gujarat on Tuesday morning, police said.

The incident took place at United Phosphorus Limited's plant in Jhagadia GIDC industrial area, said inspector P H Vasava of the local police station. The fire started after a blast around 2 a.m., he said.

The factory made chemicals used in the pharmaceutical industry, sources said.

"Two bodies have been found so far from the debris inside the factory. Search is underway for five workers who are still missing," inspector Vasava said.

As many as 23 other workers were injured in the fire and nine of them were hospitalised, he said.

Kerala fishing row: Govt inks deal with US company despite Centre's warning

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 23 FEBRUARY

Muraleedharan said the Indian consulate in the US had reported that EMCC International was not a trustworthy company as it has only virtual address of a rental building there and cannot be termed as a company.

company, he said.

Responding to Muraleedharan's allegation, state industries minister EP Jayarajan said, "The Centre might have informed Muraleedharan that EMCC International was fake. However, he has not informed this to us."

Meanwhile, Opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala has sought a judicial probe into the deep sea fishing deal signed between US company EMCC Int'l India Pvt Ltd and the Kerala Shipping and Inland Navigation Corporation.

Chennithala said government should first cancel the agreement on land allotted to Pallipuram in Alappuzha and then cancel all contracts pertaining to EMCC International.

Derek takes potshots at Modi

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 23 FEBRUARY

Trinamul Congress Rajya Sabha MP and the party's spokesperson Derek O'Brien on Tuesday lashed out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi and gave point-by-point rebuttal.

After Modi commented that people from Bengal are

stopped from worshipping goddess Durga, O'Brien said in reality Rs 50,000 was provided as assistance to each Puja committee last year.

He said before that Rs 25,000 was provided each year.

According to Derek, during Covid fire brigade services were provided for free to the Puja committees, no tax

According to Derek, during Covid fire brigade services were provided for free to the Puja committees, no tax was collected by corporations and panchayats, 50 per cent concessions were given on electricity for the Puja organisers.

Carnival and the Pujas of Bengal are the biggest celebrations in the universe," he informed.

When Modi said the TMC is not letting Bengal develop, Derek said on an average per person income more than doubled from Rs 51,543 in 2010 to Rs 1,09,491 in 2019. Derek added in the last 10 years, Bengal's GDP has grown from Rs 4.51 lakh crore to Rs 6.9 lakh crore.

He said Bengal's budget tripled in the last decade, growing from Rs 84,804 crore in 2011 to Rs 2.55 lakh crore in 2020-21.

The MP pointed out the Bengal government provides its farmers annual financial aid of Rs 6,000 per acre whereas PM Kisan provides maximum financial assistance of only Rs 1,214 per acre.

Himachal Pradesh Public Works Department Draft Press Note

The Interested Retired Engineers of State or Central Govt. Departments, PSUs, Retired or Serving Faculty Members of Govt. Engineering Colleges/ IITs/ NITs/ Govt. Research Institutes from all over India, serving Engineers of Independent Quality Management Divisions of Executing Agencies of State Govt.'s and Technical Agencies as SQMs who had dealt with roads and bridges during their service career are required to apply on prescribed proforma which can be downloaded from departmental web site www.hppwd.hp.gov.in under Quality Control & Design link to be empanelled as Independent State Quality Monitor (SQM) for the inspection of Quality of works being executed by the HPPWD, under PMGSY. The applicant can apply by post or through e-mail to the undersigned on the e-mail address pwd-hp@nic.in as scanned copy in the format given at Annexure-I. The application along with C.V. should reach this office by date 10-03-2021. The detailed guidelines for empanelment & performance evaluation of SQM (State Quality Monitors) under PMGSY issued by the NRIDA vide letter D.O.#-17012/1/2009-P-II dated October 20th, 2020 are available on website. The selection and empanelment shall be governed by these guidelines.

Note:-

1. The Designated selection committee mentioned under clause 4.1 of the guidelines will have right to accept/ reject the applications without assigning any reasons thereof.
2. All the relevant documents & guidelines for empanelment & performance evaluation of SQM (State Quality Monitors) under PMGSY available on the department web site www.hppwd.hp.gov.in under Quality Control & Design link.
3. The Honorarium and other allowances will be as fixed by NRIDA/State of Himachal Pradesh.

Chief Executive Officer (PMGSY)
HPPWD, Nirman Bhawan Shimla
6005/2020-2021 HIM SUCHNA AVAM JAN SAMPAK

Himachal Pradesh Jal Shakti Vibhag "Notice Inviting Tender"

The Executive Engineer, Jal Shakti Vibhag, Flood Protection Division, Gagat Distt. Una (HP) invites offline tender on behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh from approved eligible contractors for the following works through offline process :-

Sr. No.	Name of work	Estimated Cost	Earnest Money	Cost of form	Time
1	R/R of various existing Flood Protection Works (SH: Preparation of documentary film on Flood Management & Anti-erosion works in Himachal Pradesh).	₹ 2,93,225/-	₹ 5,865/-	₹ 250/-	1 Month

1. The last date of submission of tender on 02.03.2021 up 11:00 AM and will be opened on the same day at 12:00 PM.
2. The last date of sale of tender from divisional office on 01.03.2021 upto 4:00 PM. The Tender forms and other detailed conditions can be downloaded from www.hippjh.org or from office of the Executive Engineer, Jal Shakti Vibhag, Flood Protection Division, Gagat, Distt. Una (HP) upto date specified above.

5993/2020-2021 HIM SUCHNA AVAM JAN SAMPAK

HP PWD TENDER

Sealed item rate tenders are hereby inviting on behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh by the Executive Engineer, Chopal Division HPPWD Chopal for the following works from the approved and eligible contractors enlisted in H.P.P.W.D., so as to reach in the office on or before 16.03.2021 at 11.00 a.m. and will be opened on the same day at 11.00 a.m. in the presence of the intending contractors/firms or their authorized representatives who wish to be present. Application for tender form should be submitted to his office (Chopal Division HPPWD Chopal) against cash payment (Nonrefundable) on any working day during the office hours up to 4:00 pm dated 15.03.2021 and tender documents can be had from his office on same day 5:00 pm. No tender form documents will be issued after 5:00 PM. On scheduled date if the office happens to be closed on the scheduled date the tender form documents will be sold/ opened on the next working day at the same time and venue.

The earnest money in the shape of FDR, NSC purchase from any nationalized Bank or Post Office shall be deposited duly pledged in favors of the Executive Engineer, Chopal Division HPPWD Chopal, must accompany with application form. Conditional tender and the application received without earnest money will summarily be rejected. The offer of the tenders shall be opened for 90 days. The XEN reserves the right to reject/accept the tenders without assigning any reason.

The copy of the latest renewal/enlistment, PAN Number and GST/CST/TIN number must also accompany the application for the tender documents.

SI No	Name of work	Estimated cost.	Earnest money,	Cost of form.	Time
1	C/o road to GP Thana km. 0/0 to 0/500 (SH: C/o wire crated R/wall in between km. R.D. 0/180 to 0/195).	338738/-	7000/-	350/-	One month
2	A/R & M/O link road to village Ranghol km. 0/0 to 3/0 (SH: C/o wire crated R/wall in between km. R.D. 1/750 TO 1/800).	236912/-	5500/-	350/-	One month
3	R/R damages on Shringah to Shalan road km. 0/0 to 17/0 (SH: C/o wire crated R/wall in between km. R.D. 16/030 to 16/052).	297715/-	6000/-	350/-	One month
4	R/R damages on Rohana to Sainj road km. 11/2/167 to 11/8/945 (SH: C/o HPC at km. R.D. 116/315).	135601/-	2800/-	350/-	One month
5	A/R & M/O Batera to Kandal road km. 0/0 to 10/405 (SH: C/o B/wall in between km. R.D. 9/685 to 9/625).	302693/-	6500/-	350/-	One month
6	A/R & M/O Batera to Kandal road km. 0/0 to 10/405 (SH: C/o B/wall in between km. R.D. 9/140 to 9/195).	342500/-	7000/-	350/-	One month
7	C/o Deiya to Mahashoond road km. 0/0 to 1/0 (SH: P/L Grading-L in between km. R.D. 0/0 to 0/500).	292393/-	6000/-	350/-	One month
8	C/o road from Shagal to Bajah km. 0/0 to 2/0 (SH: Cutting in earth work in between km. R.D. 0/600 to 1/225).	490085/-	10000/-	350/-	One month
9	R/R damages on Sainj Chopal Newa Fedju road km. 0/0 to 2/30 (SH: C/o PCC wall in between km. R.D. 53/645 to 51/755 to 51/780).	379033/-	10000/-	350/-	One month
10	R/R damages on Dhadu to Deiya road km. 0/0 to 11/0 (SH: C/o R/wall in between km. R.D. 0/915 to 0/945).	475300/-	10000/-	350/-	One month
11	R/R damages on Newa to Dhadu road km. 0/0 to 6/500 (SH: C/o R/wall in between km. R.D. 1/315 to 1/330).	250000/-	5000/-	350/-	One month
12	C/o link road to village Sanna (Mashrain) km. 0/0 to 2/0 (SH: C/o balance work of HPC at R.D. 0/840, R/wall in between km. R.D. 0/705 to 0/740 and 0/840 to 0/870).	498500/-	10000/-	350/-	One month
13	A/R & M/O Sainj Chopal Newa Fedju road km. 3/0 to 9/0 (SH: C/o HPC at R.D. 48/030).	225000/-	5000/-	350/-	One month
14	C/o Dobans to Sar				



Nitish Kumar is stepney-stooge of the saffron party and has become chief minister at BJP's mercy.

LEADER OF THE OPPosition IN THE BIHAR ASSEMBLY TEJASHWI YADAV

SAYING CRIME HAS DOUBLED IN STATE UNDER NDA RULE THAN WHAT WAS DURING 15-YR REGIME OF RJD

THUMBNAILS



Dubai filmmaker Irfan Izhar during the launch of his book 'Samundar Samne Hai', a compilation of Urdu poems, in the presence of Speaker of the Delhi Legislative Assembly Ram Niwas Goel and others at India Islamic Cultural Centre in New Delhi. SNS

Bengal's Sayan Ghosh killed at Army firing range: Bengal's Gunner Sayan Ghosh of Artillery Regiment of the Army was on Tuesday killed after accidentally receiving a gun shot during live firing training in the Akhnoor Sector of the Jammu district. Ghosh was from Nagdaha village, Barakpore, Army spokesman Lt. Col Deverder Anand said. SNS

Delimitation exercise in J&K: All Parties Sikh Coordination Committee chairman Jagmohan Singh Raina on Tuesday asked the Sikhs to remain away from the delimitation exercise as there was no reservation for the community in Jammu and Kashmir. SNS

Govt approves defence acquisition proposals worth ₹13,700 cr

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 23 FEBRUARY

Procurement from the private sector will not be limited to 15 per cent but will go much beyond that'

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) today approved capital acquisition proposals worth Rs 13,700 crore of various weapons and equipment systems required by the armed forces.

All these acquisition proposals will be indigenously designed, developed and manufactured, the Defence Ministry said after a meeting of the DAC, chaired by defence minister Rajnath Singh.

The acquisitions will include inter-alia platforms and systems designed and developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

To meet the government's 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' goals on a time-bound defence procurement process and

faster decision-making and to systematically work towards reducing the time taken for capital acquisitions, the DAC also approved that all capital acquisition contracts (delegated and non-delegated) will be concluded in two years.

The MoD, in consultation with the services and all stakeholders, will come up with a detailed plan of action for achieving the same.

The defence minister said the government would notify next month another list of defence items which would not be imported.

Rs 10,000 crore has been created for Start-ups and MSMEs. Complete support would be provided to the defence and

At a webinar on effective implementation of Budget provisions in the defence sector, he also announced that a Letter of Intent (LoI) for Light Utility Helicopters (LUH) would be given to the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) so that the choppers could be inducted into the armed forces, coinciding with the 75th anniversary of India's Independence.

"Procurement from the private sector will not be limited to 15 per cent but will go much beyond that," he said. He declared projects worth Rs 500 crore to Rs 2,000 crore would be announced on a competitive basis and would be finalised within one year.

A "Fund of Funds" worth Rs 10,000 crore has been created for Start-ups and MSMEs. Complete support would be provided to the defence and

He said the Budget focused on accelerating economic growth and creating job opportunities to reverse the adverse impact of Covid-19 pandemic with 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' at the core.

Singh termed threat perceptions, aspirations, capacity and capability development initiatives and technological advancements as major factors that drive procurement decisions in defence.

The Centre has maintained that the MSP and mandi sys-

Covid spike: Chh'garh to screen visitors from other states

SNS / PTI
RAIPUR/KOHIMA, 23 FEBRUARY

In view of the rising coronavirus cases in some parts of the country, the Chhattisgarh government has asked authorities to ensure screening of people coming into the state from outside through various modes of transportation, an official said on Tuesday.

A directive has been issued to divisional commissioners and district collectors in view of the recent spike in Covid cases in some parts of the country, including Maharashtra, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh, the public relations department official said.

The authorities have been asked to ensure strict adher-

ence to SOPs related to Covid-19 screening for passengers at Raipur and Jagdalpur airports, particularly for travellers arriving from Delhi and Mumbai, he said.

No Covid case reported in Nagaland for two days

Nagaland did not report any fresh Covid-19 case for the second consecutive day on Tuesday, a health department official said.

The state now has 12 active Covid cases, while 11,937 patients have recovered from the disease, the official said.

AAP makes entry into Gujarat's local politics

AHMEDABAD, 23 FEBRUARY

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the AIMIM have made their entries into Gujarat politics with modest wins registered in the six municipal corporation elections results of which were declared today.

Elections for the municipal corporations in Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat, Bhavnagar, Rajkot and Jamnagar were held on Sunday and the counting of votes were taken up this morning.

Though all results have not yet come in, the ruling BJP appears to be comfortably ahead to retain its control over all the six corporations which the party had been ruling for last two decades. Delhi-based Aam Aadmi Party has made significant inroads in the Patel dominated areas of Surat city, long known as a citadel

SNS/PTI

TENDER



**Govt. of NCT of Delhi
Delhi Subordinate Services Selection Board
FC-18, Institutional Area, Karkardooma,
Delhi-110092**

Reference: No. F.1(200)/IT/DSSSB/2019/115

Extension for earlier Notice dated 29/11/2021 for candidates for post codes 1/20 to 88/20 & 90/20 to 116/20

Sub: Mandatory Updation of details in OARS (Online Application & Registration System) in respect of Advt. No. 01/20, 02/20, 03/20, 04/20 & 05/20 and post codes 01/20 to 88/20 and 90/20 to 116/20.

All the applicants are hereby once again informed that the DSSSB has extended the facility for updation in OARS for post codes 1/20 to 88/20 & 90/20 to 116/20 for two weeks i.e. 22/02/2021 to 07/03/2021. The detailed guidelines have been given in the OARS portal <https://dsssbonline.nic.in> and on the website of DSSSB <https://dsssb.delhi.gov.in>

Therefore, applicants are advised to update it through their registered login ID/Password within two weeks from 22/02/2021 to 07/03/2021 failing which you shall not be allowed to appear for the forthcoming examinations to be conducted by DSSSB.

