

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | FRIDAY 12 | FEBRUARY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 34°C
Min: 16°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Thai 30
Tithi: Prathamai
Star: Avittam
Rahukalam:
10.30 am to 12 noon
Yamagandam:
3 pm to 4.30 pm
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.22 am
Jumma: 12.28 pm
Asar: 3.43 pm
Maghrib: 6.12 pm
Isha: 7.25 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.14 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.33 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 6.59 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 6.51 PM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+8,766)	(+77)
1,08,79,826	1,55,476

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+481)
TN: 8,43,690 | 12,402

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

10,80,29,845

DEATHS

23,69,118

219
COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

worldometers.info

Fill learning gaps before start of examinations, CBSE tells schools

New Delhi: The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has directed schools under it to take steps to identify and resolve learning gaps, and then conduct examinations for Classes 9 and 11 by following Covid-19 safety protocols. The board has also recommended that the new academic session begin from April 1. For Classes 9 and 11, schools should take steps to identify and remedy the learning gaps and thereafter, conduct examinations by strictly following Covid-19 safety protocols.

SC refuses to entertain plea on preventing sale of fake Covid-19 vaccines

New Delhi: The Supreme Court Thursday refused to entertain a plea seeking direction to the Centre for framing 'strict' guidelines to prevent any chance of sale of fake coronavirus vaccines in the country

COUNTER POINT



Their 'rail roko' will be a big flop... there are hardly any trains running now!

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs
NEW DELHI/JOSHIMATH, FEB. 11

After a brief pause in rescue operations due to the rising water levels in the river Rishi Ganga, the security forces and disaster management teams resumed their efforts to save people stuck in Tapovan tunnel and those buried under the landslides and silt. The Uttarakhand government said the bodies

of 35 persons have been recovered so far, out of the 204 who are missing. Of these, 10 have been identified.

Rescuers from multiple agencies such as the Indo-Tibetn Border Police (ITBP), National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and the Army are trying to penetrate deeper through tonnes of silt to reach out to workers trapped inside the Tapovan tunnel. Apart from drones and canines, the relief teams are also

using sonar systems to find survivors or bodies in the areas that have high water levels.

The ITBP troops have been carrying rations to villages cut off from the main routes. On Thursday, they helped in the construction of the Jhula bridge across Dhauli Ganga to link village Bhangyul. Chinook helicopters were utilised to transport men, material and heavy loads towards rescue operations, and 14 passengers and 1,400 kg

relief load was carried for the NDRF and SDRF. In addition, 3T load and five personnel of the BRO were also transported to forward locations by the Indian Air Force.

Rescue teams stand near the Tapovan Tunnel, following the Sunday's glacier burst in Joshimath causing a massive flood in the Dhauli Ganga river, in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand, Thursday.

>>>>

— PTI



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No politics behind attaching Sasikala assets: Minister



Biden talks tough in first call to Xi

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Jofra Archer ruled out for second Test



■ **India, China reach pact to pull back troops in Ladakh**

Disengagement to be phased and verifiable, says Rajnath

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, FEB. 11

Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday said India and China have reached an agreement to disengage from north and south banks of Pangong Tso to pre-standoff status, in a major breakthrough in the nine month tense military stand-off.

"The agreement that we have been able to reach with the Chinese side for disengagement in the Pangong lake area envisages that both sides will cease their forward deployments in a phased, coordinated and verified manner," Mr Singh said in a statement in the Rajya Sabha.

Chinese troops will move east of Finger 8 in the north bank of Pangong Tso and Indian troops will move to their permanent base at Dhan Singh Thapa Post near Finger 3, Mr Singh told Parliament. There will be a "temporary" freeze in the



Disengagement underway at Pangong Tso after India and China have reached an agreement to disengage from north and south banks of Pangong Tso to pre-standoff status on Thursday.

— DC

patrolling by both sides in the area between Finger 4 to 8 on the northern banks of Pangong Tso till both sides reach an agreement in diplomatic and military talks. The Chinese army will dismantle all structures built since April 2020 in Pangong Tso area. "A similar action would be taken in the south bank area by both sides," said Mr Singh.

He, later on told the Lok Sabha said that as per latest information the disengagement process which began on Wednesday is being acted upon "smoothly". "All armoured vehicles have gone back to their permanent bases from both sides," he said.

He said that these are mutual and reciprocal steps. "It will substantially restore

the situation to that existing prior to commencement of the standoff last year," he said.

India and China will hold discussions on other friction points in Eastern Ladakh like Depsang plains after completion of disengagement from Pangong Tso.

"It has also been agreed to convene the next meeting of the senior commanders within 48 hours after the complete disengagement in the Pangong Lake area so as to address and resolve all other remaining issues," said Mr Singh.

The defence minister said he wants to "assure this House that in these talks we have not conceded anything". He said Parliament should also know that there are still some outstanding issues with regard to deployment and patrolling at some other points along the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh.



KAMAL TO BE PERMANENT CHIEF OF MNM

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 11

Actor Kamal Haasan was unanimously made the permanent president of the Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) and entrusted with absolute powers to take decisions on party affairs, including forming alliances, formulating election strategy, selection of candidates and campaigning. The MNM general council which met on Thursday, passed 25 resolutions, which include one on thanking Mr Haasan for retrieving the party's 'battery torch' symbol and also for undertaking the first round of campaign despite his injury.

Centre sanctions more men, moolah to strengthen IB's eye in cyber world

Comic Trevor Noah puts farmers' protest on show

New Delhi, Feb. 11: Stand-up comic and late night show host Trevor Noah is the latest international personality from the entertainment industry to highlight the ongoing farmers agitation.

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

On February 2, a tweet by pop star Rihanna triggered a wave of support

for the protesting farmers by a number of global personalities, activists and politicians.

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

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

— Agencies

Stir may be hijacked, says Punjab mahapanchayat

SANJAY KAW IDC
NEW DELHI, FEB. 11

The farmers' union leaders on Thursday cautioned farmers protesting against the contentious agricultural laws against attempts being made by politicians to hijack their agitation for political gains. The leaders asserted that the ongoing agitation was not limited to farmers but had become a mass movement to stop the onslaught by corporate bodies.

Addressing a mahapanchayat in Punjab, the union leaders emphasised that their agitation was apolitical as it was launched by farm-

ers, farm workers and ordinary people for their own survival. This was the first mahapanchayat in Punjab since the widespread protests -- led largely by farmers from the state -- against the Centre's three new laws began in late November last year.

