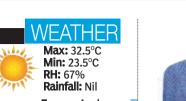
# nicle

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**NELLORE | WEDNESDAY | 24 FEBRUARY 2021** 



**DEATHS** 

Forecast: clear. Max/Min temp. 32/23 ºC



(+77)(+10,705)1,10,15,776 1,56,495 STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

 $NA^*$ NA\* TS: 2,97,712 1,625 (+70)(+1)AP: 8,89,409 7,168

CASES AROUND THE WORLD



worldometers.info/ \* TS stopped daily updates

### STROGUIDE

Sarvari; Uttarayana Tithi: Magha Shuddha Dwadasi till Star: Punarvasu till 1.11 pm **Varjyam:** 9.11 pm to 10.47 pm Durmuhurtam: 12.06 pm to 12.52 pm Rahukalam: 12 noon to 1.30 pm

**HIJRI CALENDAR** Rajab 11,1442 AH **PRAYERS** (SHAHI MASJID) Fajar: 5.18 am **Zohar:** 12.24 pm Asar: 4.38 pm Maghrib: 6.17 pm Isha: 7.28 pm SUNSET TODAY 6.17 PM

**SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.29 AM MOONRISE TODAY 3.33 PM** MOONSET TOMORROW 4.51 AM





Mantriji? He is always touring poll-bound states!

### **Jawan killed in**

## accidental fire

Jammu: An Army jawan was killed in an accidental firing during training here on Tuesday, a defence spokesman said. "Gunner Sayan Ghosh of Artillery Regiment suffered fatal injury due to a firing accident while carrying out live firing training at the field firing range (in Akhnoor sector)," the spokesman said. The incident occurred around 10.30 am. The spokesman said further details are being ascertained.

**WATER** WATER

NATION 4 **Arjun main tank's** 

purchase cleared

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WORLD 5

**US calls China just a** 'strong competitor'

SPORTS 8

**India take on England in** day-night Test from today



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# Jagan approves welfare scheme for EBC women

### Decides to allocate 5% land in private layouts for the poor

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 23

The State Cabinet headed by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Tuesday gave its nod to a new welfare scheme — EBC Nestham — that will benefit poor women belonging to forward castes.

Announcing this, information minister Perni Venkataramaih alias Nani said the new Economically Backward Caste (EBC) scheme — EBC Nestam — will be implemented from the coming financial year. Under it, the government

will provide financial assistance of ₹45,000 to each woman beneficiary aged between 45-60 years at the rate of ₹15,000 per annum for three years. He said the government has allotted ₹670 crore per annum for the scheme, totalling to ₹2,010 crore for three years. The cabinet also approved the welfare calendar for

He said the cabinet has decided to allocate five per cent of land in private layouts for the poor. Serious action will be initiated



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy is being felicitated by his ministerial colleagues in Amaravati on - DECCAN CHRONICLE

this rule. He said earlier 300 sq. ft. TIDCO houses had been given for ₹2.65 lakh each, whereas the YSRC government is giving it for only ₹1.

This government is allotting the same house for ₹3.4 lakh. The 465 sq.ft. houses had been allotted for ₹4.65 lakh each, while they are now being given for ₹4.15 lakh. The state will take a burden of ₹5,579 crore on account of the various decisions taken on

The cabinet has given its nod to roll out Kadapa Steel Plant works at a cost of ₹10,082 crore. It will be implemented in Phase1 and 2 through a joint venture partnership with a capacity of three million

tonnes in each phase. The cabinet approved the decision to complete investigation within 100 days with regard to those caught red-handed in the cases. The earlier limit was two years. The

amend the law providing for action against ACB officials if they do not complete the inquiry before

the stipulated deadline.

The minister said that the cabinet approved allotment of new fire stations and personnel in Kadapa and Chittoor districts. It gave its nod to upgrade PHCs to 50-bed hospitals in Penumuru and Karvetinagaram of Chittoor district. Medical and nonmedical staff will be recruited to that extent.

The cabinet approved recruitment of additional teaching and non-teaching staff for the newly established degree college in Kovvur. Multipurpose facility centres will be established in villages at a cost of ₹2,718 crore. About 165 acres of land in East Godavari district has been allotted to Maritime Board for taking up its opera-

Nani said 2,700 vehicles have been allocated for door-to-door collection of garbage in municipalities. Jagan has directed authorities to beautify every municipality within three to six months, adopting best practices like in Surat municipality of Gujarat.

## Toolkit case: Court grants bail to Disha, calls evidence scanty

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA with agency inputs NEW DELHI, FEB. 23

A Delhi court on Tuesday made strong remarks in favour of freedom of speech and expression and the right to dissent in the country while noting that any call for any kind of violence" was absent from the much maligned "toolk-it" as it granted bail to Disha Ravi, the 22-year-old activist arrested from Bengaluru on February

13.

Commenting that the police's case against Ms Ravi was based on "scanty

and sketchy" evidence, the court said that "the offence of sedition cannot be invoked to minister to the wounded vanity of the governments" Ms Ravi is accused of

creating and disseminating an online document that lists out how people can support the farmers' prot-est against the three news laws. Police has claimed that the document was meant to revive a Khalistani group and was part of a global conspiracy to "spread disaffection against the Indian state". The court rubbished that allegation in its order.

In Tuesday's brief hear ing, Ms Ravi's counsel stressed that she had no links with the Khalistani movement, and that a case of sedition could not be sustained.

The resistance to the bail plea," additional sessions judge Dharmendra Rana said, "seems to be more of ornamental in nature... Considering the scanty and sketchy evidence available on record I do not find any palpable reasons to breach the general rule of 'Bail' against a 22-year-old young lady, with blemish free crimi-

# Illegal quarry explosives set off accidentally, kill 6 in Karnataka

Bengaluru/Chikkaballa pur, Feb. 23: Six people were killed when the gelatin sticks they were trying to dispose of clandestinely exploded accidentally at a stone quarry site in a village in Chikkaballapur early Tuesday, police said.
The government

The government has ordered a CID probe into the blast. Police said preinvestigation liminary indicated use of petroleum and Ammonium POLICE SAID preliminary investigation indicated use of petroleum gel and Ammonium Nitrate in the quarry that was operating clandestinely and was closed a few days ago following raids.