Dy. Secretary
DSSSB

DIP/SHABDARTH/0662/20-21

SP, BSP attack govt over fuel price hike

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LUCKNOW, 23 FEBRUARY

The Opposition Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh on Tuesday attacked the BJP government at the Centre over the rise in fuel prices, saying it was unfair to trouble people reeling from the impact of Covid-19, unemployment and inflation.

The parties demanded that the government immediately stop burdening the public with the increase in fuel prices. The rationale of the government to raise funds for public welfare through this tax increase is not fair, BSP supremo Mayawati said in a tweet in Hindi.

"It is essential to immediately stop this burden on the public pocket by constantly and arbitrarily increasing the tax on petrol, diesel etc," she said, adding the government



Congress councillors arrive on bicycles at Civic Centre to protest against rising fuel prices, in New Delhi on Tuesday. AGENCY

will do a huge favour on hard-working people and the middle class by checking the prices.

Samajwadi Party supremo Akhilesh Yadav took to Twitter to criticise the BJP government over the rise in fuel price. "Income is decreasing, there is cut in salaries, What will one eat and save?" Yadav said. He tagged a cartoon which showed a scooter with 'vikas' written on it and a petrol nozzle with a man's

face showing his difficulty in coping with the price rise.

This was the 12th straight day of the price hike and the largest daily increase since oil companies started to revise rates on a daily basis in 2017.

The increase pushed petrol price to Rs 90.58 a litre in Delhi and to Rs 97 in Mumbai. Petrol price has surged past the Rs 100-mark in some places in Rajasthan and MP, which levy highest VAT on the fuel.

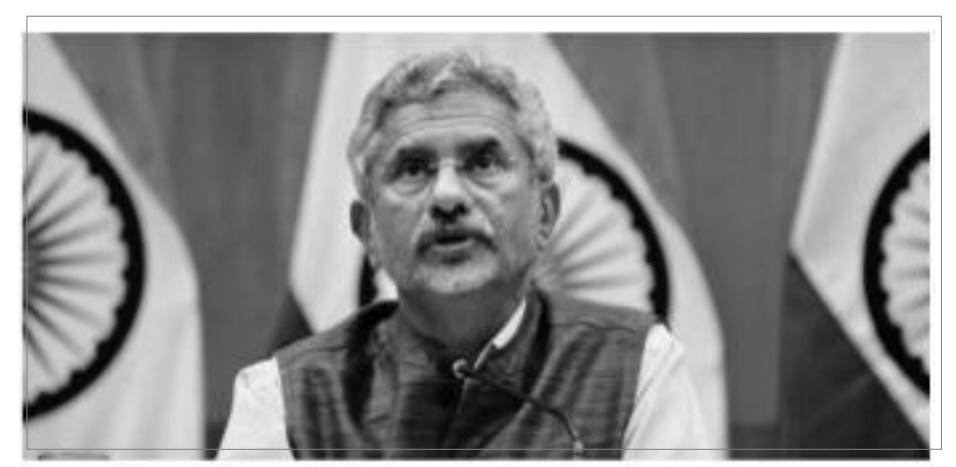
FESTIVAL OF SNOW



Dressed in his traditional attire, a tribal poses with his yak during 'Losar Panchayat Kiyato,' part of the Snow Festival in Lahaul-Spiti district, on Tuesday. AGENCY

Jaishankar calls for reforming multilateral mechanisms to tackle terror menace

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 23 FEBRUARY



External affairs minister S Jaishankar today identified terrorism as one of the gravest threats facing the humankind and called for reforming multilateral institutions and mechanisms so that they could effectively deal with the menace.

"(terrorism) is a crime against humanity and violates the most fundamental human right—namely 'the Right to Life,'" he said in a virtual address.

As a long-standing victim, India has been in the forefront of the global action against terrorism. This is possible only when there is a clear realisation, including in bodies dealing with human rights, that terrorism can never be justified nor its perpetrators ever equated with its victims," he said addressing the high-level segment of the 46th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).

India, he said, had last month presented at the UN Security Council an 8-point action plan to deal with the scourge of terrorism.

New Delhi would continue to work together with members of the UNSC and other countries to ensure implementation of the action plan.

Jaishankar said the human rights agenda continued to face severe challenges, most of all from terrorism.

The perennial concerns remain equally strong, be it global inequities or armed conflicts.

"The ongoing pandemic has complicated the situation in many geographies. There is a need for us to come together to overcome these challenges," he added.

India, the minister said, has always played an active role in global promotion and protection of basic human rights.

"Our strong commitment to the welfare of entire humanity, inspired by our civilisational ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutum-bikam' or 'the World is one family'" has provided the very foundation on which our constitutional and legal framework of human rights has been built."

He said India believed that the violation of and gaps in implementation of human rights should be addressed in a fair and just manner, with objectivity, non-selectivity, transparency and with due respect to the principles of non-interference in internal affairs and national sovereignty.

Jaishankar said India's abiding commitment to promotion and protection of basic human rights has been manifest in its strategy to deal with Covid-19 pandemic.

"And as we addressed the health front at home, we responded to the world in equal measure. We provided essential medicines and equipment to more than 150 countries to assist them in this fight. In the same spirit, India has pledged to use its vaccine manufacturing capacity to make vaccines accessible and affordable to all. From Bangladesh to Brazil and from Morocco to Fiji, the pharmacy of the world is today supplying millions of vaccine doses to more than 70 countries," he added.

On the other hand, Hyderabad-based AIMIM has made its presence felt in the Muslim-populated areas of old Ahmedabad city. The grand old party Congress has not made any significant recovery in any of the six cities where the municipal elections were held on Sunday.

The next round of local polls for the municipalities, district panchayats and taluka panchayats are to be held on coming Sunday, 28 February. Meanwhile, Delhi chief minister and AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal will hold a road show on 26 February in Gujarat. He will thank the people of Gujarat for believing in AAP's Model of Development, in a grand 'Road Show,' a tweet from the official handle of the AAP said.

Elections for the municipal corporations in Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat, Bhavnagar, Rajkot and Jamnagar were held on Sunday and the counting of votes were taken up this morning. Though all results have not yet come in, the ruling BJP appears to be comfortably ahead to retain its control over all the six corporations which the party had been ruling for last two decades. Delhi-based Aam Aadmi Party has made significant inroads in the Patel dominated areas of Surat city, long known as a citadel

SNS/PTI

J P Nadda to meet intellectuals on 25 Feb

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 23 FEBRUARY

Before ousting the Left Front regime, Mamata Banerjee had begun developing an amiable relation with the intelligentsia which the BJP will now use as a strategy to bring the 'real change' in the state.

BJP national president JP Nadda is slated to interact with eminent figures of art and culture at the Science City auditorium on 25 February. Scientists will also be invited for interacting with Nadda.

BJP party sources called it a political strategy to garner support of the Bengal intelligentsia community. It may be mentioned that the Trinamul supremo chief minister Mamata Banerjee sought the opinion of state public intellectuals before Singur and Nandigram movements and received ample from them and several poets, writers and social workers directly worked with her and lent their moral support.

Union home minister Amit Shah also took that policy before last Lok Sabha polls in 2019, in which BJP won 18 seats, and

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Reviving a deal

The frost has begun to melt. President Joe Biden can be credited with Thursday's remarkable forward movement in his country's dealings with Iran. He has pledged to restore Iran's nuclear deal with the Western powers, one that Donald Trump had abandoned. Acutely aware of the imperatives of geopolitics, Mr Biden has offered to team up with the countries of Europe. This is reckoned to be the first substantial diplomatic effort with Tehran in more than four years and serves to fulfil one of Mr Biden's critical campaign promises. It bears recall that the US administration had backed away from Trump's effort to restore sanctions on Iran, a drastic step that had alienated Washington from its allies in Europe. Mr. Biden said he would lift sanctions imposed by President Trump only if Iran returns to the limits on nuclear production that it observed until 2019. The announcement will open what is likely to be a delicate set of diplomatic offerings. There are contretemps across the trail. The United States has no indication whether Iran will accept the offer; it has cautioned that the prospect of a meeting was a first step in what would be a lengthy, difficult process towards restoring the nuclear deal. It is imperative that Iran return to full compliance with the deal, as the Biden administration has insisted. This must happen before the United States unwinds several economic sanctions that Mr. Trump had imposed, crippling the Iranian economy. Until then, and as a goodwill gesture, the Biden administration withdrew a demand that the Security Council enforce international sanctions against Iran for violating the original 2015 agreement that limited its nuclear programme.

Nearly every other nation had rejected the Trump administration's insistence that the United States could invoke the so-called "snap back sanctions" because it was no longer a part of the accord. Additionally, the Biden administration is lifting travel restrictions on Iranian officials who seek to enter the United States to attend UN meetings. Should the President's paradigm shift materialise, it will signify a major change in US foreign policy. Iran has advanced a guarded response.

The Iranian foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, said on Twitter that Tehran was waiting for American and European officials to "demand an end to Trump's legacy of #Economic Terrorism against Iran." With Joe Biden in the White House, it is fervently to be hoped that terrorism will gradually lose its economic dimension. Equally, the comity of nations will expect Iran, pre-eminently its supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, to soften its agenda on nuclear proliferation. There can be no meaningful diplomatic engagement if matters nuclear overshadow the equation. America's approach has been rational enough. So too must Tehran's.

Pay, pal

Money for nothing and news for free. That, to tweak the lyrics of the Dire Straits' hit, sums up the approach of tech giants that aggregate content from media platforms but pay the content creators all of nothing. Trust the Australians, then, to get aggressive and try and do something about it. Prime Minister Scott Morrison is currently legislating through the Australian parliament the News Platforms and Digital Media Mandatory Bargaining Code Bill which tries to level the playing field by ensuring that social media behemoths such as Facebook, Google, and others are not the sole big beneficiaries of the advertising revenue which the content they aggregate and push through their platforms attracts while the media companies which have spent money, time, and effort on creating original content get short-changed. The latest estimates show that Google and Facebook account for well over 70 per cent of online advertising revenue across most geographies with Amazon beginning to make its move at least in the US market where it now rakes in approximately 10 per cent of this revenue. Big tech has long argued that they are actually helping professional media ~ often referred to as a 'sunset industry' ~ stay relevant by directing readers, or 'content consumers' if one prefers using that despicable term as some unfortunately do, to their websites. Media platforms, while accepting this is true, point out that it's no substitute for a revenue stream. Plutitudinous sages usually comfortably ensconced in tenure-protected academia have observed that media companies need to work out a revenue stream keeping this new reality in mind given that the disruption caused by technology is here to stay and state intervention as a palliative just won't cut it in the long run.

This, then, is the lay of the land as Prime Minister Narendra Modi is being urged by major news media outlets in India to follow the Australian example. The irony seems lost on these vocal and powerful organisations that tech majors are only doing unto them what they did unto others by the so-called disruption they were leaders in engineering in the 1990s when paid subscription, initially in print and later for television and online platforms, was made irrelevant as these media firms pivoted their businesses towards making advertising revenue their only source of income and in the process became beholden to advertisers. What that did to the diversity and authenticity of content is a discussion for elsewhere; suffice it to say it certainly wasn't pretty.

But now that their bottom line is impacted, the pressure on the government to 'do something' is only likely to increase going forward. It is now being argued that between global big tech and advertisement-revenue beholden Indian media firms the latter are the lesser of the two evils. Perhaps. The government, however, would do well to take a cue from

Baby and bathwater

Whereas no one can deny government the right to introduce and to withdraw any provisions in different tax statutes, at the same time the professional and business community deserve a certain degree of assurance with regard to compliance provisions so as not to build up facilities which may be left redundant because of sudden changes in laws



The Union Budget (2021-22) has proposed withdrawal of GST Audit. Now, a self-certification by management will do. One principal reason ascribed to the proposed withdrawal is lower revenue collection as per the audit report (GSTR 9C) compared to the revenue disclosed in the annual return (GSTR 9). Two other reasons have also been flagged. One is that the audit requirement leads to a higher compliance burden, and the other is that certain auditors did not carry out the job in a manner expected of them. While the change appears close to ensuring ease of doing business, the reasons attributed to the elimination of audit are a bit awkward. Let's look at these factors in turn.

Lower revenue reported in audit report: Audit of any kind is an integral ingredient of the maker-checker concept. It is an independent review of transactions, and as such, the findings enable taking an informed view of the way affairs are managed. Hence, audit exercise as a pure play of revenue augmentation is a distortion of the very idea of audit. Needless to say that collections as per GSTR 9 may be more because of auditor's findings accepted by the managements. Naturally observations to the extent not agreed and reported by the auditors are to be of lower amount. Notably, this kind of audit is currently inbuilt into another central regulation, i.e. Income Tax Act. And the essence of the audit objective remains identical under both rules. Also the objective of audits under both is to allow auditors to step into the shoes of assessing officers and facilitate collection of revenue and to reduce the cost of collection on the part of the government.

However, the guiding principle to do away with the audit may lie in the transaction level reporting under GST, which is fully digitized. The introduction of Electronic Invoicing and Electronic Waybills will add to the robustness in the compliance ecosystem.

In other words, sales transactions are neither escaping nor is Input Tax Credit being unduly availed under the reporting framework in vogue.

But if that be the case then why retain provisions of Sec.65 and Sec.66 of GST Act providing for Audit by Tax Authorities and Special Audit respectively. Our argument is that the digitalization is yet to stabilise and

doing away with an audit can be considered once you are super-sure of the system's robustness.

At a different level, let's understand a couple of points. You lock the door not because someone can't break it open, but it makes the job more difficult. Similarly, policing may not eliminate the commission of a crime, but it does have a deterrence effect. Therefore, writing off the functional usefulness of audit even before the GST regime is adequately stabilized is a bit sad.

We are a far cry from getting into self-certification. Also, the Institute of Chartered



The writers are chartered accountants

Accountants of India front-ended the rollout of GST rollout by playing several roles, including capacity building. This included imparting extensive training to its members and staff of revenue agencies. Also, the members incurred costs on resource building to cater to the client's needs considering GST compliance's digital nature. Even the taxpayer community embarked on a fit-for-purpose capacity-building journey by either enhancing the existing IT system or deploying satellite systems integrated into leading ERP. Also, the hiring of manpower happened at both ends; auditors and clients. Whereas no one can deny government the right to introduce and to withdraw any provisions in different tax statutes but at the same time the professional and business community deserve a certain degree of assurance with regard to compliance provisions so as not to build up facilities which may be left redundant because of sudden changes in laws.

The need for policy certainty as an essential factor can not be overstated. Mark it, while the extension of due date for filing audit reports was sought for on multiple occasions, no one asked for skipping the requirement itself. Instead, companies used this opportunity to develop assessment dossiers as part of the go-to-audit/assessment strategy as a matter of best practice. The various tax positions and practices are dispassionately reviewed during an independent audit, and course correction is triggered by audit findings. In this context, the sudden announcement of doing away with audit naturally is a setback to all those who committed to incremental resource build-up.