After massive turnouts in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, the mahapanchayat in Punjab saw thousands of people turning up in tractor trollies, cars, SUVs, buses and trucks. The mahapanchayat proceedings were delayed by more than an hour due to bad weather and the late arrival of several leaders.

FOLLOW INDIAN LAWS, PRASAD TELLS SOCIAL MEDIA FIRMS

YOJNA GUSAI | DC
NEW DELHI, FEB. 11

In a stern warning to social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and WhatsApp, the Narendra Modi government Thursday told them from the floor of Parliament that while it respects their work, they must abide by the Indian Constitution and follow Indian laws.

Amid an ongoing row with Twitter, which erupted over the ongoing farmers' protests and Red Fort violence, information technology minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, replying to queries in the Rajya Sabha, made it clear that while the government has immense respect for the social media as it has empowered citizens and plays an important role in the government's Digital India mission, strict action will be taken if it is misused to spread violence, fake news or hatred. The minister said while social media platforms have their self-regulatory mechanisms to check and evaluate inflammatory content, it does not mean they will not follow Indian rules. The RS also saw Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu disallowing AAP member Sushil Gupta from quoting a Sweden-based institute's report on Indian democracy, saying such reports are political. Mr Naidu's comments came at a time when India has strongly objected to foreign celebrities and politicians using social media platforms to support the farmers' protests.



Sunil Arora

68,324, he said they expected the polling percentage to be high in the state as it used to be always.

Urging all first time voters to exercise their franchise without fail, he said special care would be given to take care of women and elderly voters.

The dates would be finalised after taking into account the issues raised by the political parties like festivals, holiday, examinations and the summer heat, he said, assuring that more steps to be taken to ensure a free and fair election in a peaceful manner.



CAA to kick in once Covid vaccination is over, says Shah

Coochbehar/Thakurnagar/Chirang, Feb. 11: Branding West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee a "failed administrator", Union home minister Amit Shah Thursday said the upcoming assembly elections in the state will be a contest between Narendra Modi's "development model" and her "destruction model" of governance.

In West Bengal, where the BJP has launched a political blitzkrieg against the Mamata Banerjee government, he raked up the issue of the TMC supremo's opposition to the CAA, and asserted the contentious citizenship law will be enforced once the process of Covid vaccination has ended.

Mr Shah's whirlwind tour of West Bengal and Assam was also marked by a social outreach to the numerically strong and restive Koch Ragbongshi and Matua communities whose concerns he sought to assuage.

Shah claimed large-scale infiltration into West Bengal's Coochbehar district, which shares border with Bangladesh, has caused significant changes to its demography.

The upcoming assembly polls, he said, will be a fight between the "Vikas (development) model of the Narendra Modi government and Mamata Banerjee's Vinash (destruction) model".

The home minister, who flagged off the fourth of the five 'Parivartan Yatra' of the BJP in Coochbehar, said the campaign is not for changing a chief minister, MLA or minister but ending infiltration and transforming West Bengal's condition. He said the yatra is also aimed at ending corruption patronised by "Bua-Bhatija" combine.

— PTI

Bid to save men trapped in Uttarakhand tunnel resumes



IN BRIEF

Plea to appoint gate keepers in level-crossings

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, FEB. 11

A delegation from Tamil Nadu comprising LS members of Tamil Nadu, including S. Thirunavukkarasari, Tiruchirappalli LS member; Palanimanickam and Karthi Chidambaram, TNCC vice-president Hidayathullah, train users association president, Pattukkottai, Jayaraman and others, met railway board chairman Suneet Sharma and Union railway minister Piyush Goyal in New Delhi recently, and urged them to appoint gate keepers in all unmanned level-crossings across the state.

A release from the office of Thirunavukkarasari in Tiruchy on Thursday said the delegation also requested them to commence train services between Karaikudi and Mayiladuthurai via Arantangi, Peravurani, Pattukkottai and Thiruthuraiipoondi, which was pending for a quite long time.

Min offers prayers at Prathyanakaredevi temple

DC CORRESPONDENT
THANJAVUR, FEB. 11

Dairy development minister K.T. Rajendra Balaji offered prayers at Prathyanakaredevi temple at Ayyavadi near Kumbakonam on Thursday in view of Thai Amavasai. He took part in the Nikumbala yagam.

Later he left for Suryanarkoil, one of the Navagraha kshetras near Kumbakonam.

Pension and gratuity right to property: HC

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 11

Pointing out that gratuity, pension and leave salary are not bounties, the Madras high court has said the benefits bestowed by law upon an employee in recognition of his committed and devoted duty are in the nature of property.

Justice S. Vaidyanathan further said this right to property cannot be taken away without following the due process of law, as right to property has been recognized under Article 300-A of the Constitution of India.

The judge made the observations while disposing of a

petition by D. Ramamurthy and 10 others, which sought a direction to the Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation (Villupuram) Ltd., to pay an interest at 10 percent for the belated payment of gratuity, leave salary and commutation of pension amount to them.

The judge said the TNSTC was a State as defined under Article 12 of the Constitution. It is expected to be a model employer and, as a State, it should ensure the enjoyment of fundamental rights to its employees. Saying that after retirement, the only source of survival was the terminal benefits and if it was not paid as per law, that would amount to violation of fundamental

rights, the judge added.

The judge said the division bench of this court in the case of Government of Tamil Nadu Vs M. Deivasigamani held that an employee was entitled to interest on belated payment of pension and other retirement benefits, even in the absence of statutory rules/administrative instructions or guidelines and that he can claim interest under part III of the Constitution, relying on Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution. In the present case, the petitioners joined the TNSTC as conductor and drivers and retired from service on different dates as special grade conductor/drivers. They have now

filed this petition seeking a direction to the TNSTC to pay interest for the belated payment of gratuity, leave salary and commutation of pension amount, the judge added.

The judge said the first bench of this court in a similar matter has passed an order dated June 12, 2015, directing the transport corporation to settle the terminal benefits of its employees in equal monthly instalments and to pay 6 percent interest on the terminal benefits payable to the workman. The bench has also held that the workman was entitled to 18 percent interest for the defaulted period of instalments.