Nitrate in the quarry that was operating clandestinely and was closed a few days ago following raids.

blast at a quarry site in Yediyurappa's hometown

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

Full report on Page 4

# Kakinada farmers to get back 2,180 acres SEZ land

**VADREVU SRINIVAS | DC** 

The nearly one-and-a-half pensation.

for-land" policy. Following the decision, 'saviour of farmers'

ited the KSEZ area and promised to sort out the issue. "The CM has fulfilled his promise and proved his credibility," said KSEZ Vyathireka Porata Samiti

Suryanarayana Murthy. He thanked Kakinada MLA Dadisetti

"People of the area will be worshipping Jagan as a saviour'," said Samiti leader B. Narayana Swamy.

decades' struggle of farmers under Kakinada Special Economic Zone Kakinada (KSEZ) fructified with the state cabinet on Tuesday deciding to return around 2,180 acres of land in the zone to farmers who have refused to take any com-

If small extents of 5–10 acres of land adjacent to KSEZ are there, these farmers will be given the same extent of land at another place the "land-

#### The CM took a decision to give back farmers about 2000 acres of land acquired for Kakinada SEZ.

some of the farmers have called Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy as Particularly delighted

are farmers of U. Kothapalli and Thondangi mandal in East Godavari During his padayatra

when he was the opposi-

MP Vanga Gita, Tuni Pithapuram MLA Pendem Dorababu and others who fully supported farmers on the issue.

# Assembly to resolve against privatisation of VSP's RINL

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 23

The Andhra Pradesh Cabinet on Tuesday decided to pass a resolution in the state Assembly against privatisation of the Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited, the corporate entity of Visakhapatnam Stool Plant The Steel Plant. The resolution will be introduced in the budget session of the Assembly after the munic-

and information, Perni Venkataramaiah said in his media briefing after the cabinet meeting that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy visited Visakhapatnam and held lengthy discussions with trade union representatives and mass organisations on the pri-

vatisation move. The Chief Minister told them that he had already written a letter to Prime

to explore alternatives to the privatization and keep the steel plant in the public sector in the interest of the people of Andhra Pradesh. A team of MPs was also sent to New Delhi to meet Central leaders and apprise them of the situation, he said.

'Keeping these in view, the Cabinet has decided to pass a resolution in the assembly in the budget session," Perni Nani said.

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KCR opposes AP building canal at Rajolibanda

### Another TS, AP water row erupts Official sources said that Rao discussed the issue with

L. VENKAT RAM REDDY I DC HYDERABAD, FEB. 23

Yet another water row has erupted between Telang-ana and Andhra Pradesh.

The Telangana state gov-ernment took a serious view of the AP governm-ent launching works to construct a canal at Rajolibanda village in Kurnool district, in parallel to the existing Rajolibanda Diversion Scheme (RDS) to draw additional water wit-hout obtaining any appro-vals from various government

agencies. This will deny

**PUBLIC REPRESENTATIVES** and farmers of Gadwal and Mahabubnagar districts complained to Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao that the Andhra Pradesh government had started making markings to dig a canal on the right side of the RDS.

Official sources said Rao discussed the issue with officials and directed them to lodge a complaint with the Krishna River Management Board, the Central Water Commission and the Apex Council of the Jal Shakti against the AP government.

while Maha-bubnagar dis-Public representatives of Gadwal and Mahabubn-agar

Telangana its rightful share

and adversely affect the erst-

districts complained to TS Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao that AP had started making markings to dig a canal on the right side of the RDS.

complaint with the Krishna River Management Board the Central Water Commiss ion and the Apex Council of the Union Jal Shakti ministry against the AP government and ensure that it sus pends these works. Though TS is supposed to get 16 tmc ft of water through the RDS it is getting less than five tmc currently due to leak-

officials on Tuesday and

directed them to lodge a

Page 2: Farmers worry about AP's parallel project

**CMYK** 

The incident comes close on the heels of a similar of Shivamogga on January 22, which left six dead.

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### SHORT TAKES TD LEADERS IN **GANTA SEGMENT JOIN YSRC**

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 23

Second run leaders of the Telugu Desam Party, including former corporators and senior party workers from the Visakhapatnam North Assembly constituency represented by the former minister Ganta Srinivasa Rao. joined the ruling YSRC party Visakhapatnam

Tuesday They include former corporator and senior TDP leader Pakalapati Narsimha Raju, popularly known as Boxer Raju from 14th ward, general secretary Seeram Tataji from 42nd ward, senior party leader Dadi Srinivasa Rao and senior members of the party from 24th, 25th and 26th ward and their follow-

A meeting was held in the north constituency in which these leaders were welcomed into the ruling party. Local north constituency coordinator K.K. Raju, Visakha Dairy vice-chairman Adari Anand, Varudu Kalyani and others

were present.
A senior TDP leader told this correspondent that this was just the beginning and more leaders and party workers would be joining the ruling party in the ensuing

They are threatening the party leaders in the trading activities and real estate business with cases and tax

He also added that it was happening in Ganta Srinivasa Rao assembly constituency only and nowhere

Senior YSRC leaders including elected representatives are poaching the potential TDP leaders while campaigning in the wards," said vice president of the party Pasarla Prasad.

Former minister and TDP State president K.
Atchannaidu said the ruling party is coercing the leaders to join their party, and this was a state-wide phenomenon in the name of Akarsh.

We are counselling our leaders to stay firm and to not get lured by the ruling party," Atchannaidu said and added that he would be meeting the MLAs and top leaders of the Visakhapatnam city to discuss important issues relating to the GVMC elections on Wednesday.