Adds to the cost of compliance: Higher compliance cost as one of the trigger points to abolish GST Audit sounds a bit far-fetched because, for large organizations, it's not a big ticket. To address that concern instead of complete scrapping, a change in threshold criteria may have been better. Smaller business entities could have been saved from compliance costs by changing the threshold. It should not so happen that the cost of non-compliance outweighs the cost of compliance. An audit provides a fair opportunity for revisit of significant positions. Thus, independent eyeballing helps prevent lapses that otherwise can bring significant hardship if found during departmental scrutiny.

Role of GST Auditors: Lastly in case there was any negligence on the part of a few attesting members of the ICAI, this could have been effectively addressed through the disciplinary mechanism already institutionalized. It's like a few vehicles meet with an accident, but that seldom makes a valid case to make the roads free of vehicular movement.

The declared intent of the treasury is to improve the ease of doing business index. But it runs the risk of sending confusing signals in the absence of a preemptive audit before the departmental scrutiny. With the change, the assessee would get exposed to the revenue authority's scrutiny without the first line of filtering available. In some ways, the proposal is perceived as empowerment of jurisdiction officers, which may even result in a more discretionary attitude during adjudication proceedings leading to rebirth of Inspector Raj.

But it should not end up as a self-goal.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR editor@thestatesman.com

Defections without principles

SIR, This refers to the report, 'Pondy govt falls as CM loses trust vote' (23 February). Puducherry Chief Minister V Narayanasamy resigned on Monday after he failed to prove his majority on the floor of the House. Under the changed circumstances, the non-Congress front, comprising the All India NR Congress (AINRC), the AIADMK and the BJP, gained an edge with 14 members, as the strength of the House was reduced to 26. With the Assembly elections in the Union Territory just a few weeks away, the Lt. Governor, Tamilisai Soundararajan, should recommend placing the UT under President's rule.

Any other course will only serve to highlight the unprincipled nature of the defections. Parliamentary democracy thrives not just

through adhering to the letter of the law but also by building and respecting healthy precedents and conventions. This was given a go-by when the Centre, in June 2017, nominated three BJP functionaries as MLAs. There was nothing illegal about it, but this raised questions of political propriety in the light of the BJP drawing a blank in the 2016 Assembly election. The month-long resignation drama can only be seen as part of the BJP's larger gameplan of realizing its goal of "Congress-mukt Bharat" (Congress-free India). There would have been no objection to the BJP's pursuit had it played the game in a fair manner.

The BJP should be aware that any negative role on its part will not go well with the words of Prime Minister

Modi, who, in his first monthly radio address, Mann Ki Baat, after getting re-elected in May 2019, said: "Beyond laws and rules, democracy is embedded in our sanskar [tradition]; democracy is our culture. Democracy is our heritage." By engineering defections so close to the election, the BJP might have lost more than it gained.

Yours, etc., SS Paul, Nadia, 23 February.

FALL OF A GOVT

SIR, This refers to today's news report, 'Puducherry Cong government falls after CM quits ahead of vote', The Statesman. Faced with the desertion and resignation of the legislators, the Puducherry chief minister V Narayanaswamy resigned even before the floor test. The fall of the government is significant, for it comes

weeks before the union territory will hold election.

Puducherry's development has confirmed, yet again, failure of the Congress to manage its internal affairs. Reports suggest that there had been brewing disenchantment with the CM's style of functioning, and legislators were looking out for political opportunities. Despite being the only southern region where the party is in power, the Congress high command clearly did not pay enough attention to these rumblings and address the internal discord as in the case of Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka, where it lost power to BJP and was about to lose in Rajasthan.

Further, developments confirm the BJP's political aggression and willingness to deploy all means to weaken the Congress and ensure non-Congress governments, even if the BJP cannot, on its own, provide an alternative as is the case in Puducherry. But, most importantly the episode exposes the utter failure of the anti-defection law. It fails in stopping legislators from shifting allegiances and the ouster of governments due to these shifts, while stifling genuine voices from among legislators, beyond party lines, on issues of public importance.

The practical realities of Indian politics ~ the ineptness of the Congress and the BJP's quest for power ~ and the dysfunctionality of existing legal frameworks such as

PLATFORM ENTRY DEARER

SIR, With the onset of the corona pandemic, the cost of railway platform ticket had seen an astronomical jump from Rs 10 to Rs 50 in Aug. 20. This was justified in the name of ensuring social distancing and avoiding congestion at stations. Now that the contagion seems to be on a downhill turn, isn't it high time that the steep escalation be rolled back for the comfort of the common man.

Besides ensuring extensive checking of platform tickets, the railways must keep a continuous tab on the entry of unscrupulous elements, unlicensed hawkers and porters, and hordes of followers of political leaders. There are several stations in the country, where people in general have almost unlimited right of access and thus need to be curbed. There is little sense in levying hefty charges on ordinary citizens, who come to see off or receive their near and dear ones.

Yours, etc., Amit Banerjee, New Delhi, 19 February.

the anti-defection law has led to Puducherry's pre-poll political shift.

Yours, etc., N Sudhasiva Reddy, Bengaluru, 23 February.

GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

SIR, I refer to 'Insecure Governor' The simple answer to this position, it should ideally be an elected office of a person from within the state, not nominated as it is now. The State legislators can be the voters for this position. Like the Office of the President and Vice President, Governors too should be elected. This will be in line with our democratic credentials.

Such actions by constitutional heads will only usher in the twilight of our Democracy and not act as guardrails where our Index is already slipping.

The institution, an archaic relic of our colonial past, should be reconsidered and its relevance reviewed. The pomp, a colonial leftover can be dispensed with and considerable resources saved as well.

Yours, etc., HN Ramakrishna, Bengaluru, 23 February.



KUMAR GAUTAM

The overarching message coming out of the recently presented Union budget was to be healthy and become self-reliant, or Atmanirbhar. While the significance of health can never be denied, in the socio-economic milieu that we live in today, 'education' is deemed more important towards becoming self-reliant. It is unfortunate, however, that the budget failed to appreciate the potency of the health-education combination as an effective weapon to become self-reliant and overcome economic distress. The neglect of the crucial back-and-forward development linkages of education in this year's union budget is reflective of a myopic vision of growth and development, *fraught* with serious long-term implication.

The education sector in India, currently reeling under the Covid-19 induced crises, urgently needed budgetary support to deal effectively with the challenges of learning inequalities due to pervasive socio-economic and digital disparities. Around 32 crore children have lost an entire school year due to the pandemic and one third of children may not return to schools when they reopen as short-term disruption in education risks permanent drop-out.

Schools are preparing to re-open and budgetary support at this juncture would have been the much-needed and timely shot in the arm. On the contrary, the budgetary allocations have been slashed for education sector in general and school education in particular. The education sector received a budget of Rs. 93,224 crore for 2021-22 which is 6.13 per cent lower than budget estimates for 2020-21. Compared to last year, the allocation to education sector has declined by Rs. 6,088 crore and this decrease is largely on account of the 8.3 per cent reduction in school education budget. Yet, the finance minister in her budget speech hailed 'education for all' as an important objective towards achieving the ultimate goal of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'.

Only last year the government unveiled the ambitious National Education Policy (NEP 2020) with much fanfare but the roadmap of its implementation and the required financial support is conspicuously missing in the budget. Where will the money come from for the implementation of various initiatives outlined in the NEP that include National Professional standards for teachers, innovative learning pedagogy, National Digital Educational Architecture (NDEAR), standardisation of Indian sign language and reforms in the CBSE board exams structure?

The insightful analysis of the union budget by Centre for Budget and

Education sector deserved better



Governance Accountability (CBGA), a new Delhi based organisation, highlights some extremely disturbing trends, raising serious concerns over the fate of funding for education in India. It may be noted that out of Rs. 54,874 crore budgeted for school education, Rs. 44,000 crore is coming from education cess and Rs. 4,800 crore from the National Investment Fund. This implies that over time, the gross budgetary support for education is declining and the fate of allocation for the sector depends on cess collection and disinvestment proceeds.

A closer look at the union budget at the disaggregated reveals that allocations have reduced for even some flagship schemes of the government that have direct and huge bearing on the literacy levels and nutritional status of our children. Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SMSA), the key centrally sponsored scheme for school educa-

tion, has seen a decline of Rs. 7,701 crore and the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) scheme, the largest of its kind in the world, has been allocated Rs. 1400 crore less than the revised estimate of the previous year. It is difficult to justify these cuts when schools are reopening after a tumultuous year. It was imperative on the part of the government to invest in components like basic infrastructure, including WASH facilities in schools and teacher training for children's mental or emotional well-being post the pandemic.

The entire edifice of teaching-learning in the country during the pandemic became dependent on technology highlighting the need for integration of technology in the education system. Yet allocations for schemes such as 'Operation Digital Board' decreased substantially from Rs. 25 crore in 2020-21 (BE), to Rs. 1 crore in 2021-22 (BE). However, the

Digital India e-learning umbrella programme under the Department of Higher Education has been allocated an additional Rs. 200 crore.

The significant role of education in development of human capital and growth of an economy is well established. Recognizing the high returns on investment in education, a progressive family even with meagre resources, spends a considerable percentage of family income on education. In support of this growing aspiration for education, the government too should have viewed it as an investment and increased the budgetary allocation on education.

According to the World Bank's Human Capital Index which provides a measure of a country's productivity per worker against its potential; a child born in India with better health and education, can become twice as productive leading to doubling of

India's GDP per worker in future. The upshot is that the most opportune time for adequate investment in education is now.

Various high-level committees in the past and even the latest NEP 2020 had recommended that the combined public spending on education sector by the Union and the States should be equal to 6 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It is disturbing, however, to note that the share of education in the total union budget is continuously decreasing. This budget allocated only 0.42 per cent of GDP. Amidst high expectations, such step motherly treatment to education in terms of budgetary allocations has left the education sector high and dry making us all wonder in dismay if education is a priority at all?

The writer teaches Economics at The Lawrence School, Sanawar. The views expressed are personal.

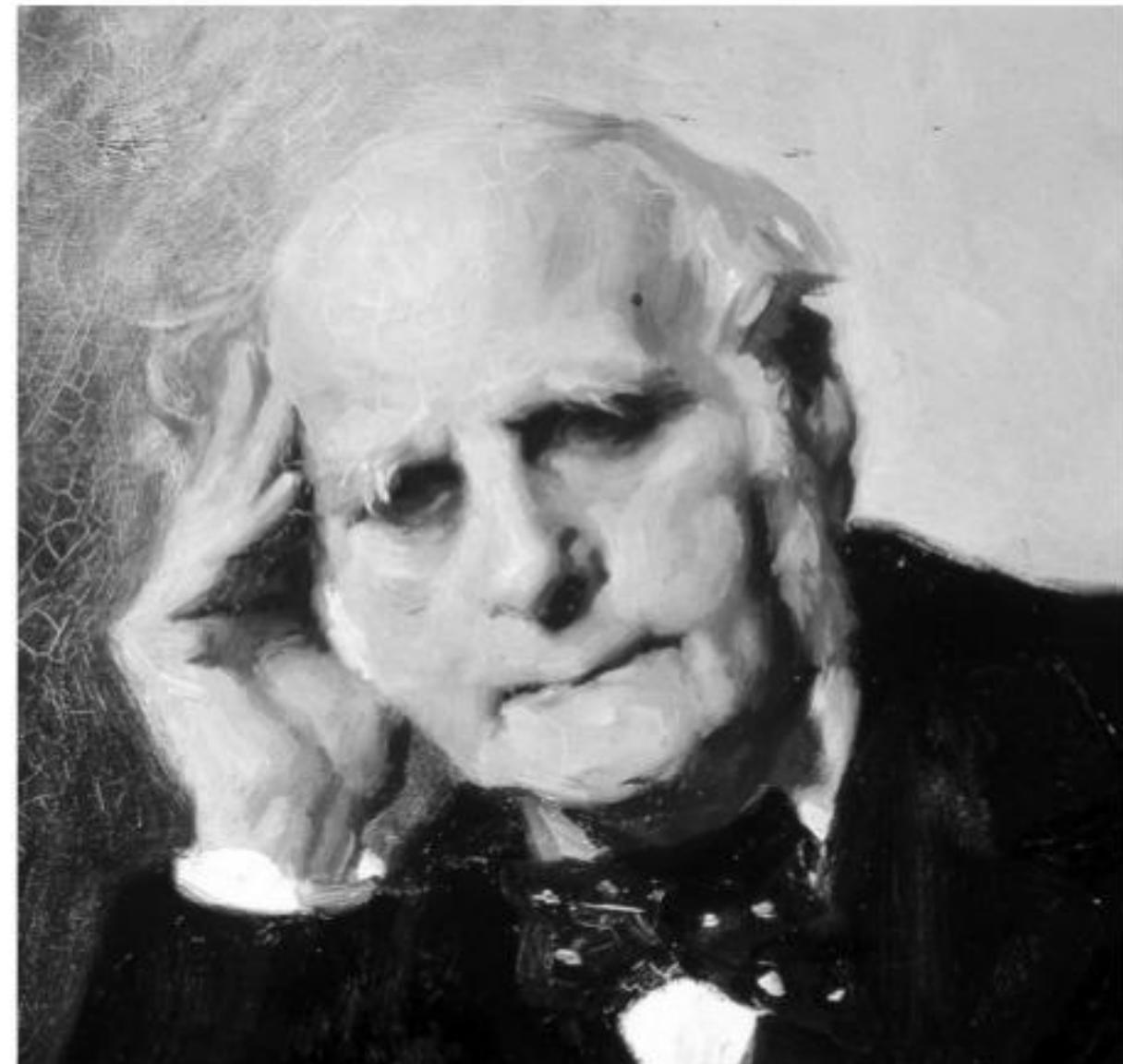
Wisdom of the crowds

SAMBIRDH GHIMIRE

The first time I heard the phrase was in relation to the concept discovered by Francis Galton in 1906. Galton, who was a cousin of the celebrated naturalist Charles Darwin, was observing a contest in an animal fair where the visitors were supposed to guess the exact weight of an ox. The results bewildered Galton as no single individual, including veterinary doctors, naturalists or cattle experts, could guess the ox's exact weight, but the average of all the estimations was merely a pound over the animal's actual weight.

This was an analogy to a democracy where people from different backgrounds, skills and abilities get a vote, and all these votes together elect a leader who forms the government. He wrote that 'the average competitor was probably as well fitted for making a just estimate of the weight of the ox, as an average voter is of judging the merits of most political issues on which he votes'. After which he did realise the credibility of a democratic judgement system and admitted it to be trustworthy.

One of the greatest philosophers of all time, Aristotle, has said that 'it is possible that the many, though not individually good men, yet when they come together may be better, not individually but collectively, than those who are so, just as public diners



to which many contribute are better than those supplied at one man's cost.'

With Nepal in political turmoil, which is a perennial problem of the country's politics, one often wonders what the solution to this problem

might be. The country is at a baffling juncture, where the alliance that was voted to lead the government, that is, the left alliance, has split. The split has created opportunities for the opposition, that is, the Nepali Congress. But

one should always remember the context in which the elections took place with the left alliance promising development and stability against the highly volatile and unstable governments of the past, this coupled with a few hyper-national sentiments were able to garner a comfortable win for the left alliance.