Kiran Bedi orders postponement of inauguration of municipality building

Puducherry, Feb 11: Lt Governor Kiran Bedi has ordered the territorial administration to postpone the inauguration of a reconstructed structure of the Puducherry municipality, scheduled for Friday.

The former IPS officer on Thursday said that the inauguration of the building reconstructed at a cost of Rs 14 crore was totally funded by the Central government with the utilisation of funds provided by World Bank.

But the organising officer of the programme for which

invitation had also been brought out had 'regrettably overlooked' the protocol to ensure participation by officers of the Central government in the function.

Kiran Bedi, whose name is also not included in the invitation, said the inauguration of the reconstructed building was a historic event but the exclusion of the officers of the Central government was 'regrettably'.

She said a fresh date of inauguration would be announced in course of time. —PTI

Removal of leaders' names from airport flayed

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 11

TNCC president K S Alagiri and DK President K Veeramani flayed the BJP government at the Centre for removing the names of late Tamil Nadu leaders K Kamaraj and C N Annadurai from the Chennai airport terminals.

The international terminal was named after Annadurai and the domestic terminal after Kamaraj in 1989 at the behest of the then Chief Minister M

Karunanidhi when V P Singh was the Prime Minister, Veeramani said in a statement.

If the names were not restored to the terminals immediately, the Congress party would organize a protest against the BJP government, said Alagiri in a press release.

Members of Parliament from the State should take up this issue with the Centre, Veeramani said, adding that the planned action was aimed at hurting the sentiments of the Tamils.



Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami along with other ministers drinking tea at a bakery in Dharapuram on Thursday during his election campaign. —DC

Reception to Sasikala turned to grandshow by followers: TTV

From P1

Ms Sasikala would not be able to enter the party's headquarters on Lloyds Road in Chennai at any cost, he said and clarified that the state government had nothing to do with the seizure of properties of Ms Sasikala's relatives and co-accused in the case, J. Ilavarasi and V.N. Sudhakaran, and that it was done based on the orders of the court.

However, Mr Dhinakaran, a Tweet on Wednesday, claimed that the reception to Ms Sasikala was converted into a grand show by her true followers. In a letter to the cadre, written on the AMMK letterhead, Mr Dhinakaran said the reception was the historic one, something that had not happened earlier in the country.

He thanked them for coming to greet her on their own in such large numbers despite the hurdles thrown at them by the ruling dispensation, adding that their enthusiasm never slackened all through Ms Sasikala's long journey.

Meanwhile, by launching a scathing attack on Mr Dhinakaran, another AIADMK minister, Mr C Ve Shanmugham, landed in trouble. Referring to the call for unity among AIADMK cadre from Ms

Sasikala and Mr Dhinakaran, the law minister said "let the family members be united first."

He then referred to a standard query from Mr Dhinakaran on ministers "were they sober?" and said it was Mr Dhinakaran's family business to treat people to alcohol and ruining them. This statement earned the ire of many with Mr Dhinakaran himself taking to Twitter to say that those abusers were drunk on power.

The verbal exchanges continued between the ruling party mandarins and Mr Dhinakaran even as Ms Sasikala was confined to her niece's home in T.Nagar. It was said that she was under quarantine till February 17 and would not meet visitors till then.

Some junior political leaders are said to have sought appointments with Ms Sasikala and have been reportedly asked to wait for some time. Even her promise on Monday to speak to the media has not been met as only Mr Dhinakaran was giving interviews. It was to a television channel he said that Ms Sasikala would storm the party headquarters and also do audits and that their priority was to retrieve the AIADMK. He also claimed that MLAs and ministers were in touch with them.



Son of veteran actor late Sivaji Ganesan, Ramkumar, joined BJP on Thursday. —DC

Sivaji's son Ramkumar, Karate Thiagarajan join BJP

Chennai, Feb 11: Late iconic Tamil actor Sivaji Ganesan's son Ram Kumar and former deputy mayor of Chennai Corporation Karate R Thiagarajan joined the BJP here on Thursday.

Ram Kumar, also a film producer, and his son

Dushyanth joined the BJP in the presence of senior leader and Tamil Nadu incharge C T Ravi and state unit chief L Murugan. Kumar said his father Ganesan's ideology of nationalism and divinity, should return to Tamil Nadu, adding that was the

reason why he joined the BJP.

Hailing Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he said, "I am also a foot soldier here." Thiagarajan, who was formerly with the AIADMK and then the Congress, joined the BJP along with his support-

ers at a grand function here. Earlier in the day, the state election office of the BJP was inaugurated here following pujas. Former MLA from Coonoor, Soundarapandian, has also joined the party, Murugan said. —PTI

Amma mandapam bathing ghat sees large crowd on Thai amavasai

DC CORRESPONDENT
SRIRANGAM, FEB. 11

After a gap of over eight months due to Covid-19, the Amma mandapam bathing ghat was opened for public especially for those who perform 'tithi' for their forefathers on Thai amavasai at Sri Rangam, Tiruchy, on

Thursday. There was a large turnout of public for the ritual. Similar events took place on the banks of river Cauvery and Kollidam in different parts of Tiruchy district.

A large gathering also assembled at Kameswaram, a fishermen hamlet in

Nagapattinam district, to perform 'tithi' for their forefathers. People of Karur district performed 'tithi' on the banks of river Cauvery and Amaravathi, while people of Perambalur, Ariyalur, Pudukkottai and Tiruvallur district performed 'tithi' in different water bodies in their respective districts.



Thousands take a holy dip in Agnithiertham sea near Ramanathaswamy temple in Rameswaram on Thursday to pay tributes to their forefathers as it was Thai Amavasai. It is considered to be an auspicious day to seek the blessings of the departed souls. —S. P. Loganathan

No politics behind attaching Sasikala assets: Min

DC CORRESPONDENT
NAGAPATTINAM, FEB. 11

There is no political intention behind confiscating the assets of V. K. Sasikala and her relatives and the proceedings are based on the directions of the Supreme Court as well as the union government, according to handloom minister O.S.Manian.

Manian told the media, on the sidelines of foundation stone laying ceremony for a Rs 140 lakh yatri nivas at new bus stand at Nagore, on Thursday that the AIADMK cadres will not exceed the party's commands and those who took part in the reception given to Sasikala are not AIADMK cadres.

Replying to a question, he said people of Tamil Nadu are aware of the AMMK's strength during the recent local bodies elections.