### **HC RESERVES** VERDICT ON **ULBs PETITIONS**

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 23

Andhra Pradesh High Court completed a hearing on a batch of petitions seeking cancellation of the State Election Commission's order to resume the election process for urban local body polls and reserved its verdict here on Tuesday.

A single-judge bench headed by justice D.V.S.S. Somayajulu heard the counsels for peti-tioners saying that the SEC did not have the right to resume the election process for urban local bodies as it issued notification for conducting polls in March 2020 and deferred them due to the prevalence of Covid-19. Some petitions were also filed, seeking the issue of a fresh notification for conducting the urban local body polls. SEC's counsel N. Ashwani

Kumar argued that the SEC issued a notification in March 2020 to conduct urban local body polls and followed preva-lence of Covid-19 at that point of time, it deferred the polls and maintained that once a notification was issued, there was no provision to cancel it and issue a fresh notification. He informed the court that the Supreme Court also upheld the SEC's decision to defer the argued that the writ petitions filed on the issue were not entertainable.

Advocate general S. Sriram appearing for the state government, informed the court that the SEC consulted the state government for going ahead with the urban local body polls from the stage where they were deferred. After hearing both the parties, the judge announced the hearing's completion in the case and reserved the judgement.

In a related development, the High Court extended the interim order up to March 1 directing the SEC not to inquire in cases related to prevention of contestants from filing nominations or compelling the contestants to withdraw their nominations under duress in the earlier election process to MPTCs/ZPTCs held in March



The YSRC activists hold flags and placards during a campaign rally for the upcoming GVMC elections at the 30th

# **CM firm on developing** Amaravati, says Perni

Govt will go ahead with decentralisation plan: Minister

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 23

Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy is adhering development Amaravati, information and public relations min-ister Perni Venkatramaiah alias Nani asserted on Tuesday, refuting allegations that the CM is neglecting Amaravati. He charged that it is the farmers who have abused ministers, MPs and MLAs whenever they went to them to resolve the executive capital issue. He said that executive capital would come at Visakhapatnam in the

coming days. Briefing media about a meeting of the Cabinet on Tuesday, the information minister maintained that while the state government will go ahead with its decentralisation plan of executive, judicial and legislative capitals, it would not shun development of Amaravati as the legislative capital. He said despite Amaravati farmers being against the gov-ernment, CM Jagan has decided to construct a bridge and barrage on Krisnna River to provide connectivity to Amaravati. An outer ring road (ORR) will also be established linking Amaravati to the national highway, thereby provid-

lages in the vicinity of Amaravati. Nani asserted that it is not Chandrababu Naidu but Jagan Mohan Reddy who is developing Amaravati. As a result, the area is developing and land rates are also rising in the city. The minister said the cabinet discussed the results of gram panchayat elections. The CM congratulated ministers for ensuring victory of ruling YSRC in over 80 percent of the seats. Jagan asked ministers to further ensure victory of the ruling party in the scheduled municipal and MPTC / ZPTC elec-

ing connectivity to all vil-

tions too. THE INFORMATION minister maintained that while the state government will go ahead with its decentralisation plan of executive, judicial and legislative capitals, it would not shun development of Amaravati as the legislative capital.

### MANA BADI-NADU NEDU SECOND PHASE TO START IN APRIL: SURESH

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 23

Minister for education Adimulapu Suresh said the first phase of infrastructure work on 15,700 schools in the state under "Mana Badi – Nadu Nedu" will be completed in the coming month. Addressing a press conference on Tuesday, he said till date ₹2,570 crore have been spent on the project.

He stated that the reverse tendering has saved ₹245 crore on the purchase of fans, furniture and green boards. He said the second phase of Nadu Nedu will

start from April 1. Suresh said as per the directions of CM, high priority is being to the quality of works in the schools with usage of tiles and granite.

He said that in 45,000 schools, work was carried out in three phases.

SURESH SAID as per the directions of CM, high priority is being to the quality of works in the schools with usage of tiles and granite.

• **HE SAID** that in 45,000 schools, work was carried out in three phases.

He claimed that the YSRC government was giving high priority to education under which thousands of crores of rupees are being spent.

The minister disclosed that admissions in degree colleges have increased in the current academic year compared to last

More than 40,000 additional students have taken admissions in 1,336 public, private and aided degree colleges than the previous year.

## KSEZ struggle is successful: farmers

DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, FEB. 23

Farmers of Kakinada Special Economic Zone (KSEZ) have succeeded against all odds with the state government finally deciding to return certain extentw of lands back to the farmers. Political parties including BJP, CPI, CPM, Telugu

Desam and many non-governmental organisations visited the area and had expressed support for the farmers. The Kadali Organisation led by its secretary K. Rajendra launched the agitation in initial stages by creating awareness among farmers on the environmental issues they could face in future. Rajendra brought to the area many environmentalists including Medha Patkar and Balagopal. They created awareness among farmers and submitted representations on their behalf to

 TOTAL LAND involved in KSEZ area is 10,400 acres. FARMERS OF 2,180 acres refused to take compensa-

APIIC ACQUIRED 2,180 acres of land in Kona area of Thondangi mandal of which 550 acres has been allotted to Divis Labs.

central and state govern-

ments. When Chandrababu Naidu was in opposition in the united AP, he promised KSEZ farmers to give back their lands if he came to power. But after assuming power, he did not fulfil his promise despite ruling the

state from 2014 to 2019. "All political parties supported the farmers' agita-tion and we thank all of them. We will never forget CM Jagan as he has finally done justice to us," said KSEZ Vyathireka Porata Samithi convener Chinta Suryanarayana Murthy.