To reiterate, the left alliance was voted to be in power and the Nepali Congress was (not) voted to be in the opposition. Now that the alliance has been fractured, that does not allow the Nepali Congress to form a government with one of the factions, as that was not something the people had envisioned. A very similar comparison can be drawn with the Indian state of Bihar, where the 2015 election was fought between the Mahagathbandhan alliance comprising of Janta Dal (United) led by Nitish Kumar, Rashtriya Janata Dal led by Lalu Yadav and the Indian National Congress led by Sonia Gandhi and the National Democratic Alliance comprising of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Lok Janshakti Party led by the late Ram Vilas Paswan.

The Mahagathbandhan alliance was able to get a majority, but the government lasted merely for 18 months after which Nitish Kumar sought the support of the Bharatiya Janata Party and continued his stint as the chief minister. A similar question was raised during that time that whether a leader who fought under a specific alliance could change the alliance without seeking a fresh mandate from the peo-

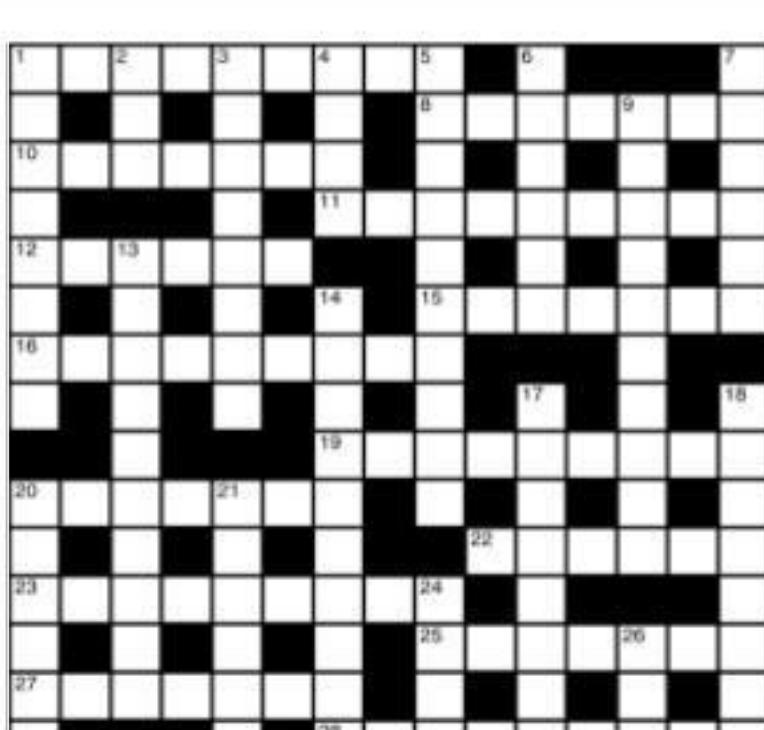
ple. As ideologically and morally this seems blatantly wrong and against the very spirit of democracy, there was however no legal obstacle in doing so. But the implications of dissatisfaction were manifested in the Bihar Assembly elections of 2020 in which Janata Dal (United) out of the 115 seats contested only 43 compared to 101 and 71 in 2015. The election also institutionalised the new title of 'turncoat uncle' for Nitish Kumar.

Likewise, the Nepali left joining in an alliance with the Nepali Congress is like trying to cure a fracture by joining an ankle to a knee or a hip to a wrist. In other words, it is a complete mismatch and antithetical to democracy as this was not the mandate given by the people in the general elections.

The solution to this problem lies in the title of the article. As the political strategist of India Prashant Kishor says, one must always believe in the wisdom of the crowd. At this rendezvous with uncertainty, the only thing that is certain is the will of the people, and the only definite way of gauging it is through an election. All other solutions to this problem might look easier in the short run, but they will have wide repercussions for the parties and institutions in the long run, which will again take Nepal into a vicious cycle of fractured mandates, coalition governments and instability; and history will repeat itself from what happened in the 1990s.

The Kathmandu Post/ANN.

CROSSWORD



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

ACROSS

- Belonging to group of atoms not involving carbon, primarily – which includes gold (9)
- How to raise the temperature of that girl Erica? (7)
- Dog collars left for newcomer (7)
- American engineering technician shakes around Air Force staff (9)
- Hobbyist banishes depression, becoming reader in church (6)
- Piece of shiny material to stretch across broken leg (7)
- Characteristic counter-culture followed by European country, but not Norway (9)
- Careful mother not starting to drink red wine (9)
- Papa gets nappy the wrong way round, with discharge already settled (7)
- Still show resistance for second time (2,4)
- Perhaps snail trail is back, inspiring a tantrum (9)
- Fish tanks, for example, moved away from highly corrosive liquid (7)
- See unit refurbished as part of a set (2,5)
- Socialite teed off about Asian country deporting Henry (9)
- To shield at home, you texted boring schedule (8)
- Frequently remove roof from top of house (3)
- Ran opinion piece supporting hostility (8)
- Obsessive type blocks inner demons (4)
- Humble lady follows men taking drug, being a skinflint (10)

- Snare leader of party to leave same statement repeatedly (6)
- Cost to protect new member of royal family (6)
- Goes home in pants to make uniform (10)
- More than one singer seeks to cover quirky tune (10)
- Reproduced entertaining Russian car, power unsuited to modern needs (10)
- Teach that curt, snide characters are shown up (8)
- Foolishly, we have case of tequila in unusually warm weather (4,4)
- Fake member of parliament initially says Latin must be included (3,3)
- A legal right to get expert (6)
- Smear name around America (4)
- Organise dried fruit to be peeled (3)

NO 28835

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

OCASIONAL NOTE

The Bihar Planters' Association and the Bihar branch of the European Association have not wasted any time in responding to the spirited appeal contained in the last part of the circular issued by the Bihar Government to district officers, and reproduced in The Statesman the other day. "His Excellency in Council fully realises," the circular declared, "that all that Government officers can do by way of propaganda is not adequate to the needs of the situation. The active support of all responsible persons who are loyal to the existing system of government, and especially the landed classes, must be enlisted in a resolute campaign to combat the misrepresentations which have characterised the non-cooperation movement from the start. His Excellency proposes to initiate active measures to combat it at a very early date." The two bodies mentioned now announce that they will wholeheartedly support the Government in "any active and effective measures which they may take to suppress the non-cooperation movement at present being carried out in North Bihar." Lord Sinha occupies a specially strong position in taking the stand which he has done, and, with the whole-hearted support of all loyal groups and individuals, he ought to experience little difficulty in restoring order and a proper sense of proportion throughout the province.

NEWS ITEMS

COLLAPSE OF STUDENTS' STRIKE

The majority of the educational institutions in Calcutta have re-opened, and judging by the attendance, the strike of students which commenced about a month ago, appears to have collapsed. The "National" College which was opened by Mr. Gandhi at the Forbes Mansions (Wellington Square), with about five hundred students on the roll, is now attended by barely fifty students. Seventy-five per cent of the students have returned to the Scottish Churches College and more are expected. As regards the Government institutions, viz. the Presidency College, the Hindu, and Hare Schools, the Medical College and the Sanskrit College, etc., they were never much affected and the attendance is normal. Forty per cent have returned to City College. Thirty per cent is registered at Ripon College and the attendance is improving.

N.W. RAILWAY AND COAL SHORTAGE

In the course of a Press note the Agent of the N.W. Railway states that the difficulty about the shortage of coal still continues on the North-Western Railway. Since November the despatches of coal from the Bengal collieries has been considerably less than the consumption and it is understood that the short despatches have been due to the small output and not to the want of wagons. For over two months therefore the Railway has been steadily using up its reserve of coal and the stock is now dangerously low. The position is examined daily and receives constant attention and the Agent assures the public that any restriction which can be removed will be withdrawn at the earliest possible moment.

RECENT POLICE STRIKE AT GAYA

In view of incorrect statements having appeared in the Press, the Publicity Bureau gives particulars regarding the recent police strike at Gaya. The facts are that on February 3, the Inspector-General of Police received petitions from about three hundred constables and a few of the head constables of Gaya addressed to His Excellency the Governor, complaining that their pay was insufficient and stating that unless the Government raised their pay before March 5, they would be reluctantly compelled to resign. The new scale of pay for the Police had already been sanctioned by the Government before the receipt of these petitions, but they had not at that time been officially announced in the Gazette.

NAVAL ALLIANCE REJECTED

The suggestion for an Anglo-American Naval Alliance has been rejected with so much emphasis by Mr. Daniels, Secretary of the United States Navy that rumours of a rupture between America and Japan are again crystallising. Mr. Daniels, speaking yesterday at the House of Representatives Naval Committee, declared that the United States must take the lead in naval construction in these days of chaos. He urged the completion without delay of the sixteen great battleships now building, and also necessary smaller ships. He further urged that the Committee should carefully consider the Navy Board's general recommendations for the construction of eighty-eight new ships. I wish we could have a world agreement that would settle disputes without recourse to arms, but until that comes, and comes surely, we ought to carry out our naval building programme.





Hoping for a global regulation on safety and privacy of data that would make sure that tech products and services are safe to use

SATYA NADELLA
MICROSOFT CEO

THUMBNAILS

NTPC acquisition: State-owned NTPC on Tuesday said it has signed a share purchase agreement to buy GAIL's 25.51 per cent stake in Ratnagiri Gas and Power Pvt Ltd (RGPLL), which is commonly known as Dabhol project. After the transaction is complete, NTPC would have 86.49 per cent stake in RGPLL. Earlier in January, the company had announced acquiring 35.47 per cent stake in RGPLL from its lenders. Initially, NTPC and GAIL had 25.51 per cent stake each in the Dabhol project. PTI

ICSI-IIM pact: The Institute of Company Secretaries of India has signed a MoU with Indian Institute of Management Calcutta, said a Press release from ICSI. The objective of the MoU is to facilitate a comprehensive partnership for imparting knowledge and skills in the areas of joint academic research, joint workshops, professional development programme for company secretaries, sharing resources and international conferences besides awarding the topers of programmes of IIM Calcutta with ICSI Signature Award Gold Medal and a scholarship to pursue the company secretary course, the release added.

SNS

Amazon Smbhav: Amazon India on Tuesday announced that it will host the second edition of "Amazon Smbhav" from 15 to 18 April 2021. Amazon Smbhav will be a four-day virtual summit hosted around the theme of "Unlocking Infinite Possibilities for India" across sectors like manufacturing, retail, logistics, IT/IteS, content creators, start-ups, brands and entrepreneurs across India, according to a Press release.

SNS

Sany India launches piling rig: Sany India, a global leader in the CE industry, launched its first 'Made in India' Piling Rig 'SR235' for the Indian market recently. The new 'SR235' manufactured at Sany's state-of-the-art manufacturing plant in Pune, Maharashtra, will give a boost to the government's 'Make in India' programme. Sany Heavy Industry India Pvt. Ltd vice president & business head, heavy equipment, Sanjay Saxena said, "With the launch of piling rig, Sany India has reaffirmed its commitment to the 'vocal for local' initiative."

SNS

IBIS commitment: IBIS, a smart economy brand from the Accor stable with 19 hotels across 13 cities in India, has joined hands with Accor India for a sustainable initiative for the environment. With Planet 21, Accor's sustainable development programme, IBIS hotels have committed themselves to work towards better environment, betterment of the society, helping those in need, healthy lifestyle and much more, said a Press release.

SNS

GDP likely to turn positive at 1.3% in Dec quarter: Report

Economy witnessed contraction in first and second quarters ended June and Sept 2020, respectively

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 23 FEBRUARY

India's GDP may turn positive at 1.3 per cent in the third quarter of financial year 2020-21, having witnessed contraction in the previous two quarters due to the coronavirus pandemic, as the number of cases is falling and public spending has started rising, according to a report.

The government will release the GDP numbers for the October-December quarter of the current fiscal on Friday.

Projecting that the gross domestic product (GDP) may have returned to the black in the last quarter of the calendar year 2020, DBS Bank in the report said the full-year growth in real terms may be at a negative 6.8 per cent.

"Real GDP growth in 3QFY (4Q20) is seen at 1.3 per cent versus (-)7.5 per cent in the quarter before," DBS Research said.



ters ended June and September 2020, respectively.

The unlocking saw domestic demand benefit from festive tailwinds, pent-up consumption and pick-up in capacity utilisation alongside resumption in sectoral activities, DBS Research said.

India posted de-growth of 24 per cent and 7.5 per cent in GDP in first and second quar-

ters beginning 1 April, a shade higher than the RBI's projection of 10.5 per cent. However, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects India to grow at 11.5 per cent in 2021.

After a slow start to the year, public spending accelerated in the second half of 2020-21; disbursements picked up sharply to 29 per cent in the

December 2020 quarter over (-)12 per cent in the September 2020 quarter.

It expects contribution from net exports to weaken as import growth declined to a small extent because of production restart as well as accelerated public investment push.

"Real GDP growth in 3QFY (4Q20) is seen at 1.3 per cent versus (-)7.5 per cent in the quarter before," DBS Research said.

Farm output will continue to add to growth, aided by farmer manufacturing output and among services, financial and public administration are likely to fare better than contact intensive activities like travel, airlines and tourism, it added.

"We peg 3QFY GVA (gross value added) estimate at 1.6 per cent. Full-year real GDP growth in FY21 is expected to register (-)6.8 per cent, before cyclical tailwinds and base effects lift full-year FY22 to 10.5 per cent, assuming a well-contained caseload and on-track vaccination programme," it said.

Acknowledging the recent

rise in virus cases in states such as Maharashtra and the precautionary measures deployed, DBS said vaccination is ongoing to meet the intended frontline needs before widening the outreach to people above 50 and with comorbidities.

On the inflation front, it said the previously elevated food inflation is tapering off in early 2021, causing the headline inflation to retreat from 6.9 per cent in November to 4.1 per cent in January this year.

Retail inflation averaged 6.6 per cent during 2020 in India, above the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) target of 4 per cent and upper threshold of the target at 6 per cent.

"We also observe that supply-side disruptions that had caused a wide gulf between retail food and wholesale food during the height of the lockdown have since narrowed.

"Heading into FY22, while food inflation eases, core inflation is expected to prove sticky due to higher non-food forces via higher industrial commodity prices, bounce in global oil, domestic fuel tax rigidities..." said the report.

tivities that can make our country Aatmanirbhar in silk. We in the ministry of textiles are looking at the next two years to ensure that India is self-reliant in the space of silk," she said.

The minister of textiles in the state of Karnataka, the minister said that the minimum support price operations for cotton procurement by the Cotton Corporation of India has touched over Rs 359 crore in the state.

"From 2014-15 to this year, the ministry of textiles has extended support of over Rs 1,622 crore only for cotton procurement and MSP operations benefiting over 1.67 lakh farmers," she said.

Highlighting the importance of the handicraft sector, the minister said that "Pehchaan Cards" or identity cards were distributed to over 26,000 artisans.

The latest handloom census has brought to light that there are over 50,000 weavers in Karnataka who are looking at new opportunities digitally to expand their markets.