Earlier, the minister accompanied S.Valarmathi, backward class and minorities welfare minister, and inaugurated the renovation of the Nagore dargah tank including the construction of four side walls of the tank which was damaged in the recent Puravi storm.

Delay in sealing of illegal resorts in MTR questioned
Activist sends notice to Nilgiris collector for speedy actionB. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, FEB. 11

Irked by the delay in taking action against the illegal tourist cottages and resorts in Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR) buffer zone limits which recently witnessed the gruesome killing of a wild elephant by an unauthorized resort owner, the Chennai-based environmentalist 'Elephant Rajendran' once again issued legal notice to the Nilgiris collector for speedy action, and urged the authorities to snap power supply to all these illegal cottages.

Elephant G. Rajendran, in a

legal notice sent to the Nilgiris Collector, expressed shock over the Masinagudi panchayat president sending letter to the Block Development Officer (BDO) in Ooty as well as the Nilgiris collector seeking regularization of the unauthorised tourist resorts, cottages and homestays, is an attempt to save such illegal buildings.

"There is reason to believe that this is done for extraneous consideration. There is illegal trade, tax evasion and all types of violations. It is also learnt that the BDO and other officials who went to seal such unauthorized cottages, returned without seal-

ing them. It may be due to mutual understanding with the Masinagudi panchayat president as the Masinagudi panchayat has

jurisdiction over private lands in MTR buffer zone. The officials seemed to be colluding with the violators and refused to execute their power in accordance to law," he noted, and wanted immediate action against the president of Masinagudi panchayat and also action to seal and demolish all such unauthorized tourists cottages, resorts and homestays.

In a legal notice issued to the superintending engineer, TNEB, the Nilgiris, he noted

that after obtaining power connection for residential purpose, the unauthorized resort/tourist cottage owners

converted them for commercial purpose, thus bringing loss to the TNEB exchequer. Power supply to all those unauthorized tourist resorts and cottages must be snapped immediately, he stressed. He also wanted the Nilgiris superintendent of police to close the Kalhatti ghat road in the interest of protecting the environment and wildlife. He warned of seeking judicial remedy if concerned officials failed to act immediately.

VFF
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MS ANANDAN

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WORLDWIDE

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TAPAS NAYAK | VISHAGYARAJ | S MURUGADOSS | SATHYA RJ | PALLAVI SINGH
JAYALAKSHMI SUNDARESAN | D VENKATESH | K RAVI | JOHNSON | KANNADASAN DKO

PRODUCED BY VISHAL

TOTAL TAMILNADU RELEASE BY VFF

SHORT TAKES

**1-YEAR-OLD DIES
AFTER FALLING
INTO BOREWELL PIT**AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO | DC
BHUBANSWAR, FEB. 11

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

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

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

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

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

**26,121 INDIAN
WEBSITES
HACKED IN 2020**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**ODISHA MAN GETS
LIFE TERM FOR
ESPIONAGE**AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 11

The Court of Additional District Judge in Odisha's Balasore district on Thursday convicted a youth named Ishwara Behera on espionage charge and sentenced him to life imprisonment.

Behera, a contractual cameraman at Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) was convicted for passing confidential and sensitive information of Integrated Test Range (ITR) in Chandipur to Pakistan's intelligence agency ISI.

He was convicted under Sections 121A (treason) and 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), and 3, 4 and 5 of the Official Secrets Act.

Behera was found guilty for the offences of spying and wrongful communication of information protected under the law with the court said that his actions caused severe security threat to the nation.

Behera, a resident of Kantipur village of Mayurbhanj district, was arrested on January 22, 2015 for allegedly supplying secret information on various missiles test-fired by DRDO from Wheeler Island to his ISI conduit in Kolkata.

Ishwar was employed as a cameraperson at the ITR on contractual basis in 2007. He had been spying for ISI for the last 8-10 months prior to his arrest. A hard disk, two mobile phones and a bank passbook had been seized from his possession at the time of arrest.

Farm laws only to help big corporates: Rahul

'Industrialists will buy unlimited quantities of foodgrains'

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

A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Lok Sabha staunchly defended the newly enacted agri laws and supported private enterprises and greater investment in agriculture sector, Mr Gandhi stepped up the attack, alleging that these laws will destroy India's food security system and will hurt the rural economy.

"The intent of the three laws is to allow industrialists to buy unlimited quantities of foodgrains and hoard them as much as they want," Mr Gandhi said in the Lok Sabha.

Asserting that the laws were enacted to ensure the right price to the farmers for their produce and help them sell their produce anywhere in the country, Mr Singh said, "an atmosphere of confusion has been created" and it is being claimed that the wholesale market will no longer exist, the MSP system will come to an end and the land of the farmers would be mortgaged.

The farmers were "mis-



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

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

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

Speaking to reporters after meeting Mr Modi, Mr Kumar said his party is with the government on the issue and that the Centre has opted for the right path by holding talks with the farmer unions agitating against the three laws.

YOU WILL ALSO START CHANTING 'JAI SHREE RAM': SHAH TELLS MAMATADC CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, FEB. 11

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

"The environment in Bengal has been made such that Jai Shree Ram slogan is an offence! If Jai Shree Ram can not be chanted in Bengal then

where will it be, in Pakistan? Why does Mamata-di feel insulted hearing this? The entire country and crores of people across the world feel proud remembering our icon. But she finds its problematic because she needs votes of a particular community through appeasement. Don't their (read: Hindus) votes matter? I can promise you, Mamata-di will also chant Jai Shree Ram while the polls getting over," Shah told a rally in Coochbehar in North Bengal.

Follow Indian law: Min

From Page 1

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

● Equating the Red Fort violence with the US Capitol Hill riots, Mr Prasad said while the social media companies took immediate action there, they failed to do so when protesters ran riot at Red Fort on Republic Day.

plementaries on the social media manipulation of public opinion and media manipulative survey.

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

The government, he said, was committed to

the freedom of the media and the rights of individuals but it was equally concerned about safety, security, and law and order in the country.

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

"This double standard would not work here," said the minister, as he pointed to the inflammatory content, especially those with the hashtag accusing PM Narendra Modi of planning the "genocide" of farmers.