### TS FARMERS **WORRY ABOUT AP'S PROJECT**

**FROM PAGE 1** 

Farmers complained that if AP builds a parallel canal, it would deprive Telangana of even the minimum five tmc of

Irrigation project RDS is located on Tungabhadra river and spread in Gadwal district of Telangana, Kurnool district of AP and Raichur district of Karnataka. It is an inter-state barrage on Tungabhadra river, which supplies water to the three states.

The RDS is crucial for Telangana, as it irrigates about 87,000 acres in the state and 4,000 acres in AP. Telangana has been allocated 15.9 tmc from the RDS but only gets an average of only five tmc.

The RDS has only one

canal, which emanates from the left side of RDS anicut on Tungabhadra river. The anicut is locatat tne (Kurnool) and Karnataka (Raichur). The canal passes through Karnataka for 43 kms and flows into Telangana for the remaining 100 km. It is intended to serve an ayacut of 5,900 acres, utilising 1.2 tmc in Karnataka and 87,500 acres with 15.9 tmc in Telangana. The tailend reaches in Telangana have not been getting water for decades due to

RDS was one of the main issues during the Telangana statehood agitation. However, it was not addressed in the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014. Due to this, farmers under the RDS canal in Gadwal district are still awaiting their rightful share of water to reach their fields even more than six years after Telangana state

leakages.

formed

IRRIGATION PROJECT RDS is located on Tungabhadra river and spread in Gadwal district of Telangana, Kurnool district of AP and Raichur district of

### **DGP PRAISES POLICE FOR PEACEFUL POLLING**

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 23

DGP Gautam Sawang has stated that the fourphased Gram Panchayat elections passed off peacefully in Andhra Pradesh as the police officers and other government personnel acted in unison to ensure fair polling.

The dedicated performance of each and every police personnel in duty management, as also their service spirit, punctuality, precautionary measures and coordination with all departments helped ensure

ments neiped ensure peace, he said.

The DGP said that compared to the big clashes in the 2013 gram panchayat elections, this time there were only "minor incidents." Prebinding of criminals money laundering and special surveillance by the police and the special enforcement bureau to prevent distribution alcohol have all contributed to the successful conduct of the elec-

He said, as a result, a positive change was evident in trouble-prone Anantapur, Prakasam and Nellore districts. The DGP said the state

election commissioner and chief minister lauded the services of the police department for ensuring peace in the panchayat polls. He said cops even postponed their vaccination and gave first priority to attending to the call of duty during the election time.

DGPSawang noted that the elections were held without causing any situation for repolling. "There was fear that there will be an atmosphere of conflict. The police department overcame them all and helped hold the polls

peacefully."

He stated that as many as 70,000 police personnel performed duties in each phase.

DGP Sawang noted that the elections were held without causing any situation for re-polling. There was fear that there will be an atmosphere of conflict. The police department overcame them all and helped hold the polls

### **MINISTER'S KIN** ATTACKED ME, **ALLEGES JS WORKER**

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 23

Minister for Fisheries and Animal Husbandry Seediri Appalaraju's brother S. Chiranjeevi allegedly attacked Jana Sena worker Padma Reddy in Devanaltada village in Srikakulam

on Monday night.
Padma Reddy told
reporters that he had a duel with Chiranjeevi over social media for some time, and he allegedly abused his mother in some of the posts. After he raised objections, Chiranjeevi and 30 others attacked him and his mother, causing a head injury. After dialling 100, a home guard came to them and collected a statement. The police later registered a case.

### AP govt issues show cause notice to ex-bureaucrat

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC HYDERABAD, FEB. 23

Andhra Pradesh government on Tuesday issued a show cause notice to retired bureaucrat Preeti Sudan for alleged misuse of power and influencing subordinates to derive financial or material ben-

The government's move has shocked the babudom as severe allegations and the show cause notice are related to a trivial issue of regularising her extraordinary leave into an earned leave. Though both the compe-

authorities Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) at centre and the state gov-ernment – agreed in prin-ciple to her request, Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy-led government has taken objection to the manner in which orders were issued regularising the official's leave. What is more shocking is that the AP government dug into the closet a year after the regularisation was done and four months after she retired from service.

According to Tuesday's G.O., under secretary of Health and Family

THE STATE government is the competent authority to regularise the leave period in concurrence with DoPT and not the **Health Department at** the centre.

Welfare Department at the centre issued orders in February, 2020, regularising her leave as per her request. The state government, however, argued that DoPT had addressed letter

Secretary, AP.
Hence the state government is the competent authority to regularise the leave period in con-currence with DoPT and Department at the centre.

AP government has levelled allegations against Preeti Sudan that she violated provisions of All India Services (Conduct) enced subordinates under her control to get a favour. The retired bureaucrat has been asked to explain within two weeks why disciplinary proceedings should not be initiated

### Why Z plus security to Sarada Peetham Swami: Ashok Babu

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 23

Telugu Desam MLC P. Ashok Babu on Tuesday charged "fake Swami" of Visakhapatnam-based Sarada Peetham with sheltering criminals and corrupt elements. questioned the

Andhra Pradesh government to explain why Z+ security has been given to the Swami who is carrying out nefarious activities from his peetham with total disregard to Hindu dharma.
The MLC said the

Swami has turned the Visakha Sarada Peetham into a dumping ground of

why utmost importance and security is being given to the Swami right now," he maintained. He stated that YSRC ministers have no moral right to talk about Swamijis who have not come forward to defend temples when there had been 168 instances of desecrations.