"Under the Silk Samagra Programme, the Government of India dedicated specifically over Rs 2,000 crore for the development of silk. I am hopeful that the industry gives the state of Karnataka ideas, proposals or ini-

Airtel, Qualcomm team up for 5G push

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 23 FEBRUARY

We are delighted to have Qualcomm Technologies as a key technology provider in our journey to roll out world-class 5G in India. With Airtel's integrated service portfolio and Qualcomm Technologies' 5G leadership, we will be well placed to usher India into the next era of hyper-fast and ultra-low latency digital connectivity.

RANDEEP SEKHON
CTO, BHARTI AIRTEL

Telecom operator Bharti Airtel and US chipmaker Qualcomm today announced collaboration for accelerating 5G in India. Airtel recently became India's first telco to demonstrate 5G over a live commercial network in Hyderabad city, underlining the company's technology capabilities.

"Through Airtel's network vendors and device partners, Airtel will utilise the Qualcomm 5G RAN platforms to roll out virtualised and Open RAN-based 5G networks. Airtel, as a board member of the O-RAN Alliance, is committed to driving the success of O-RAN and is working with Qualcomm Technologies to explore and implement the O-RAN approach for India," according to a company statement.

The flexible and scalable architecture of O-RAN will

enable new opportunities for small and medium-sized businesses to become viable players in the deployment of 5G networks, it added. Open RAN or open radio access network architecture is an industry terminology for interoperability and standardisation of radio access network elements, including products and software from various vendors.

Airtel and Qualcomm Technologies will also collaborate to enable a wide array of use cases, including 5G Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) that is geared to deliver broadband connectivity at Gigabit speeds to homes and businesses.

This collaboration also aims to allow a faster roll-out of broadband services in a cost effective and expeditious manner across India for "last mile" connectivity challenges that are becoming increasingly important in today's remote, mobile-first society," the statement pointed out.

Airtel 5G solutions, including FWA services, are expected to deliver multi-gigabit Internet speeds wirelessly to customers and open up a slew of innovations.

For users, the ultra-fast and low latency of 5G will usher in a digital world of "limitless possibilities" such as gigabit size file downloads in seconds and 4K video streaming on-the-go across smartphones and computing devices, immersive technologies such as virtual reality and smart homes.

Randeep Sekhon, CTO, Bharti Airtel said: "We are delighted to have Qualcomm Technologies as a key technology provider in our journey to roll out world-class 5G in India. With Airtel's integrated service portfolio and Qualcomm Technologies' 5G leadership, we will be well placed to usher India into the next era of hyper-fast and ultra-low latency digital connectivity."

Amazon ties up with Mahindra Electric for delivery of EVs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 23 FEBRUARY

Indore and Lucknow.

These have been deployed with Amazon India's network of delivery service partners, it added.

In 2020, Amazon India had announced that its fleet of delivery vehicles will include 10,000 electric vehicles (EVs) by 2025 in India.

These EVs are in addition to the global commitment of 1,00,000 electric vehicles in the delivery fleet by 2030 announced in the Climate Pledge signed by Amazon.

"This partnership with Mahindra Electric is an important step towards India's progress in the e-mobility industry to achieve its environmental sustainability goals," Amazon India said.

Commenting on the

partnership, Amazon APAC, MENA & LATAM, vice-president, customer fulfilment operations, Akhil Saxena, said, the company is committed to building a supply chain that will minimise the environmental impact of our operations.

"The expansion of our electric vehicle fleet to 10,000 vehicles by 2025 is an integral milestone in our journey to become a sustainability leader in the industry," he said.

Saxena further said: "We continue to work with several OEMs to build a fleet of "Made in India" electric vehicles that ensure sustainable and safe deliveries of customer orders, and this partnership with Mahindra Electric is a testament of our commitment."

Loan pact to improve power infra in Assam

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 23 FEBRUARY

newer networks to achieve affordable, secure, efficient and reliable 24x7 power. This would, in turn, bring Assam closer to ensuring long-term sustainability of its electricity supply," reads the Press release from the finance ministry.

The loan agreement was signed by Baldeo Purushartha, joint secretary, department of economic affairs, ministry of finance, on behalf of the Government of India, and Rajat Misra, acting director general, investment operations on behalf of the AIIB.

"The project is expected to improve the transmission network and reduce transmission losses. The strong backward and forward linkages associated with the project will create socio-economic opportunities for both households and business communities in the state," said Purushartha.

"The programme would strengthen the existing intra-state transmission network of Assam by augmenting it with

Equity indices snap 5-day losing streak

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 23 FEBRUARY

Markets found firmer ground today after five days of heavy losses as investors made a cautious return to select energy, banking and infra counters amid mixed global cues.

Aspurt in Covid-19 cases and lack of fresh buying triggers continued to weigh on sentiment, traders said.

After gyrating 667.46 points during the day, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended just 7.09 points or 0.01 per cent higher at 49,751.41 points.

On similar lines, the broader NSE Nifty settled 32.10 points or 0.22 per cent up at 14,707.80 points.

ONGC topped the Sensex gainers' chart, climbing 5.55 per cent, followed by IndusInd Bank, L&T, UltraTech Cement, SBI, NTPC and Titan.

Index heavyweight Reliance Industries rose 0.84 per cent after the company

announced the contours of carving out its oil-to-chemicals (O2C) business into an independent unit with a \$25 billion loan from the parent, as it looks to unlock value by selling stakes to global investors like Saudi Aramco.

On the other hand, Kotak Bank, Maruti, Bajaj Auto, HDFC Bank, HCL Tech and HDFC were among the laggards, sliding as much as 3.87 per cent.

"Domestic market got back on its feet during the morning trade supported by strong Asian market while negative waves from European peers outweighed the gains by the end of the day.

The expectation of strong global recovery as prompted by rising international commodity prices helped the market, but was tempered due to elevated bond yield and virus cases.

"Consequently, volatility has increased in the domes-

tic front, but broad markets continue to be attracted with themes like mid and small caps, cyclicals, energy, PSUs,



KBK Infographics

India, Mauritius ink free trade agreement

NEW DELHI, 23 FEBRUARY

India and Mauritius have signed a free trade agreement, under which over 300 domestic goods from agriculture, textiles, electronics and other sectors will get market access at concessional customs duties in the African nation, an official statement said today.

According to a commerce ministry statement, commerce secretary Anup Wadhawan and Ambassador Haymandoyal Dillum, secretary of foreign affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, Government of Mauritius, signed the India-Mauritius Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) in Port Louis on Monday.

It was signed in the presence of Prime Minister of Mauritius Pravind Jugnauth, and India's external affairs minister Jaishankar, it added.

CECPA is the first trade agreement signed by India with a country in Africa, the ministry said.

"The agreement will come into force at an early date," it added.

The Union Cabinet on 17 February had approved signing of this pact. Mauritius will benefit from preferential market access into India for its 615 products, including frozen fish, speciality sugar, biscuits, fresh fruits, juices, mineral water, beer, alcoholic drinks, soaps, bags, medical and surgical equipment, and apparel.

In a free trade agreement, two trading partners cut or eliminate customs duties on a host of products besides liberalising norms to promote services trade.

The bilateral trade between the countries



We view the Quad as having essential momentum and important potential.
So we'll build on it by deepening cooperation on areas of traditional focus.

US STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESPERSON NED PRICE

WEATHER

CITY	MAX(°C)	MIN(°C)
SINGAPORE	29	26 R
HONG KONG	33	29 H
TOKYO	31	24 R
LONDON	14	09 S
DUBAI	42	30 S
SAN FRANCISCO	11	08 H
NEW YORK	04	01 R
MOSCOW	-18	-12 H

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

THUMBNAILS



The moon is partially seen in the sky as lava flows from the Mt Etna volcano, near Catania in Sicily on Tuesday. AP

German robbery: A German man suspected in three heists against money transporters, including one at Cologne-Bonn airport, was arrested in the Netherlands on Tuesday, German investigators said. The 60-year-old is alleged to have participated in the robberies in Cologne in 2018 and at the airport and in Frankfurt in 2019. AP

NZ whales: Volunteers in New Zealand were optimistic they could save the 28 whales that remain from a mass-stranding after refloating them on Tuesday for the second time in two days. A pod of 49 long-finned pilot whales was first found stranded on Monday on Farewell Spit, a remote beach on the South Island. AP

Egypt boat capsizes: A boat capsized in a lake near Egypt's Mediterranean city of Alexandria, leaving at least five people dead, an official said. Alexandria's governor, Mohamed el-Sharif, on Monday said three others were rescued and taken to a hospital. Rescue workers were still searching for others missing in Lake Mariut, he said in video comments at the scene. AP

US ex-House speaker quits: Michael Madigan (78), the Chicago Democrat who for decades led the Illinois House of Representatives before recently resigning the Legislature amid an ongoing federal probe that implicated him in a long-running bribery scheme, quit as state party chairman. He did not give a reason for resigning. AP

Queen's relative handed 10-month jail term for sexual assault in UK

LONDON, 23 FEBRUARY

A relative of Queen Elizabeth II was on Tuesday sentenced to a 10-month prison term for sexually assaulting a woman at his ancestral home in Angus, Scotland.

Earl of Strathmore Simon Bowes-Lyon, who is the son of a cousin of the 94-year-old British monarch, was found to have forced his way into the sleeping woman's room during an event he was hosting at Glamis Castle. The 34-year-old was sentenced at Dundee Sheriff Court after he had pleaded guilty. According to the BBC, Sheriff Alastair Carmichael told Bowes-Lyon in court that he had repeatedly ignored his victim's pleas during the attack.

"Even now one year on she still, occasionally, has nightmares and feels panicky because of being sexually assaulted by you. This has also had an impact on her emotional wellbeing," said Sheriff Carmichael.

Last month, Bowes-Lyon apologised for his actions after entering his guilty plea. AP

Biden calls 500,000 death toll a 'heartbreaking milestone'

President participated in a moment of silence in WH; Another report says more than 28.1 mn is infected



President Joe Biden, first lady Jill Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris, and Doug Emhoff participate in a moment of silence during a ceremony to honor the 500,000 Americans that died from Covid, at the White House. AP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON, 23 FEBRUARY

The United States on Monday crossed a grim "heartbreaking milestone" in its fight against Covid as the death toll due to the disease crossed 500,000, a staggering figure that is more than the combined American casualties during the World War I, World War II and the Vietnam War.

"As a nation, we can't accept such a cruel fate. We've been fighting this pandemic for so long. We have to resist becoming numb to the sorrow. We have to resist viewing each life as a statistic or a blurb or on the news," President Joe Biden said on Monday as he led the nation in mourning the dead.

"Today we mark a truly grim, heartbreaking milestone - 500,071 dead," Biden said at a candle-lighting ceremony at the White House to mark the grim milestone. More than 28.1 million Americans have also been infected - another global record.

He also participated in a moment of silence, standing

by 500 lighted candles outside the White House, joined by first lady Jill Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and second gentleman Doug Emhoff.

Biden, a Democrat, said efforts should be made to end the politics and misinformation that has divided families, communities in the country.

Noting that the pandemic has cost too many lives already, he said it is not the Democrats and the Republicans who are dying from the virus - it's the fellow Americans.

Biden's approach to the pandemic is different to his predecessor Donald Trump, a Republican, who cast doubt on the impact of the deadly virus and was viewed as having politicised the wearing of masks and other measures to prevent the spread of the virus.

Citing the figure of 500,071 dead in the US, Biden said, "that's more Americans who've died in one year - this pandemic - than in World War I, World War II and the Vietnam War combined."

That's more lives lost to this

J&J says can provide 20million doses

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, 23 FEBRUARY

Drugmaker Johnson & Johnson says it will be able to provide 20 million US doses of its single-shot Covid vaccine by the end of March, assuming it gets the greenlight from federal regulators.

J&J disclosed the figure in written testimony ahead of a Congressional hearing on Tuesday looking at the country's vaccine supply. White House officials cautioned

last week that initial supplies of J&J's vaccine would be limited.

The company reiterated that it will have capacity to provide 100 million vaccine doses to the US by the end of June.

That supply will help government officials reach the goal of having enough injections to vaccinate most adult Americans later this year. On a global scale the company aims to produce 1 billion doses this year.

US health regulators are still reviewing the safety and effectiveness of the shot and a decision to allow its emergency use is expected later this week. J&J's vaccine would be the first in the US that requires only a single shot.

Currently available vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna require two doses spaced several weeks apart. Executives from both companies and two other vaccine makers will also testify at Tuesday's hearing.

cheon.

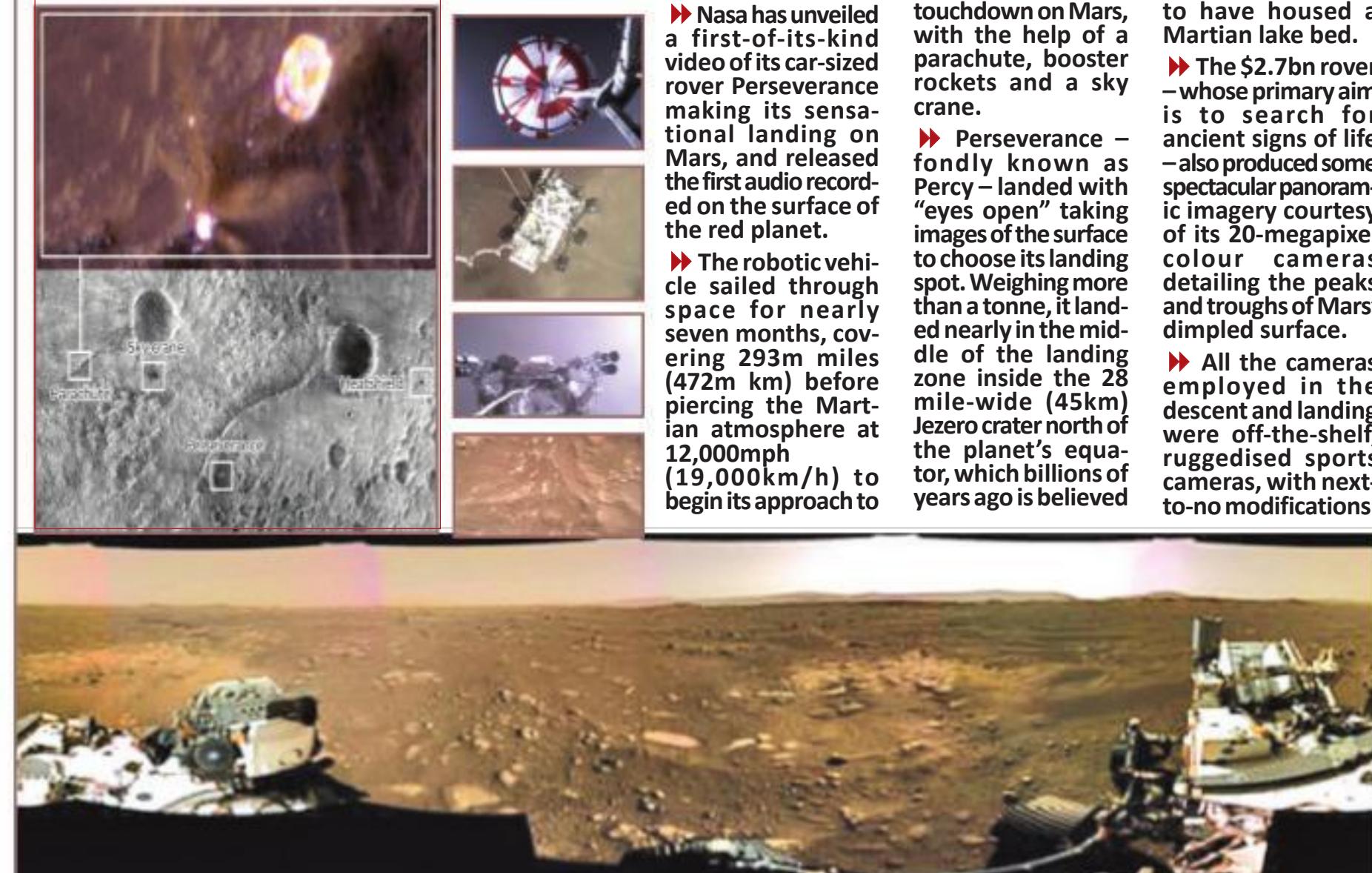
But with both leaders stressing caution to their citizens, Biden and Trudeau are foregoing the typical protocol and holding their talks by video conference.