Rescue operations continue at Tapovan Tunnel in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand on Thursday, following the Sunday's glacier burst in Joshimath causing a massive flood in the Dhauliganga river. — PTI

Border disengagement will be verifiable, says Rajnath

From Page 1

"These will be the focus of further discussions with the Chinese side. We have agreed that both sides should achieve complete disengagement at the earliest and abide fully by the bilateral agreements and protocols," said Mr Singh. He said that by now, the Chinese side is also fully aware of India's resolve. "It is therefore our expectation that the Chinese side will work with us in full sincerity to resolve these remaining issues," said the defence minister.

Sources said that tanks and armoured vehicles are been pulled back from South bank of Pangong Tso and there is thinning of troops from the northern banks of the lake. The Indian Army is expected to leave strategic heights on Kailash range which it occupied in August on South bank of the lake in the Chushul sector, in the second phase after verified disengagement action by Chinese.

The defence minister said India has consistently maintained that while bilateral relations can develop in parallel with

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

The disengagement in Pangong Tso is significant as it was the most contentious stand-off points

between India and China since May 2020. In May last year, China had occupied the area between finger 4 and 8 on the North bank of Pangong Tso where Indian troops used to patrol. Indian and Chinese troops had brutally clashed in the finger area in May last year. In a counter move, Indian Army in August last year occupied strategic heights on the south bank of Pangong Tso which allowed it to dominate the Chushul-Moldo Chinese garrison. The Chinese were taken by surprise by Indian move and they made several failed

CBSE issues guidelines for class 9, 11 examinations

New Delhi, Feb. 11: The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has directed schools under it to take steps to identify and resolve learning gaps, and then conduct examinations for Classes 9 and 11 by following Covid-19 safety protocols.

The board has also recommended that the new academic session begin from April 1.

"For Classes 9 and 11, schools should take steps to identify and remedy the learning gaps and thereafter, conduct examinations by strictly following Covid-19 safety protocols as per the Examination By-Laws," the Central Board of Secondary Education Controller of Examination Sanyam Bhardwaj said in a letter to school principals.

"This exam will also help in identifying learning gaps which could be addressed by schools in the new academic session, at the beginning of classes, by having a bridge course specially designed to address learning gaps,"

● IT WOULD be appropriate to start the academic session 2021-2022 from April 1 to the extent feasible subject to the instructions of state governments, CBSE suggested.

he said.

Schools were shut in March last year as a precautionary measure following the outbreak of the Coronavirus. During the subsequent nationwide lockdown, students moved to online classes. But as restrictions were gradually eased from June last year, schools reopened partially in a few states from October 2020 onwards.

In the letter, Bhardwaj said, "While holding examinations/classes, Covid-19 safety protocols should be followed strictly. It would be appropriate to start the academic session 2021-2022 from April 1 to the extent feasible subject to the instructions of state governments."

Schools are requested to follow the suggestions to make the next session

more streamlined and ensure that learning gaps, if any, are addressed, he added.

"Schools have opened in a majority of states and with the improvement of Covid-19 pandemic situation, it is expected that schools will be opened in other states and Union Territories. Schools should be fully geared up and prepared to welcome the students for face to face classes. This will help students attend schools for completing their practicals," Bhardwaj said.

The CBSE had earlier this month announced the schedule for board exams for classes 10 and 12.

"The board has taken decision to reschedule the class 10 and 12 exams from May-June, because of the unprecedented situation arising due to Covid-19 pandemic. As a result a number of schools have been seeking advice from CBSE regarding examinations for classes 9 and 11 and about the commencement of new academic session, Bhardwaj said.

— PTI

Holy dip

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra takes a holy dip in Sangam on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya during the ongoing Magh Mela in Prayagraj on Thursday. — PTI

Maha disallows use of VVIP aircraft for Gov.

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC
MUMBAI, FEB. 11

The Maharashtra government on Thursday denied the permission to use the aircraft for Koshiyari was sought nine days in advance, but there was no response from the government. "Is it not the duty of the government to respond to the Governor office's proposal?" he asked.

An official statement issued by Raj Bhavan said, "Governor of Maharashtra and Goa Bhagat Singh Koshiyari is scheduled to preside over the official programme of the Valedictory Function of the 122nd Induction Training Programme of IAS officers at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration at Mussoorie, Uttarakhand at 10.00 am on Friday, 12 February 2021. In this con-

nection, the Governor was scheduled to depart from CSIM Airport Mumbai for Dehradun at 10.00 am on Thursday 11th February 2021."

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

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

the Governor about the state's non-clearance. Meanwhile, the sources in Raj Bhavan said that the permission to use the aircraft for Koshiyari was sought nine days in advance, but there was no response from the government. "Is it not the duty of the government to respond to the Governor office's proposal?" he asked.

attempts to occupy these heights. The sector also witnessed first incident of firing in 45 years at LAC as tension soared after India's pre-emptive move. Both China and India brought their tanks in the area which remained virtually in eyeball to eyeball confrontation. In the subsequent talks, China was insisting on India first vacating these strategic heights in the southern banks of Pangong Tso, while refusing to discuss finger areas on the Northern side of the lake. ments and protocols," said Mr Singh. He said that

by now, the Chinese side is also fully aware of India's resolve. "It is therefore our expectation that the Chinese side will work with us in full sincerity to resolve these remaining issues," said the defence minister.

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He said India has consistently maintained that while bilateral relations can develop in parallel with discussions on resolving the boundary question, any serious disturbance in peace and tranquility along the LAC in the border areas is bound to have adverse implications for the direction of our bilateral ties. Mr Singh said actions by the Chinese side since last year have seriously disturbed peace and tranquility.

SHORT TAKES

7.7-MAGNITUDE
QUAKE LEADS TO
SMALL TSUNAMI

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

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

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

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

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

PORN MOGUL
LARRY FLYNT
DEAD AT 78

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

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

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

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

FAKING EVEREST
SUMMIT: NEPAL
BANS 3 INDIANS

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

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

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

Biden talks tough
in first call to Xi

Slams China's unfair trade, crackdown in HK

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—PTI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—AP

LUKASHENKO VOWS TO DEFEAT REBELLION

Kyiv, Feb. 11: Belarus' authoritarian leader on Thursday denounced six months of protests against his rule as a foreign-directed "rebellion" and vowed to resist the pressure. Speaking to 2,700

participants of the All-Belarus People's Assembly, President Alexander Lukashenko charged that "very powerful forces" abroad were behind the protests. Lukashenko didn't elaborate, but over the

past several months he has repeatedly accused the West of fomenting the protests.