Ashok Babu demanded that Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy explain to devotees why he failed in ordering a detailed CBI probe into all incidents of desecra-tions in the state. The MLC accused YSRC

leaders of disrespecting allowing other religions corruption money belonging to ruling party leaders. "That is the reason to launch their religious propaganda over SVBC and TTD tickets. to launch their religious

### BJP senior leader slapped with slipper during TV debate

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 23 A live TV debate on rais-

ing funds to develop capital city Amaravati ended abruptly when one of the participants, identified as Amaravati JAC leader K. Srinivasa Rao slapped BJP senior leader S. Vishnuvardhan Reddy with a chappal in its Hyderabad studio on Tuesday.A private TV channel was discussing the development of the capital city Amaravati. Taking part in it, BJP senior leader S. Vishnuvardhan Reddy commented that the previous TDP regime carried out publicity stunt to raise loans for developing the capital city. However, Amaravati JAC leader K. Srinivasa Rao objected to it Enraged at it, senior BJP

A private TV channel was discussing the development of the capital city Amaravati. Taking part in it, BJP senior leader S. Vishnuvardhan Reddy commented that the previous TDP regime carried out pub licity stunt to raise loans for developing the capital city.

leader advised Rao to work in the Telugu Desam party office and do 'bhajan' to the party lead-ership. He also called Rao a paid artist of the Telugu Desam Party. With this, both of them entered into a heated argument, and in a fit of rage, Rao slapped Vishnuvardhan Reddy with his chappal live on the show, and they were just short of exchanging blows when the anchor intervened and tried to

**DIGITAL** INDIA

### DigiLocker is a platform initiated by the Centre under its flagship programme Digital India

### Centre plans issue of soft copy of passports to citizens Srinivasa Rao said, "The Centre would integrate issue/renewal of pass-

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN |

VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 23

Air passengers could soon be relieved of the burden of carrying their passport for checks at airports. The Centre is working on a project to integrate Passport Seva with a mobile app called DigiLocker. Passengers need get a soft copy of their passport and keep it with them during

DigiLocker is a platform initiated by the Centre under its flagship programme Digital India, for issuance and verification of documents and certificates in a digital format. This would eliminate physical carrying of docu-ments. "The Union min-istry of external affairs is contemplating to integrate the passport seva with DigiLocker shortly," an official said here. Accordingly, those who

carry soft copies of their

Aadhaar card, Class X pass certificate, PAN Card

visit passport offices with application for fresh passports or for renewal need

 VIJAYAWADA REGIONAL passport office has come back to its normal service levels by attending to 500 to 600 applications per day. PASSPORT SEVA kendras located in other parts of AP are slowly picking up pace

in providing services to the citizens. authorities issue new passport or renew the old

the passport authorities on their DigiLocker app for verification.

As DigiLocker-issued documents are at par with original documents as per

IT Act, 2000, the authorities will need only download such documents on the app, verify them and Once

and any other proof of residence like driving licence, and show them to issue or renewal of passport.

Of late, several Class X educational boards are issuing soft copies of pass certificates to the stu-dents so that they can show a soft copy of their Class X pass certificate for verification at passport

the

their mobile app and avoid carrying the hard copy. Vijayawada regional passport officer DSS passport

passport seva DigiLocker shortly so that the air passengers can be relieved of burden of carrying a hard copy of their passport during travel. They can upload their soft one, those who got it can copies on the upload the soft copy on DigiLocker and show DigiLocker, similar to online storage of other them before officials for documents, and keep it ready for verification on verification when needed." "Passport offices are becoming paperless as we would accept soft copies of various documents for

providing a series of services including

ports to the citizens," he On the other hand, services like issue/renewal of

passports at passport offices are slowly picking up pace to the pre-Covid-19 levels. AP is having three regional passport seva kendras, a passport seva laghu kendram and 20 post office passport seva kendras at present. Nearly 1,600 to 1,700 cases are being attended to daily for fresh issue or renewal of passports and including other services.

### **AP REPORTS 70 COVID-19 CASES, ONE DEATH**

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 23

Andhra Pradesh registered 70 fresh Covid-19 infections and

The state health authorities reported that out of 28,268 samples tested, 70 persons were infected with Covid-19. Out of a total number of 1,37,75,253 samples tested so far in the state, 8,89,409 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 8,81,666 were recovered in the course of treatment, while 575 are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of Coronavirus, Chittoor topped the state with 18 followed by nine each in East Godavari and Visakhapatnam, seven in six in Nellore, \_\_ four each in and West Krishna, six in Nellore, five in Srikakulam Godavari, three Vizianagaram, two each in Anantapur and Prakasam, one in Kadapa and zero cases in

With regard to the cumulative Covid-19 active cases, Krishna reported the highest number of 91 followed by 75 in Chittoor, 67 in East Godavari, 66 in Nellore, 60 in Kadapa, 45 West Godavari, 44 in Guntur, 38 in Prakasam, 27 in Anantapur, 22 in Srikakulam, 20 in Visakhapatnam, 13 in Kurnool and seven in Vizianagaram.

Covid-19 Among daily deaths, one patient died in Visakhapatnam district, raising toll to 7,168.

### **SOBTI TAKES CHARGE AS CHIEF OF EASTERN FLEET**

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 23

Rear Admiral Tarun Sobti took over the Command of the Eastern Fleet, the sword arm of the Eastern Naval Command, from Rear Admiral Sanjay Vatsayan, on Tuesday. The change of guard took place at an impressive ceremony held at the Naval Base in Visakhapatnam.

Rear Admiral Tarun Sobti was commissioned into the Indian Navy on 1 July 1988 and is a specialist in navigation and direction.

The Flag Officer is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy, Khadakwasla. Interarmées College Défense, Paris, France and College of Naval Warfare,

He also served as the Naval Attaché at the Embassy of

Before assuming command of the Eastern Fleet, the Flag was Commandant and Chief Instructor of Indian Navy's premier officer training estab-lishment Indian Naval Academy at Ezhimala.



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these columns.