U.S. presidents traditionally invite the Canadian prime minister for their first meeting with a world leader. White House officials said that they are still trying to offer a touch of stagecraft for the meeting.

The small meeting will be followed by an extended session that will include Vice President Kamala Harris as well as several of Biden's Cabinet-level advisers and Trudeau's ministers. The agenda includes the two countries' Covid responses, climate change, economic issues and more. Biden and Trudeau plan to deliver joint closing statements at the end of their meeting.

The White House said that the leaders also plan to issue what they are calling a "road map" outlining how the neighboring countries will work together to fight Covid, curb climate emissions and pursue other shared priorities.

NASA RELEASES VIDEO OF PERSEVERANCE ROVER LANDING ON MARS



This panorama, taken by the navigation cameras aboard NASA's Perseverance Mars rover, was stitched together from six individual images after they were sent back to Earth.

Security officials to answer for 6 Jan failures at Capitol

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, 23 FEBRUARY

Congress is set to hear from former U.S. Capitol security officials for the first time about the massive law enforcement failures on January 6, the day a violent mob laid siege to the building and interrupted the presidential electoral count.

Three of the four scheduled to testify Tuesdays before two Senate committees resigned under pressure immediately after the deadly attack, including the former head of the Capitol Police.

Much remains unknown about what happened before and during the assault, and lawmakers are expected to aggressively question the former officials about what went wrong. How much did law enforcement agencies know about plans for violence that day, many of which were public? How did the agencies share that information with

each other? And how could the Capitol Police have been so ill-prepared for a violent insurrection that was organized online, in plain sight? The rioters easily smashed through security barriers on the outside of the Capitol, engaged in hand-to-hand combat with police officers, injuring dozens of them, and broke through multiple windows and doors, sending lawmakers fleeing from the House and Senate chambers and interrupting the certification of the 2020 presidential election.

Five people died as a result of the violence. Former Senate Sergeant-at-Arms Michael Stenger and former House Sergeant-at-Arms Paul Irving will speak publicly for the first time since their resignations at the hearing, which is part of a joint investigation by the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee and the Senate Rules Committee.

Thousands of National Guard troops still surround the Capitol in a wide perimeter, cutting off streets and sidewalks that are normally full of cars, pedestrians and tourists. Congress is also considering a bipartisan, independent commission to review the missteps, and multiple congressional committees have said they will look at different aspects of the siege.

Georgian police storm Opp party offices, detain its leader

AGENCIES
MOSCOW, 23 FEBRUARY

to leave the building.

It also said in a separate statement that its computer infrastructure had been hit by a cyber-attack from abroad.

The U.S. Embassy said it was deeply concerned by his detention and expressed regret that its call for restraint and dialogue had been "ignored".

"Today, Georgia has moved backward on its path toward becoming a stronger democracy in the Euro-Atlantic family of nations," it said in a statement. The European Union's ambassador to Georgia urged efforts to find common ground between the two sides.

"The logic of escalation is getting the upper hand. The political crisis is deepening," the diplomat, Carl Hartzell, wrote on Twitter. Last week, a court ordered Melia to be detained for allegedly failing to post bail.

The Interior Ministry at the time announced it was postponing carrying out the order to detain him following Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia's resignation.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA

Facebook said on Tuesday it will lift its ban on Australians sharing news after it struck a deal with Australia's government on legislation that would make digital giants pay for journalism.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg and Facebook confirmed that they have agreed on amendments to proposed legislation to require the social network and Google to pay for Australian news that they feature.

Facebook's cooperation is a major victory in Australian efforts to make the two gateways to the Internet pay for the journalism that they use. The company had blocked Australian users from accessing and sharing news last week after the House of Representatives passed the draft law late Wednesday.

The amended version of the proposed legislation would give digital platforms one month's notice before they are formally designated under the code. That would give those involved more time to broker agreements before they are forced to enter the binding arbitration arrangements required by the proposed law.

Initially, the Facebook news blockade cut access — at least temporarily — to government pandemic, public health and emergency services, sparking public outrage.

A statement Tuesday by Campbell Brown, Facebook's vice president for news partnerships, said the deal allows the company to choose which publishers it will support, including small and local ones.

"We're restoring news on Facebook in Australia in the coming days. Going forward, the government has clarified we will retain the ability to decide if news appears on Facebook so that we won't automatically be subject to a forced negotiation," Brown said.

Frydenberg described the agreed-upon amendments as "clarifications" of the government's intent. He said his negotiations with Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg were "difficult."

"There is no doubt that Australia has been a proxy battle for the world," Frydenberg said.

"Facebook and Google have not hidden the fact that they know that the eyes of the world are on Australia and that is why they have sought to get a code here that is workable," he added, referring to the proposed News Media Bargaining Code.

The code was designed to curb the bargaining dominance of Facebook and Google in their negotiations with

Australian news providers by requiring a negotiation safety net in the form of an arbitration panel. The digital giants would not be able to abuse their overwhelming negotiating positions by making take-it-or-leave-it payment offers to news businesses for their journalism. In case of a standoff, the panel would make a binding decision on a winning offer.

Swinburne University senior lecturer on media Belinda Barnett said the proposed amendments guarantee Facebook time to strike deals before the arbitration panel decides on a price for news.

Peter Lewis, director of the Australia Institute's Center for Responsible Technology, a think tank, said in a statement that the "amendments will keep the integrity of the media code intact."

Google also had threatened to remove its search functions from Australia because it said the proposed law was unworkable. But that threat has faded.

Google has been signing up

Australia's largest media companies in content licensing deals through its News Showcase model.

The platform says it has deals with more than 50 Australian titles through Showcase and more than 500 publishers globally using the model which was launched in October.

Facebook said it will negotiate deals with Australian publishers under its own model, Facebook News.

"We are satisfied that the Australian government has agreed to a number of changes and guarantees that address our core concerns about allowing commercial deals that recognize the value we receive from them," Facebook regional managing director William Easton said.

"As a result of these changes, we can now work to further our investment in public interest journalism and restore news on Facebook for Australians in the coming days," Easton added.

Iran imposes curbs on UN N-inspections

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TEHRAN (IRAN), 23 FEBRUARY

Iran officially has begun restricting international inspections of its nuclear facilities, state TV reported Tuesday, a bid to pressure European countries and US President Joe Biden's administration to lift economic sanctions and restore the 2015 nuclear deal.

The state TV report gave little detail beyond confirming that Iran had made good on its threat to reduce cooperation with International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors.

Iran has said it plans to cease its implementation of the Additional Protocol, a confidential agreement between Tehran and the IAEA reached as part of the landmark nuclear accord that grants the UN inspectors enhanced powers to visit nuclear facilities and watch Iran's program.

Iran blocking access to IAEA cameras also means the agency can't monitor Iranian actions when those inspectors aren't physically at a site.

but stressed the country forbids nuclear weapons. Tehran has long insisted that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes, such as power generation and medical research.

Tehran has long insisted that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes, such as power generation and medical research.

The escalation Tuesday followed IAEA Director-General Rafael Grossi's emergency weekend trip to Tehran to negotiate the inspection restrictions. As part of a temporary deal, Grossi said the agency would maintain the same number of inspectors on the ground. But Iran's curbs would affect inspectors' ability to conduct so-called snap inspections of nuclear sites, Grossi said. Iran blocking access to IAEA cameras also means the agency can't monitor Iranian actions when those inspectors aren't physically at a site.

Biden attempt to resurrect Iran N-deal off to bumpy start: The Biden administration's early efforts to resurrect the 2015 Iran nuclear deal are getting a chilly early response from Tehran. Though few

expected a breakthrough in the first month of the new administration, Iran's tough line suggests a difficult road ahead. Having made several significant overtures to Iran, the administration's outreach has been all but shunned by the Iranians. They had already rejected Biden's opening gambit: a U.S. return to the deal from which Donald Trump withdrew in 2018 if Iran resumes full compliance with its obligations under the accord.

SARATH THIRUMARANAIAN

Goldfinger, the bad guy in Ian Fleming's novel of the same name, had his victims painted in gold paint. But a strip along the backbone was left unpainted. This was because the gold paint did not allow the skin to breathe and a person painted all over would die.

Our atmosphere is like gold paint over the Earth. It traps the sun's heat and acts like a blanket, to keep the Earth from cooling by losing the trapped heat to space. So far, this has been a good thing, to give Earth a degree of uniform warmth, which enabled life to arise and flourish. But carbon dioxide pollution has affected the balance and Earth is collecting more heat than it can handle.

Lyu Zhou, Haomin Song, Nan Zhang, Jacob Rada, Matthew Singer, Huafan Zhang, Boon S Ooi, Zongfu Yu and Qiaoliang Gan, from The State University of New York at Buffalo, University of Wisconsin and King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, Saudi Arabia, report in the journal *Cell Reports Physical Science*, a substantial improvement in technology to throw the heat that the Earth accumulates right back into the chill of outer space.

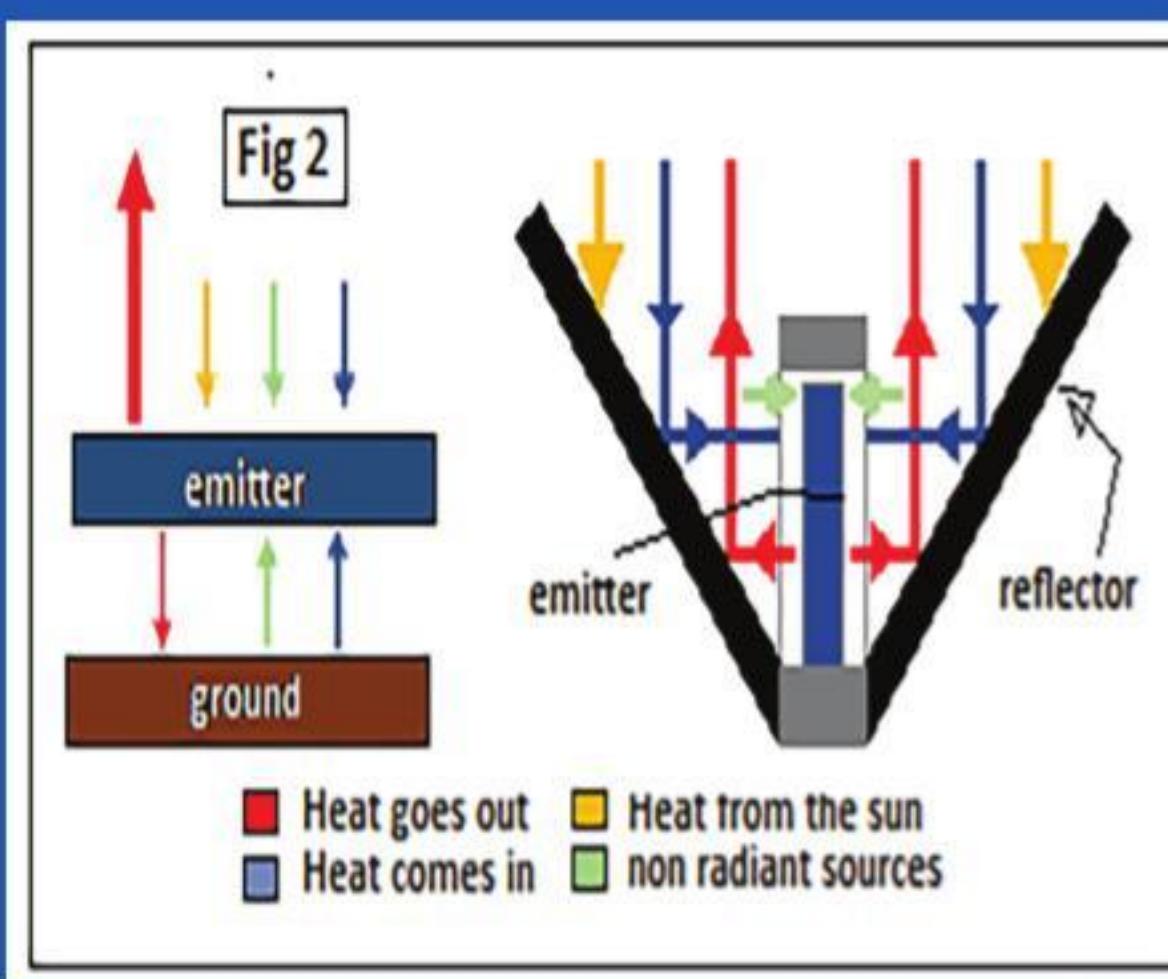
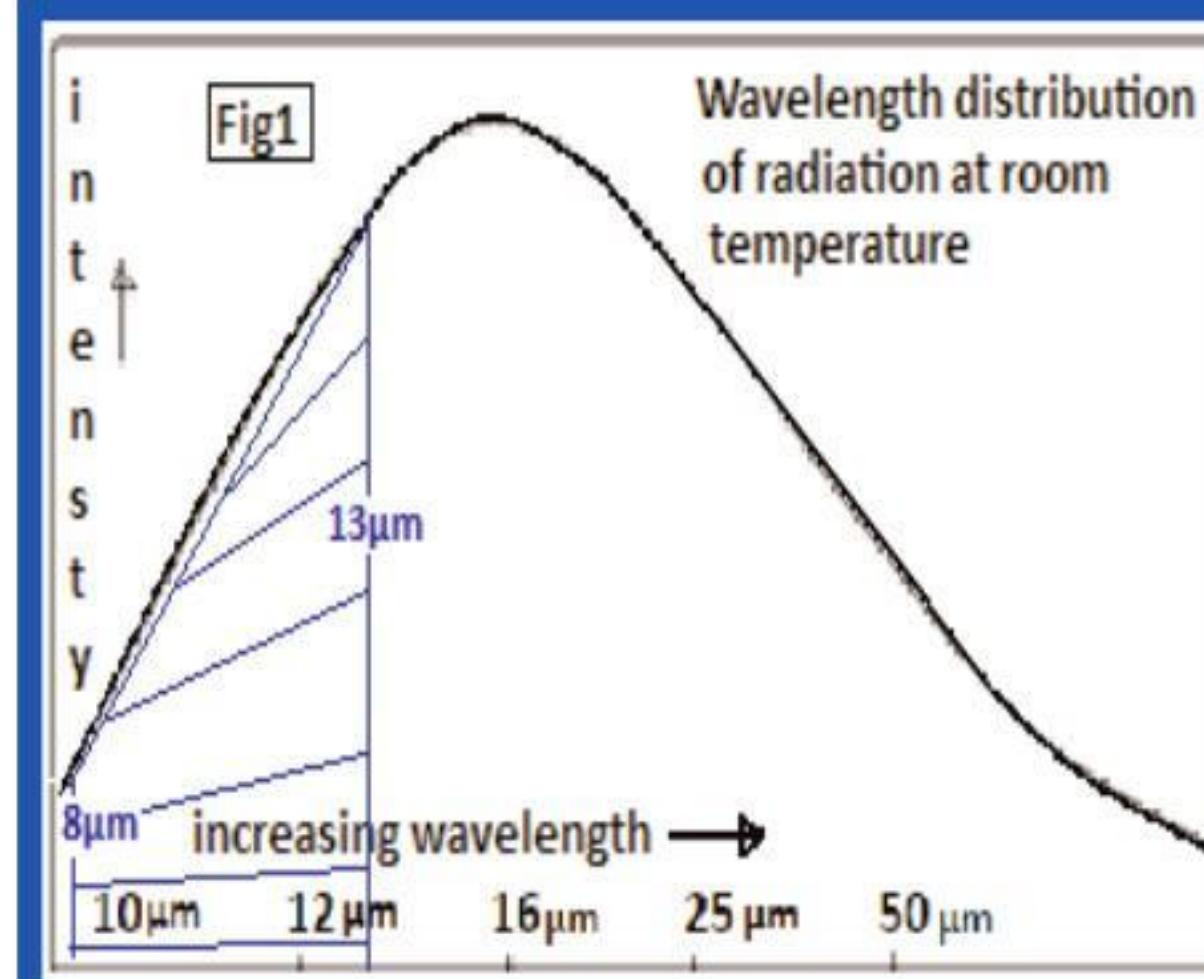
The way things warm up is really the way things cool down. Nothing will get warm if left to itself. It warms because it receives heat from objects that are cooling, and the heat it receives is more than the heat it is radiating. The Earth's atmosphere is good at receiving heat, and it gets better when it contains more carbon dioxide. As the atmosphere is most dense at sea level, it is nearest to the earth that it is the warmest. And this heat stays there, because the layer immediately above is pretty warm too, and radiates back most of the heat that the lowest, warm layer radiates out.