"We must stand up to them no matter what, and this year will be decisive," he said.

—AP

CANINE | COMPANION

It's established pets are attuned to interest owners show

Dogs play more when humans watch

Washington, Feb. 11: Pet dogs are far more likely to play with one another when their owner is present and being attentive, according to a new study, raising the intriguing possibility that they are putting on a show for our benefit. That our canine companions are keenly attuned to the level of interest humans are showing them is well established, Lindsay Mehrkam, an animal behaviourist and lead author of the paper that appeared in *Animal Cognition*, said. "But we weren't aware of

any research that has really shown the effect of a human audience impacting species typical behaviour, in this case dog-dog play," Mehrkam, an assistant professor of psychology at Monmouth University, oversaw an experiment involving 10 pairs of pet dogs that had lived together for at least six months.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—AFP



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

—AFP

Nations curb Myanmar ties

Seoul, Feb. 11: A growing number of governments are curbing diplomatic ties with Myanmar and increasing economic pressure on its military over the coup last week that erased the fragile democratic progress in the long-oppressed Southeast Asian nation. President Joe Biden said Wednesday he was issuing an executive order that will prevent Myanmar's generals from accessing \$1 billion in assets in the United States, and promised more measures.

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

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

In Washington, Biden

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

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

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

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

—AP

AstraZeneca works
to adapt vaccine
for newer strains

London, Feb. 11: AstraZeneca said Thursday it's working with the University of Oxford to adapt its Covid-19 vaccine to protect against new strains of the virus as public health officials raise concerns about mutations that may make the virus more resistant to existing vaccines.

The Anglo-Swedish drugmaker worked with Oxford to develop one of the first Covid-19 vaccines authorized for widespread use. AstraZeneca said it hopes to cut the time needed to produce large amounts of any new vaccine to between six and nine months. The comments came as AstraZeneca said fourth-quarter net income rose to \$1.01 billion from \$313 million in the same quarter a year earlier.

Drug sales increased 11 per cent to \$7.41 billion, driven by a 24 per cent increase in cancer treatments. The company posted \$2 million of revenue from its Covid-19 vaccine, which it has pledged to supply on a non-profit basis during the pandemic, and said it would begin reporting sales of the vaccine separately beginning in the next quarter.

—AP

FRENCH NUN,
TURNS 117 AFTER
SURVIVING COVID

Toulon, France, Feb. 11: Europe's oldest person, French nun Sister Andre, turns 117 on Thursday after surviving Covid-19 last month and living through two world wars, with a special birthday feast including her favourite dessert — baked Alaska.

Born Lucile Randon on February 11, 1904, Sister Andre said she didn't realise she had caught the Coronavirus, which infected 81 residents of her retirement home in the southeast city of Toulon, killing 10 of them. "I'm told that I got it," the nun said on Wednesday at the home, where she sat basking in the winter sun, her eyes closed and hands clasped in prayer. "I was very tired, it's true, but I didn't realise it," she added in a steady, strong voice that belies her years.

Sister Andre said she was not planning to do anything special for her 117th birthday.

—AFP

WHO: Europe
still vulnerable

Copenhagen, Feb. 11: The World Health Organisation on Thursday warned of a "false sense of security" in Europe, saying most of the continent's nations were still vulnerable despite a fall in Covid cases.

WHO Europe director Hans Kluge told a press conference that "the decline in cases conceals increasing numbers of outbreaks and community spread involving variants of concern." More than a million cases are registered every week across the 53 member states in the UN agency's European region, which includes several in central Asia.

But the number of reported cases has been falling over the past four weeks and deaths have also been declining over the past two weeks.

"At this point, the overwhelming majority of European countries remain vulnerable," Kluge said, adding that as of now there is "a thin line between the hope of a vaccine and a false sense of security."

The number of vaccine doses administered in Europe now stands at 41 million, greater than the nearly 36 million cases recorded since the start of the pandemic.

—AFP

GREATER CHENNAI CORPORATION PARKS DEPARTMENT	
P.D.C. No. P2/907/2020	
e-TENDER NOTICE	
Tenders are invited by the Superintending Engineer / Parks for the following work as per details furnished below:	
Formation of new playground at Annai Sathya nagar in Dn-60, Zn-5	
Approx. value of work in Rs. 81.02 Lakhs - E.M.D.: 1% Rs.82,000/-	
For more information see www.tntenders.gov.in and www.chennai corporation.gov.in	
Due Date and Time for Submission of tender: 01.03.2021 upto 3.00 pm	
Tender opening date and time : 02.03.2021 @ 3.30 pm.	
DIPR/1018/tender/2021 Superintending Engineer (Parks)	

PSPCL Punjab State Power Corporation Limited	
Regd. Office: PSEB, Head Office, The Mall, Patiala-147001 Corporate Identification Number (CIN): U40109PB2010SGC033813 Phone No. 0175-2213047, Fax No. 0175-2225024 Mob: 096461-82644, 096461-11035 email: pocablensteel@yahoo.in e-tendering page: www.eproc.punjab.gov.in	
TENDER NOTICE	
Short Description	Design, Manufacture, Testing, Inspection, Packing and Delivery of ISI marked, Multi Core, LT, XLPE insulated, PVC sheathed, Aluminum Conductor, unarmoured cable, as per IS: 7098 (Part- I)1988 (with latest amendments/revisions if any) and as per PSPCL specification No.QQ-1305/ PO/C&S of following sizes & Quantity:-
	S No. Size(mm ²) Quantity (Km)
	1 4C×25mm ² 800
	2 4C×95mm ² 160
Start date for down loading of Specification/tender documents from www.eproc.punjab.gov.in	12,February, 2021
Last date for down loading of Specification/tender documents from www.eproc.punjab.gov.in	18, March, 2021 (upto 11:00 AM)
Last date for Bid Submission	18, March, 2021 (upto 11:00 AM)
Bid Opening date	22, March, 2021 (11:00 AM)
For detailed NIT & Tender specification please refer to www.eproc.punjab.gov.in	
Note :- It is informed that in case tender process is not completed due to any reason, no corrigendum will be published in newspapers. Details regarding corrigendum may be seen on www.eproc.punjab.gov.in	
C-55/21 RO No PR-Advt. No :- 76155/12/89/2021/1451	
Chief Purchase officer/MM, Central Purchase Organisation, PSPCL, Patiala.	