# **Healthcare worker's** kin demand ex gratia

### She took vaccine on Feb. 15, admitted to KGH with fever

D. SIVA RAMI REDDI | DC

The fear psychosis among Healthcare Workers (HCWs) who had been administered Covid vaccine about the after-effects like dizziness, vomiting, convulsions, and fever is driving them to hospi-tals. Kurnool General Hospital Superindent G. Narendranath Reddy said that people have been complaining of the after-effects in the past few days. In the past two days alone, three HCWs got admitted in the hospital, he said.

of a death worker Healthcare (HCW) due to the Covidvaccine Nandikotkur on Monday sent panic signals among

**TD CLAIMS HIKE** 

**IN VOTING** 

**PERCENTAGE** 

NELLORE, FEB. 23

DC CORRESPONDENT

TD Nellore Lok Sabha

segment in-charge and former mayor of Nellore

S.K. Abdul Aziz claimed

that the voting percent-

age of TD was increased

in the recent panchayat

elections compared to the previous elections while appealing the TD

cadres not to feel dis-

heartened with the neg-

Speaking to party cadres at NTR Bhavan

on Tuesday, he alleged

that YSRC won the maj-

ority of seats by offering

sops and applying pres-

Stressing that it is not

a real victory, he advised

the party men to make

themselves available to

the public and resolve

Mr Aziz maintained

that it is their duty to protect the people from

the harassment of YSR

"Since the ruling party

men would try to recov-er the money they spent

during the elections, we

should prevent this and

money", he observed.
TD State Secretary

Jenni Ramanaiah and

Coordinators of Nellore

rural segment Sabir

Khan and Jaladanki

Sudhakar were present.

**14 PASSENGERS** 

**OF PRIVATE BUS** 

**HURT IN MISHAP** 

As many as 14 people were grievously injured

when a private bus

bound for Vijayawada from Kurnool hit a cul-

vert at Nallamala forest

area near Diguvametta

forest beat in Giddalur

mandal of Prakasam

district on Tuesday.

The bus with 29 pas-

sengers was overturned

after hitting the culvert.

Giddalur SI Ravindra

Reddy rushed to the spot

and his team shifted the

wounded to hospital

after helping them come out of the bus.

DC CORRESPONDENT

NELLORE, FEB. 23

among others

the public

sure on the voters.

their problems.

Congressmen.

protect

ative results.

 Health workers under psychological stress after death of a health worker

 Kurnool General Hospital Superindent G. Narendranath Reddy said that people have been complaining of the after-effects in the past few days.

The relatives of the deceased did not agree to a post-mortem and the ICDS staff disposed the body, said Bhagya Rekha, ICDS project director.

other HCWs.She has completed the full course of the vaccine by taking twice. The HCW identified as Noorjahan, 55, of Malyala Village in Nandikotkur mandal got admitted into KGH due to fever. She did not reveal that she had taken the vaccine, and died while undergoing treatment. Later her relatives staged a dharna before

Nandikotkur ICDS office demanding compensa-tion. The relatives of the deceased did not agree to a post-mortem and the ICDS staff disposed the body, said Bhagya Rekha, ICDS project director.

She said there are about 4,200 Anganwadi workers in the district, and all of them got the Covid-19 vaccine twice as per the course. Only a

few complained of after effects, she said. The son of the deceased lodged a complaint with the Nandikotkur police to probe the matter.

KGH superindent further said that the HCW who died has multiple problems, including respiratory disease and sore throat. We have conducted RT-PCR test, which came negative, he said.

The deceased has been

administered Covishield vaccine produced by Serum Insitute of India in Pune, the authorities said. Kurnool district has been supplied with Covishield (75 per cent) and Covaxin of Bharat Biotech Ltd of Hyderabad (30 per cent) of total supplies to cater to 42,500 targetted people.

### **Chariot festival**



A large number of people take part in the Chariot festival of Lord Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy at Antarvedi in East Godavari district on Tuesday.

# 16 employees of Durga temple suspended

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 23

top Durga temple were suspended due to their involvement in various illegalities in the temple. The ACB officials conducted checks in the temple for five days and found a lot of corruption and submitted a report to the government. Based on the ACB report, 16 employees were suspended.

The five-day inquiry by the ACB officials on the

temple administration inquiry, the ACB found many flaws in various departments and submitted a preliminary report to the state gov-

ernment. The ACB found irregularities in Laddu prasadam department, Tickets, Saree counter, Tonsuring, Tollgate, Provisions and Engineering departments.

Based on the preliminary report submitted to

and other key depart- ment, Commissioner P. As many as 16 employ- ments concluded on Arjun Rao issued susemployees of various departments temple Tuesday. As per the commissioner's orders, the temple Executive Officer M.V. Suresh Babu suspended six superintendents, 10 clerical staff of the temple. Out of the suspended staff, eight belong to Saree, Prasadam and Annadanam

### Tenders for agri meters sent to judicial commission's nod

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, FEB. 23

The Southern Power Distribution Company Limited (SPDCL) has prepared the tenders to instal meters to agricultural services as per the G.O released by the state

Vyavasaya Padhakam.

SPDCL Tuesday submitted the tender proposals to the judicial commission for approval. The tenders' were also uploaded on the official website of the judicial

Vidyut would be available up to

The SPDCL appealed to the contractors and general public to verify the tenders and raise objections, if any, by filing them on the website. The CMD of APSPDCL has informed that action will be initiated based

### NGT panel to identify lapses in green laws in Polavaram and also recommendations of the experts' panel on

DC CORRESPONDENT

National Green Tribunal would set up an oversight committee headed by a retired high court judge to find lapses relating to compliance of environmental norms during execution of the Polavaram

irrigation project.
The NGT principal bench headed by its chairman Adarsh Kumar Goel held the hearing in the case in New Delhi on Tuesday and issued a direction to set up an oversight committee comprising experts from IITs from New Delhi and Hyderabad and also from Indian Institute of Soil

Science. Goel said that after consulting the Andhra Pradesh High Court Chief Justice Arup Kumar Goswami, the name of the retired judge to head the panel would be finalised. He called upon the AP government to extend all support to the panel to find out how the project works were failing to comply with environmental norms.