Except, there is a part of the radiated heat that the upper layers do not absorb, to radiate back, but passes through the upper layer, and all the layers above that, and is lost to the Earth for good. This is because the atmosphere is transparent, or allows free passage, to heat that is radiated in the form of infra-red light with wavelengths in the window of eight to 13 micrometres.

What this implies is that a good way to cool the Earth would be to collect the heat we receive, turn as much as we can to IR light in the eight-13 micrometre range, and beam it out to space. We already know that white-washing the roof can help reflect the heat and keep a building somewhat cooler. But a lot of the reflected heat gets absorbed by the atmosphere and

Thermal drainpipe to cool Earth

A newly built device could send heat back into space



is radiated back. What would work is that we change the heat into that range of wavelengths that can pass through, before we send it out.

Normal objects, at usual temperatures of around 30°C, radiate over a wide range of frequencies, as shown in Fig 1. As stated, most of this radiation would be absorbed by the atmosphere itself, with no reduction of the net heat content, except for emission in the eight-13 micrometre band.

A first method to get emission to stay in this band was developed a few years ago, with a seven-layer stack of the materials, hafnium dioxide and silicon dioxide, mounted on a thin silver base. Hafnium oxide has large emission in the eight-13 micrometre range, while silicon dioxide emits strongly at nine micrometre. The thickness of the layers was regulated, for best efficiency of reflectivity and selective emissivity. The result was a device where sunlight that passed through the stack was reflected skywards with very little radiation absorbed and strong emission at the

special wavelength band. And an arrangement that was tried in Stanford University brought about a four to five °C drop in temperature.

Another device by the same team had a wafer of silica, or silicon dioxide, laid over a crystal of silicon, the material of solar cells, with a backing of an aluminum mirror. The result was a solar cell with an arrangement to prevent heating. As the efficiency of solar cells falls steeply when the device warms, the arrangement promised a substantial improvement in the output of solar cells.

While devices in use attain cooling of around 100 W/m², the paper says that the best cooling, even in principle, that is possible for a sky-facing device is 160W/m². In comparison, the energy that comes in from the sun is 1,000 W/m². A great part of the energy received is hence not made use of, the paper says.

A first feature that can be improved, the paper points out, is that the emission from one half of the emitter, in the sky facing systems

developed, is directed to the ground and wasted. This is shown in the left side part of Fig 2. The authors remedy this by standing the emitter up, vertically, and deploying a pair of mirrors from both faces of the emitter. This, they observe, "breaks the cooling power density limit (which is 160 W/m²) of the single-sided thermal emitter," and lifts cooling performance to 273.3 W/m².

A further feature is that the material of the reflectors is a cermet, or a composite of a ceramic and a metal, which is spectrally selective. This means it reflects light of certain wavelengths and allows light of other wavelengths to be absorbed. The optimised reflector that was used could absorb 90 per cent of the solar radiation and reflect 90 per cent of the radiation in the eight-13 micrometre band, the paper says.

The result was that along with emission of heat, out to space, of more than double what other devices could do, 90 per cent of the remaining solar energy was absorbed. There was

tremendous heating of the solar absorption plates, the paper says. The cooling, at the same time, was 14°C in a laboratory trial and 12°C in an outdoor trial, the paper says.

The important thing to note is that radiative cooling, with simultaneous heat capture, is a passive process, that needs no electricity, compressors, etc. Cooling at the rate of 160W/m² amounts to cooling like a 0.05 tonne conventional AC unit. A 20 m² passive emitter, which is a square with sides of 4.5 m, would thus cool like a one tonne AC unit – with no electricity. And it would also produce heat, to warm water, drive a generator, etc., all on solar energy!

An IEA report says air conditioning and electric fans for cooling accounts for 20 per cent of energy used in buildings, and the demand for air conditioning is set to soar in the decades to come. Does it look like the end of the road for conventional cooling systems?

The writer can be contacted at response@simplescience.in

PLUS POINTS

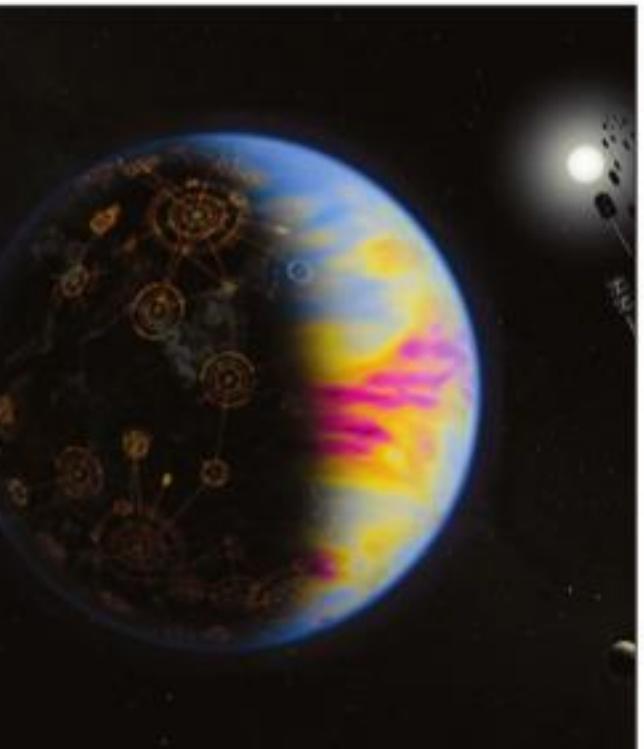
Looking for pollution

Aliens could be detected by measuring atmospheric pollution on other planets, according to new research.

A study by a space agency examined the presence of nitrogen dioxide gas, which is produced on Earth by burning fossil fuels. While the evolution of a civilisation that has developed to oil- or coal-based industries seems slim, the gas is also sourced from other materials including lightning and biological processes.

"On Earth, most of the nitrogen dioxide is emitted from human activity - combustion processes such as vehicle emissions and fossil-fuelled power plants," said Ravi Kopparapu of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland. "In the lower atmosphere (about 10 to 15 kilometres or around 6.2 to 9.3 miles), nitrogen dioxide from human activities dominate compared to non-human sources. Therefore, observing nitrogen dioxide on a habitable planet could potentially indicate the presence of an industrialised civilisation."

Nitrogen dioxide gas could be what scientists call a "technosignature", which is when there is presence of a gas that is released as a by-product of an industrial process. This is similar to a biosignature, which are gases such as oxygen and methane produced by organic activity. Due to the huge number of planets in the universe, as well as their distance, scientists need to use these indications – which can be measured at great distances – to determine which worlds are worth investigating.



"Other studies have examined chlorofluorocarbons as possible technosignatures, which are industrial products that were widely used as refrigerants until they were phased out because of their role in ozone depletion," said Jacob Haqq-Misra, a co-author of the paper at the Blue Marble Institute of Science, Seattle, Washington. "CFCs are also a powerful greenhouse gas that could be used to terraform a planet like Mars by providing additional warming from the atmosphere. As far as we know, CFCs are not produced by biology at all, so they are a more obvious technosignature than nitrogen dioxide. However, CFCs are very specific manufactured chemicals that might not be prevalent elsewhere; nitrogen dioxide, by comparison, is a general byproduct of any combustion process."

Scientists used computer modelling to predict whether nitrogen dioxide could produce a signal that is able to detect with current and future telescopes. The gas absorbs some colours of visible light, meaning that it can be measured by observing light reflected from the planet.

A planet similar to Earth could be detected up to 30 light years away over 400 hours using a large NASA telescope; while this is a huge amount of time to study a single planet, it is not unprecedented. NASA's Hubble Telescope took a similar amount of time for the Hubble Deep Field Observations which has helped scientists study dark matter.

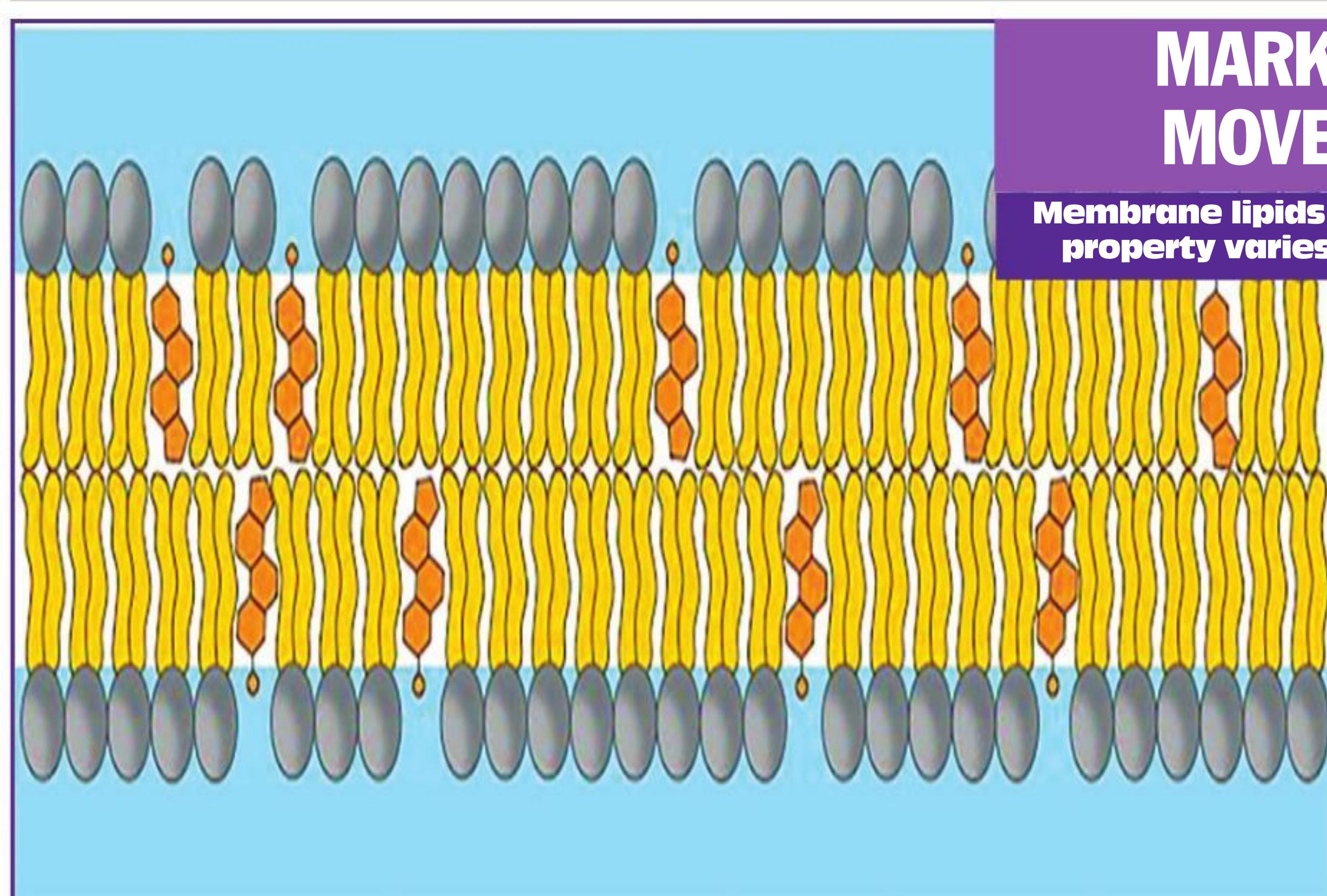
"On Earth, about 76 per cent of nitrogen dioxide emissions are due to industrial activity," said Giada Arney of NASA Goddard, a co-author of the paper. "If we observe nitrogen dioxide on another planet, we will have to run models to estimate the maximum possible emissions one could have just from non-industrial sources. If we observe more nitrogen dioxide than our models suggest is plausible from non-industrial sources, then the rest might be attributed to industrial activity."

"Yet there is always a possibility of a false positive in the search for life beyond Earth, and future work will be needed to ensure confidence in distinguishing true positives from false positives."

There are benefits and complications to using nitrogen dioxide to look for alien worlds. Happily, stars that are cooler and more common than our Sun produce less ultraviolet light (which breaks down the gas) and therefore increases the chance that extra-terrestrial life can be found.

Conversely, however, clouds or aerosols in the atmosphere could mimic the signature of the gas making it more challenging to detect – although researchers are developing 3D models in order to more accurately map results and deal with these potential imperfections. The research was published online recently in *arXiv*.