DECCAN Chronicle

12 FEBRUARY 2021

Twitter's snub of Centre's selective outrage timely

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

The government's fear of its image abroad being hammered by celebrities with a large following on the social media has led to it calling for Twitter to take down nearly 1,200 accounts following tweets on farmer protests. Some of those accounts may be backed by Pakistan or Khalistan sympathisers, and sported ridiculously hateful hashtags like "farmers' genocide".

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

Orders to take them down are legitimate and may have already been acted upon. To insist on a virtual blanket ban on one side of the arguments in support of the farmers, which might be more universal among Indians than the government may imagine, is what makes government action suspicious in the eyes of the votaries of free speech and expression. In a free world, Indian developers are free, too, to set up microblogging platforms like Koo.

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

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

PM's red herring

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

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

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

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

Subhani



Simultaneous polls to be a blow to smaller parties

Sanjay Kumar



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS

POLL PROCESS

Apropos your report *TN political parties tell CEC they prefer one-day poll* (Feb. 11). As the Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora had been in the state to review the poll preparedness, we had all our Tamil Nadu political parties who had put forth their requests for a single phase poll which also included a number of demands like provision of CCTV footage at polling booths, deployment of security services from the central force, discrepancies in the electorate list which need to be rectified and the duration period of counting should not prolong for too long from the date of polling.

Jacqueline Netto, Chennai

WELCOME ANNOUNCEMENT

THE CHIEF Election Commissioner of India Sunil Arora's announcement that in view of the pandemic, polling time in the four states going to assembly elections would be increased by an hour is welcome. Increasing the number of polling stations by 25,000 numbers from 78,000 to 9,30,000 in Tamil Nadu would call for more expenditure and more supervising staff to prevent malpractices. But this decision is also laudable keeping in mind the Covid-19 situation which is still threatening. But it would have been welcome if separate polling stations/ booths are allocated for electorate above 50 years of age. A decision has not been taken to allow postal votes for senior citizens above 80 years of age.

M.C. Vijay Shankar, Chennai

NEW TREND

IT IS really shocking that such a massive welcome was extended to Sasikala who was returning from jail after serving a four-year sentence by the courts for amassing wealth disproportionate to her income. Isn't it a real shame that people have turned sycophants to adore someone who went to jail not for any social cause but for corruption charges? Is it not a reflection on the society we are also part of? We understand that she has informed the crowd that came to welcome her that she would definitely wreak vengeance against her betrayers who have stabbed her from behind. Her entry into politics is definitely going to create problem for the present AIADMK government in the ensuing elections.

Tharcus S. Fernando, Chennai

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Tarun Chugh



A Budget of aspirations, self-reliance

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

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

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

The development of any nation depends on transportation networks

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The writer is national general secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Party

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	51,531.52 0.43
Nifty 50	15,173.30 0.44
S&P 500*	3,914.48 0.12
Dollar (₹)	72.86 -0.02
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.79 -0.01
Euro (₹)	88.29 0.005
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,509▲36 0.07
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	61.35 -0.20
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.962 -0.80
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.145 -0.007

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Average salary to increase 6.4% in 2021: Survey

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

Sun Pharma, Shanghvi settle case with Sebi



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

Indians spend highest time on smartphones

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

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

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



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

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 11

The gross loan portfolio of micro lenders has grown in double-digits in the December quarter over the previous quarter, but gross delinquencies have also moved up.

The gross loan portfolio (GLP) of all lenders recorded a growth of 16 per cent during the December quarter to Rs 2,27,893 crore compared with Rs 1,96,820 crore in the year-ago quarter. The GLP of all lenders in the previous quarter, September 2020, was marginally higher at Rs 2,27,843 crore.

However, delinquencies during the October-December period reached disturbing levels of 13 per cent, higher than the post-



demonetisation levels.

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

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

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

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

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

Grofers mulls US listing via merger

BAIJU KALESH &
ANTO ANTONY
FEB. 11

Grofers, an online grocer, is weighing a plan to go public in the US through a merger with a special purpose acquisition company (Spac), people familiar with the matter said.

The SoftBank Vision Fund-backed company is working with an adviser, one of the people said, asking not to be named as the information is not public. The grocer is seeking a deal that would value the

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

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

The Spacs trend is rapid-

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

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

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

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

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

ADITYA MITTAL NAMED CEO OF ARCELORMITTAL

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

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

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

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

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

—PTI

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

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, FEB. 11

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

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

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

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

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

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

(With inputs from Ravi Ranjan Prasad)

Life without Google: Oz facing the unthinkable

ANGUS WHITLEY &
GEORGINA MCKAY
FEB. 11

Imagine a world without Google, the search engine so pervasive it's the starting point for more than five billion queries a day. That's the reality facing Australia, where the tech giant is threatening to unplug its homepage in a standoff with the government.

Google opposes a planned law that would force the company and Facebook Inc. to pay Australian publishers for news content. The Internet juggernaut's ultimatum to local lawmakers—change the legislation, or else—has left a digital vacuum hanging over a nation that essentially knows just one way to navigate the web. Google runs 95 per cent of Internet searches in Australia.

Potential fallout from the spat goes far beyond Australia for Alphabet Inc.-owned Google, whose dominance of global

advertising has made it a target for watchdogs worldwide. If the company backs down in Australia, the pay-for-news law risks becoming a template for jurisdictions, including Canada and the European Union that are following the quarrel and keen to shorten Google's lead.

But disabling what is arguably the world's most famous website would hand all of Australia to rivals, including Microsoft Corp's Bing and DuckDuckGo, which have failed to dislodge Google as the gateway to the web. These search-engine competitors would suddenly have a playground for development and a foothold to advance on the global stage.

Software-engineering student Patrick Smith exemplifies Australia's Google dependency. The 24-year-old from Canberra said he sometimes racks up 400 Google searches a day to help with his studies, catch up on news and look up

recipes. Smith said his browser from the previous day shows 150 searches—in the space of just five hours.

"The prospect of Google search disappearing is frightening at best," Smith said. "It's quite reflexive of me to Google something, anything, that I'm even mildly not sure of."