The NGT expressed displeasure over the failure to comply with a series of directions issued earlier

environmental executing Polavaram project and won-dered as to why there was no proper prior planning on environmental

It was critical of the authorities for "shifting the blame on others" after landing in trouble, instead of anticipating such issues in advance and taking up nec-

while taking up project

essary preventive steps. Noted economist Pentapati Pulla Rao filed a petition in the NGT in 2018 alleging a series of environmental lapses while executing the Polavaram project.

Petitioner's counsel K. Sravan Kumar informed the NGT bench that the Polavaram project got environmental clearances in 2005. "Despite the filing of several petitions on violation of such norms during execution of the project since 2015, there was no stoppage for such activi-

He said that in 2016, additional land was acquired without obtaining environmental clearance and this started being used as a yard rocks that surfaced while clearing the land, without

assessing their impact. Counsel informed the bench that the dumping of waste resulted in deformation of a stretch of the road and formation of cracks on nearby structures. As no proper precautionary measures were taken in the construction of the cofferdam, it caused inundation of several villages, affecting a large number of people.

He said that if such viola tions were allowed to be continued in execution of the project, it might even result in a catastrophe as was witnessed recently in Uttarakhand. He also informed the bench that petitioner Rao and his family members were denied payment of relief for land acquisition as they petitioned the NGT and sought its intervention for pay ment of early relief.

In response, the NGT chairman directed the AP government to pay the relief with immediate effect.

Petitioner Pentapati Pulla Rao said, "We are expecting the NGT's order to set up a panel to oversee shortcomings in implementation of to dump mud and pieces of environmental norms.

### **VU OFFERS SCHOLARSHIPS TO STUDENTS**

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 23

Dr M.Y.S. Prasad Vice-Chancellor of Vignan's Deemed to be University, released the admission notification for the aca-2021-22 year towards admission into programmes, B.Pharmacy, and all other UG, PG and PhD programmes. He said that admissions into B. Tech and B.Pharmacy programmes will be based on the performance in the "Vignan's Scholastic Aptitude Test (V-SAT)", an online examination conducted across 36 test centres on all India basis from 24 to 30 May 2021 in AP and Telangana States.

Dean, admissions Dr V. Ravi Kumar informed that VU is offering scholarships for rankers and meritorious students and appealed students to make good the opportunity He informed that under the scholarship scheme, the first 100 rankers would get 75 per cent scholarship in tuition fee, 101 – 200 rankers will get 50 per cent scholarship in tuition fee and 201-400 rankers will get a 25 per cent scholarship in tuition fee and fur-ther 401-2000 rankers will get 10 per cent.

Scholarship in tuition fee. He stated that scholarships would also be given based on the per-formance in JEE (Mains & Advanced), AP & TS EAMCET ranks and intermediate marks. He further stated that Meritorious students could also avail scholarships for pursuing any programme offered by

the university.

He added that 25 per cent of the total seats in each department are reserved for scholarships. These seats will be filled based on merit, availability of seats in a particular department and a first-come-first-

The temple has come

up with the land donated

He said that it was a

miracle that eagle has

been coming to the tem-

ple once a year when the

Brahmotsavams begin and end. He said Kurnool

citizens have been visit-

ing the temple for its

Sthala vishistata and

been benefitted from the

diving blessings. The Puranas refer to the

eagle as Lord Vishnu's vehicle and it was the 75/1-A/3

75/1-A/4

by industrialist and MP

T.G. Venkatesh

#### This is to inform to the general public on the instructions of M/s.Virtusa Life Spaces India Pvt. Ltd., rep., by its Managing

PUBLIC NOTICE

Director, the said company had decided to purchase the schedule mentioned lands from Sri Kondareddy Bala Subrahmanyam Reddy, S/o late Venkata Subba Reddy, resident of Vakadu Village & Mandal. It was informed that the schedule lands were originally purchased by M/s.Nivee Agro Farms Pvt. Ltd., under the sale deed dated 28-12-1993 registered as doct.No.733/1993 from Janirami Reddy & others and was in possession and enjoyment of the said lands with absolute rights. Inturn the said M/s.Nivee Agro Farms Pvt. Ltd., sold the said land to Kondareddy Bala Subrahmanyam Reddy under the sale deed dated 17-08-2007 registered as doct. No. 1851/2007. Since then the said Kondareddy Bala Subrahmanyam Reddy is in possession and enjoyment of the said land with absolute rights. The said Kondareddy Bala Subrahmanyam Reddy also obtained pattadar and title deed passbooks in his favour. Anybody who have a right, claim, charges etc., over the schedule mentioned lands shall inform the below mentioned address within 15 days from the date of this publication Otherwise it would be deemed that there are no claims and my client will purchase the schedule lands. Any claims received after 15 days of this publication are not binding on my client.

### **SCHEDULE**

Sri Potti Sriramulu Nellore Registration, District: Kovur, Sub-Registration: Kovur Mandal, Kovur Village & Panchayat:

S.NO.	Extent (Ac./cents)
72/1	2.60
73/A	0.62
73/B	0.10
78/A	0.48
78/C	0.35
81/2B	0.85
TOTAL	AC. 5.00 cents