—THE INDEPENDENT



MARKED BY MOVEMENT

Membrane lipids are fluid and that property varies with conditions

tures than shorter-chain fatty acids, which means that membranes enriched in long-chain fatty acids tend to be less fluid.

For example, as the chain length of saturated fatty acids increases from 10 to 20 carbon atoms, the melting point rises from 32°C to 76°C and hence the membrane becomes progressively less fluid.

The presence of unsaturation affects the melting point even more markedly. For fatty acids with 18 carbon atoms, the melting points are 70, 16, 5, and 11°C for zero, one, two, and three double bonds, respectively. As a result, membranes containing many unsaturated fatty acids tend to have lower transition temperatures and thus are more fluid than membranes with many saturated fatty acids.

The effect of unsaturation on membrane fluidity is so dramatic because the kinks that double bonds introduce into fatty acids prevent the hydrocarbon chains from fitting together snugly. Membrane lipids with saturated fatty acids pack together tightly whereas lipids with unsaturated fatty acids do not. The lipids of most plasma membranes contain fatty acids that vary in both chain length and degree of unsaturation. In fact, the variability is often intramolecular because membrane lipids commonly contain one saturated and one unsaturated fatty acid. This property helps to ensure that membranes are in the fluid state at physiological temperatures.

For eukaryotic cells, membrane fluidity is also affected by the presence of sterols – mainly cholesterol in animal cell membranes and phytosterols in plant cell membranes. Sterols are prominent components in the membranes of many cell types. A typical animal cell, for example, contains large amounts of cholesterol – up to 50 per cent of the total membrane lipid on a molar basis. Cholesterol molecules are usually found in both layers of the plasma membrane, but a given molecule is localised to one of the two layers.

The writer is associate professor and head, department of botany, Ananda Mohan College, Kolkata

TAPAN KUMAR MAITRA

One of the most striking properties of membrane lipids is that rather than being fixed in place within the membrane, they form a fluid bilayer that permits lateral diffusion of membrane lipids as well as proteins. Lipid molecules move especially fast because they are much smaller than proteins. A typical phospholipid molecule, for example, has a molecular weight of about 800 and can travel the length of a bacterial cell (a few micrometres, in most cases) in a second or less! Proteins move much more slowly than lipids, in part because they are much larger molecules, with molecular weights many times greater than those of phospholipids, but mainly due to their interactions with cytoskeletal proteins on the inside of the cell.

The lateral diffusion of membrane lipids can be demonstrated experimentally by a technique called

fluorescence recovery after photobleaching. The investigator tags, or labels, bind to lipid molecules in the membrane of a living cell by covalently linking molecules of a fluorescent dye to them. A high-intensity laser beam is then used to bleach the dye in a tiny spot (a few square micrometres) on the cell surface. If the cell surface is examined immediately thereafter with a fluorescence microscope, a dark, non-fluorescent spot is seen on the membrane.

Within seconds, however, the edges of the spot become fluorescent as bleached lipid molecules diffuse out of the laser-treated area and fluorescent lipid molecules from adjoining regions of the membrane diffuse in. Eventually, the spot is indistinguishable from the rest of the cell surface. Not only does this technique demonstrate that membrane lipids are in a fluid rather than a static state, it also provides a direct means of measuring the lateral movement of

specific molecules.

Membrane fluidity changes with temperature, decreasing as the temperature drops and increasing as it rises. In fact, we know from studies with artificial lipid bilayers that every lipid bilayer has a characteristic transition temperature (T_g) at which it gels ("freezes") when cooled and becomes fluid again ("melts") when warmed. This change in the state of the membrane is called a phase transition and is somewhat like the change that butter or margarine undergoes upon heating or cooling.

To function properly, a membrane must be maintained in the fluid state that is, at a temperature above its T_g value. At a temperature below the T_g value, all functions that depend on the mobility or conformational changes of membrane proteins will be impaired or disrupted, including such vital processes as transport of solutes across the membrane, detection and transmission of signals, and

cell-to-cell communication.

The technique of differential scanning calorimetry is one means of determining the transition temperature of a given membrane. This procedure monitors the uptake of heat that occurs during the transition from one physical state to another – the gel-to-fluid transition, in the case of membranes. The membrane of interest is placed in a sealed chamber, the calorimeter, and the uptake of heat is measured as the temperature is slowly increased. The point of maximum heat absorption corresponds to the transition temperature.

The fluidity of a membrane depends primarily on the kinds of lipids it contains. Two properties of a membrane's lipid makeup are especially important in determining fluidity – the length of the fatty acid side chains and their degree of unsaturation (that is, the number of double bonds present). Long-chain fatty acids have higher transition temper-



HEART OF THE MATTER

Sachin Tendulkar (photo, left) says he firmly believes sport recognises only on-field performances and not the background of an athlete. His son, Arjun, recently provoked snide remarks after landing an Indian Premier League contract which many said was a reward for his surname.

For more updates

www.thestatesman.com

THUMBNAILS

Kumar wins: Deepak Kumar (52kg) advanced to the quarter-finals with a facile win as Indian boxers got off to a mixed start at the Strandja memorial tournament in Sofia, Bulgaria. He defeated Kazakhstan's Olzhas Bainiyazov 5-0 in his opening bout.

Thorpe's tip: Joe Root has been England's batting linchpin against Sri Lanka and India this winter but Graham Thorpe believes it is time for others to come to the fore and lighten the load on the Test captain's shoulders. Root is averaging 90.37 in four Tests this year.



New clauses: Shakib Al Hasan's appeal for a longer stint in the Indian Premier League at the expense of a Test series has left the Bangladesh Cricket Board "disappointed" and it has decided to add clauses to central contracts to avoid a similar situation in the future.

Positive test: The Vijay Hazare Trophy tournament has suffered its first Covid-19 setback with a Bihar player returning positive for the virus, following which all the other cricketers are being tested. Bihar are in Elite Group C, playing their league games in Bangalore.

Warner's plan: Australian opener David Warner reckons he will have to face "at least six to nine months" of rehab for his groin injury but will be back in action for New South Wales next week. He sustained the injury during the one-day series against India in November.

Gauff advances: Coco Gauff Jasmine Paolini 6-4, 6-7 (4), 6-2 on Tuesday in a first-round match at the Adelaide International. It follows Gauff's two wins in weekend qualifying in the South Australian state capital to advance to the main draw of the tournament.

Ronaldo strikes: Cristiano Ronaldo scored twice as Juventus, now third in the standings, got back to winning ways by beating bottom club Crotone 3-0 in Serie A. Ronaldo could even have had a hat trick. Weston McKennie sealed the result after the break.

Fans' return: Plans to ease England's lockdown restrictions will see up to 10,000 supporters being allowed back into Premier League stadiums for the final day of the season in May ahead of Wembley hosting European Championship games, it is said.

Dortmund fined: Borussia Dortmund were fined 75,000 euros for breaking social distancing rules after players celebrated a win over a fierce rival inside the team bus. Videos showed players celebrating together as the bus passed a crowd of Dortmund fans.

Trial date: Former Germany defender Christoph Metzelder will stand trial on charges of possession and distribution of child pornography on 29 April. Dusseldorf district court said on Monday it was proceeding with a case brought by the public prosecutor.

Repsol Honda Team: Marc Marquez and Pol Espargaro prepare for all new challenges in 2021 with the Repsol Honda Team. The pair bring with them 446 World Championship starts, 184 podiums, 109 poles and 97 wins.

'Conway knock exposes Indian league's idiocy'

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI, 23 FEBRUARY

Former New Zealand fast bowler Simon Doull says players from his country have always been "overlooked for second-rate Australians" in the Indian Premier League, expressing his views after Devon Conway (in photo) created a flutter with his splendid hitting days after going unsold at the glamorous league's auction.

South African-born New Zealander Conway smashed a 59-ball 99 and powered his team to a 53-run win over Australia in the first of five Twenty20 Internationals in Christchurch on Monday. But Doull felt it might not matter.

"Not sure it matters," Doull tweeted, referring to the blazing knock in his reply to a post

by India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, in which he went in appreciation, "Devon Conway is just 4 days late, but what a knock."

Doull, who is now a commentator, said on the social networking site, "NZ players have continually been overlooked for second rate Australians in the IPL for years. Seems outside of IPL big bash is the only comp looked at..." Conway, whose base price

in the IPL auctions was a modest Rs 50 lakh, went unsold as none of the franchises showed any interest in him, despite him being in fine form for his national side and in other competitive T20 matches.

Conway came into the T20I opener against Australia on the back of four consecutive half-centuries -- 93 not out, 91 not out, 69 and 50 (his previous Super Smash scores)

-- and with another unbeaten innings, he became the first New Zealand player to record five successive fifties in the game's shortest format.

In another tweet, Doull wrote, "Just some context. I did not mention any names so stop trolling. Since IPL started 94 Aussies at combined 886 Crore. 31 NZ players 212 Crore.

"Both countries have 6 first class teams and both have domestic T20 comps. It's more about timing and viewing of BBL."

While Conway may not have found any takers in the IPL, his countrymen Kyle Jamieson (Rs 15 crore) and Adam Milne (Rs 3.2 crore) received handsome contracts at the auction, picked up by Royal Challengers Bangalore and Mumbai Indians, respectively.

A Devon Conway batting masterclass inspired New Zealand to a 53-run win over Australia in the opening Twenty20 International in Christchurch on Monday.

The Black Caps overcame a shaky start to finish on 184 for five after losing the toss and being put in to bat at the Hagley Oval. In reply, the tourists were all out for 131 after 17.3 overs, with Black Caps spinner Ish Sodhi taking four wickets for 28 to give the hosts an early edge in the five-match series.

Australia captain Aaron Finch refused to blame the loss on his team's two-week Covid-19 quarantine upon arrival in New Zealand. "It feels like a long time since we played but we were treated brilliantly (in quarantine)," he said.

"They just ran harder and we didn't get it right."

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Root warns team-mates to expect more spin

DAVID CHARLESWORTH
LONDON, 23 FEBRUARY

touring batsman accumulated more than Moeen Ali's 49 runs across two innings.

"It's going to spin at some point, it's just a question of when," he said. "That's always the case when we come here. We experienced it very early in the last Test, it might not be the case quite so much this time around."

England won the opener in Chennai but were beaten at the same venue last time out, humbled by spin duo Ravichandran Ashwin and Axar Patel on a surface that turned almost from the off, as India levelled the four-match series.

However, whether Anderson and Jofra Archer will have Stuart Broad or Mark Wood for company is still not clear.

Also, talented batsman Zak Crawley could be back in the playing XI in place of Rory Burns while Jonny Bairstow can replace Dan Lawrence at number three.

The Squads:

India: Virat Kohli (Captain), Rohit Sharma, Mayank Agarwal, Shubman Gill, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane (vice-captain), KL Rahul, Hardik Pandya, Rishabh Pant (wicket-keeper), Wriddhiman Saha (wicket-keeper), R Ashwin, Kuldeep Yadav, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Ishant Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah, Md. Siraj, Umesh Yadav.

England: Joe Root (c), James Anderson, Jofra Archer, Jonny Bairstow, Dominic Bess, Stuart Broad, Rory Burns, Zak Crawley, Ben Foakes, Dan Lawrence, Jack Leach, Ollie Pope, Dom Sibley, Ben Stokes, Olly Stone, Chris Woakes, Mark Wood.

Match starts 2.30pm (IST).

There are many unknowns ahead of the penultimate fixture at Ahmedabad as India have only ever hosted one pink-ball Test and, on that occasion, the home side's seamers took all of the Bangladesh wickets in November 2019 in Kolkata.

Ben Stokes ramped up expectation as he divulged James Anderson, Stuart Broad and Jofra Archer had been "licking their lips," adding net practice had to be halted when the lights came on as bowling became "really dangerous."

Root, though, is braced for spin playing its part and the England captain has called on his side to learn lessons from the second Test, where no

and we should have put the work in this week which, from what I have seen, the guys have certainly done.

"If it is more seam-oriented then the experience of growing up in English conditions should be in our favour and it is about handling those conditions as best we can and try to exploit them with ball in hand."

While Stokes admitted conditions at practice might be wholly different to ones they will be confronted with when the Test starts on Wednesday, the talismanic all-rounder is optimistic after what he saw in the nets on Sunday.

"Broad, Jimmy and Jofra have been licking their lips," he said. **THE INDEPENDENT**

Motera Nights: India venture into unknown, England seek answers

AGENCIES
AHMEDABAD, 23 FEBRUARY

A virgin Motera strip has become the big talking point as India captain Virat Kohli prepares the right pink ball questionnaire to trouble a spoilt-for-choice England in the day-night third Test starting here on Wednesday.

Ahmedabad as a cricketing venue has been witness to a lot of cricketing feats in Indian cricket -- from Sunil Gavaskar's famous late cut to complete 10,000 runs in Tests to Kapil Dev's best bowling figures of 9 for 83 and also him eclipsing Richard Hadlee's then world record of highest wickets.

On Wednesday, Ishant Sharma joined Kapil as the second Indian pacer to play 100 Tests would add to the momentous occasion and Kohli scoring a hundred is just what the 55,000 odd spectators, who would be allowed in, might crave.

The refurbished Sardar Patel Stadium looks colossal under lights but the first Test match in many years would mean that even the home team wouldn't expect a lot of advantage.

It would prefer a square turner to go 2-1 up in a high-

stakes game but whether it actually gets one remains to be seen.

As senior opener Rohit Sharma was clear in team's choice of surface -- a turner that helps Ravichandran Ashwin and Axar Patel just like Joe Root would have opted for a green at the Headingley or the Old Trafford.

There are a few more questions that would demand answers.

How would the twilight period be for the batsmen as James Anderson feels that the ball swings more in that phase? Will the extra lacquer on the SG Test Pink make it difficult for the Ashwin-Axar combo which

wreaked havoc on the Chepauk snake pit? And with a 2:30 pm start, how much will the dew have a bearing during the final session? The ball would be difficult to grip at that point for slow bowlers and the pitch, despite grass being shaved off, might ease out with ball skidding off the surface.

When there are so many unknown variables that warrant factoring, any captain would like to assess conditions as senior seamer Ishant Sharma on Monday.

"...this test pink ball test match test we are playing in new ground, so for even for us there are a few things we don't know

how we will have to tackle (and) all these things," Ishant said on the eve of his 100th Test match. His opposite number James Anderson however has no doubts whatsoever that by the time clock ticks 2:30 pm on Wednesday, the turn will bear a bald look, similar to Chepauk.

Umesh Yadav passing the fitness test was good news for the Indian camp as Kuldeep Yadav is likely to be dropped from the playing XI.

Umesh, along with Ishant and the now injured Mohammed Shami, had polished off Bangladesh twice inside six sessions in the inaugural Pink Test match in Kolkata.

But this England team, with Joe Root, Ben Stokes, Jonny Bairstow, will pose a far greater challenge.

Hardik Pandya has been kept with the Test team with an eye on his bowling workload but it's not known whether the team thinks that he is Test ready.

Pandya taking the load of a maximum 15 overs per innings on a turner could provide more balance to the playing XI and his big-hitting can tilt any game in India's favour.

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