Searching for 'best beach Sydney' shows the variance in performance among Google's competitors. DuckDuckGo's first result was an ad for a hotel more than 1,000 kilometres away in Queensland. Search Encrypt, which touts its data-protection capability, said: "It looks like there aren't any great matches." Bing suggested Bondi Beach Post Office. Only Google returned a real beach, Bondi, first up.

The world-first legislation is still being debated in Australia's parliament and a report on the law from a key senate committee is due Friday.

—Bloomberg

RAILTEL SETS ₹93-₹94 PRICE BAND FOR IPO

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, FEB. 11

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

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

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

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

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

World is going electric and MNCs are upbeat

RUDY RUITENBERG
FEB. 11

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

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

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

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

Schneider forecast organic sales growth of 5 to 8 per cent in 2021. Its

shares rose as much as 2.9 per cent and advanced 22 per cent last year.

Siemens last week raised its earnings outlook, while ABB reported better-than-expected revenue thanks to a rebound in Germany and China and rising orders linked to data centres, EV chargers and renewable energy.

Smaller rival Legrand SA reported results on Thursday that were in line with expectations, with the fourth quarter "not matching the general trend in the sector for big profit beats," RBC analyst Wasi Rizvi said. Legrand predicted organic sales growth of 1 to 6 per cent, trailing Schneider's outlook.

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

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

—Bloomberg

Passenger vehicle sales up 11% in Jan: Siam

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, FEB. 11

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

Domestic wholesales of passenger vehicles rose 11.14 per cent year-on-year to 2.77 lakh units last month, according to the Siam.

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

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

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

Three-wheeler sales, however, declined by 56.76

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

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

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

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

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

ATMA NIRBHAR | AMERICA

Firms say country's share dwindling

US chip makers lobby for local mfg

IAN KING
FEB. 11

The chief executive officers of chip companies including Intel Corp, Qualcomm Inc and Advanced Micro Devices Inc urged US President Joe Biden to support domestic production and stop the country from losing its edge in innovation. The Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA) sent a letter on Thursday to Biden to include "substantial funding for incentives for semiconductor manufacturing, in the form of grants and/or tax credits" in his administration's stimulus package.

The letter, signed by Bob Swan of Intel, Steve



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

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

The SIA argues that government incentives in other countries have unfairly disadvantaged US chip manufacturing. The US has historically shied away from tax breaks and other major government support for the industry, but some politicians have become concerned about the loss of these technical skills.

Support by the Biden administration may even help TSMC and Samsung to go ahead with plans to build plants nearer their customers in the US. TSMC has announced an initial agreement to locate a new chip facility in Arizona. Samsung is considering various sites in the US.

—Bloomberg

HALDIRAM'S FIGHTS LOOK-ALIKE SITES

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

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

Business
NOTE

SHORT TAKES

Sprinter Hima is policewoman

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

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

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

— PFI

Tokyo chief Mori set to resign

Tokyo: Tokyo Olympics chief Yoshiro Mori is to resign after he sparked outrage in Japan and abroad by claiming that women talk too much in meetings, reports said Thursday. The decision comes after a barrage of criticism from politicians to sports stars, and is the latest headache for organisers as they battle public disquiet over plans to hold the Games this summer despite the pandemic. Multiple Japanese media outlets, citing anonymous sources, said the 83-year-old has told officials he wishes to step down and will announce his resignation at a meeting of Games organisers on Friday. His most likely successor is Saburo Kawabuchi, an 84-year-old long-time sports administrator, local media reported.

— AFP

Rizwan century sinks Proteas

Lahore: In-form wicketkeeper batsman Mohammad Rizwan's scintillating century helped Pakistan beat South Africa by 3 runs in the first Twenty20 International against South Africa in Lahore on Thursday. Rizwan smashed 104 for his maiden hundred to guide Pakistan to 169-6. In reply, South Africa fought hard but could only manage to score 166 for the loss of 6 wickets in the stipulated 20 overs. Rizwan finished with 64-ball 104 not out comprising of six boundaries and seven sixes after South Africa won the toss and sent Pakistan in to bat at Gaddafi stadium.

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

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

Bonner bolsters WI on first day

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

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

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

ARCHER RULED OUT

Setback for England as pacer Jofra out of 2nd Test

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, FEB. 11

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

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

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

AXAR SET FOR TEST DEBUT

Axar Patel moved a step closer to making his Test debut as he resumed bowling in India nets on Thursday. A knee injury had ruled the left-arm spinner out of the opening Test against England. Axar's presence is expected to bolster the spin bowling department as Virat Kohli wasn't pleased with the way left-arm spinner Shahbaz Nadeem and offie Washington Sundar leaked runs in the first Test that India lost by 227 runs. Shahbaz and Washington failed to support India's frontline bowlers by maintaining pressure. Shahbaz had a match-haul of four wickets, but conceded 233 runs with an economy rate of around four per over. Washington went wicketless in the first innings and bowled just one over in the second.

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



Ajinkya Rahane, Jasprit Bumrah and Rohit Sharma during a training session in Chennai.

— BCCI

Foakes expects spinning track

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, FEB. 11

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

The 27-year-old's two-year wait will finally end when England take on India in the second Test



Ben Foakes

that begins here on Saturday. It's an enforced change as England's No.1 keeper Buttler has flown home as part of their rotation policy.

Foakes said he would love to have the same kind of impact he had in his

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

Having lost their first home Test since February 2017, India will be eager to hit back. With India 0-1 down, Foakes expects a spinning track for the second Test. "Obviously, it's an avenue that India would like to go down. Actually, I found it quite tricky to read the wicket. The pitch looks different to the last one — a darker soil. I think it might play a bit low and slow. The previous pitch played really

well for about three days. I think there is a potential that it will spin earlier. But we will wait to see what happens on the opening day," said Foakes.

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

Svitolina thrashes Gauff in round 2

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— AFP

TEAM INDIA REV UP FOR ASIAN LE MANS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 11

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

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

Racing Team India's Dubai debut will make it the first outfit with an all-Indian driver line-up to compete in international endurance racing. If it secures an invitation to the 24 Hours of Le Mans in June, it will become the first Indian team to take part in the iconic endurance classic at the Circuit de la Sarthe in France.

"Le Mans is like the whole Formula One championship in 24 hours. It's all about endurance, preserving the car and getting a great set up and work as a team. The pitstops need to be right, the driver changes, et al. The challenges are so many including driving at night at the speed of 300km every lap. It is the toughest race in the world without a doubt," Karthikeyan said.

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