S.SRINIVASA MURTHY, B.A., B.L.,

### PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform to the general public on the instructions of M/s. Virtusa Life Spaces India Pvt. Ltd., rep., by its Managing Director the said company had decided to purchase the schedule mentioned lands from M/s.Nellore Builders Pvt. Ltd., and three other companies. It was informed that the schedule lands were originally pur-chased by **M/s.Deccan Breweries Pvt. Ltd.**, between the years 1992-1995 under various registered sale deeds and the said company was in possession and enjoyment of the said lands with absolute rights and while so, the said company was merged with M/s.SKOL Breweries Ltd., as per the orders of the Hon'ble High Courts of AP & Mumbai and all the movable and immovable properties of erstwhile company **M/s.Deccan Breweries Pyt. Ltd.**, were ransferred to M/s.SKOL Breweries Ltd., and thus the said M/s. SKOL Breweries Ltd., became the absolute owner of the schedule lands and the said company sold the schedule lands to M/s Nellore **Builders Pvt. Ltd.**, and three other companies under four separate sale deeds dated 27-04-2007 registered as doct. Nos. 1157/2007, 1158/2007, 1159/2007 & 1156/2007 registered at SRO, Kovur and since then the said M/s.Nellore Builders Pvt. Ltd., and three other companies are in possession and enjoyment of their respective extents with absolute rights. The said companies have also obtained pattadar and title deed passbooks in its favour. It is further informed that the original registered sale deeds standing in the name of M/s.Deccan Breweries Pvt. Ltd., were lost by the date of sales on 27-04-2007 itself. Anybody who have a right, claim, charges etc., over the schedule mentioned lands shall inform the below mentioned address within 15 days from the date of this publication. Otherwise it would be deemed that there are no claims and my client will purchase the schedule lands. Any claims received after 15 days of this publication are not binding on my client.

**SCHEDULE** Sri Potti Sriramulu Nellore Registration, District: Kovur, Sub-

Registration: Kovur Mandal & Village:						
Item-1:		75/1-A/5	0.30			
S.NO.	Extent (Ac./cents)	75/1-B/1	0.21			
89-A	0.38	75/2-A/1	0.10			
89-B	0.37	75/2-A/2	0.86			
90	4.88	75/2-B 1.36				
91	1.98	75/1-A/1 0.05				
92	1.22	77/A1	0.12			
80	4.57	77/B1/A				
93	0.90	77/B-1/B	0.14			
95	0.04	77/B-2	0.04			
96/A	1.43	78/A	5.95			
TOTAL	AC. 15.77 cents	78/B	0.30			
		79/A	0.20			
Item-2:		79/B	0.43			
S.NO.	Extent (A a Joanto)	TOTAL	AC. 11.48 cents			
	Extent (Ac./cents)					
85	1.11	Item-4:				
87	1.48	S.NO.	Extent (Ac./cents)			
81/1	2.80	63/3	0.54			
81/2-A	2.28	64/3	1.21			
TOTAL	AC. 7.67 cents	72/1	1.44			
ltam 2.		73/A	0.84			
Item-3:	Extent (A a Joanto)	73/C	0.48			
S.NO.	Extent (Ac./cents)	73/B	1.80			
75/1-B/2	0.20	74/A	3.97			
75/1-A/2	0.06	71/R	0.40			

S.SRINIVASA MURTHY, B.A.,B.L.,

TOTAL

AC. 10.68 cents

16/1085, Trunk Road, Nellore-1

### government of AP under YSR Uchitha commission www.judi-cialpreview.ap.gov.in and on judiciaal approval. **LUCKY | MASCOT | Every year the bird appears during Brahmotsavams**

# Miracle eagle mesmerises devotees

DC CORRESPONDENT KURNOOL FEB. 23

It is incredible but true that an eagle has been hovering around the Hari Hara Kshetra on the day when Brahmotsavams began at Swamy Venkateswara Temple at Sankalbagh in

Kurnool every year for the past 20 years. This year it was no different, and it made its presence at the appointed day much to the delight merriment Bramhana Archakas and

the temple managing This temple was located



An eagle hovers around Hari Hara Kshetra on Tuesday.

at Sankalbagh on the ple has come up with the bank of the river land donated by industri- seen the temple's comple-

Tungabhadra. The tem- alist and MP T.G. tion.

chief servant of the Lord.





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### **U'KHAND: 136 MISSING PEOPLE** 'PRESUMED DEAD'

Dehradun, Feb. 23: The Uttarakhand government has issued a notification authorising 136 people still missing after the flash flood in Chamoli district over two weeks ago to be declared "pre-sumed dead".

Sixty-eight bodies have so far been recovered after the February 7 disaster. There is a tunnel in which around 35 people are suspected to have been trapped, but rescuers have not been able to reach it till now due to the sludge. Authorities say clearing the debris from the tunnel could take months.

A glacial lake was formed upstream of Tapovan over Rishiganga following the devastating flash flood which had demolished a 13.2 MW hydel project along the river besides causing extensive damage to Tapovan-Vishnugad hydel project along Dhauliganga.

Uttarakhand health secretary Amit Singh Negi said on Tuesday that the presumption of death can be made by officials in the affected district only in case of missing people who in all likelihood have died in the disaster but their bodies have not been found.

Normally the missing are declared dead only when they are not traced for seven years after the incident responsible for their disappearance but in case of an extraordinary occurrence like the one witnessed in Uttarakhand special provisions can be made, he

The move to declare those who continue to be missing in the flash flood as presumed dead has been initiated to expedite the process of distribution of compensation among the affected families, he said.

### **SIX KILLED WHILE DISPOSING GELATIN** STICKS IN K'TAKA

Bengaluru/Chikkaballapur, Feb. 23: Six people were killed when the gelatin sticks they were trying to dispose of clandestinely exploded accidentally at a stone quarry site in a village in Chikkaballapur early Tuesday, police said.

The government has ordered a CID probe into the blast. Police said preliminary investigation indicated use of petroleum gel and Ammonium Nitrate in the quarry that was operating clandestinely and was closed a few days ago following raids.

The incident comes close on eary urappa s hometown of Shivamogga on January 22, which left six de ad. Karnataka health minister K. Sudhakar, who represents the Chikkaballapur constituency, visited the spot and said the bodies of the victims were badly mutilated and scattered all over the place. Prime Mi nister Narendra Modi tweeted his condolences to the families of the victims of the blast.

"Pained by the loss of lives due to a mishap at Chikkaballapur in Karnataka. Condolences to the bereaved families. Praying that the injured recover quickly," he said.

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

"A high-level investigation into the incident is underway and stringent action will be taken against the guilty," he added. "Whoever is involved in illegal activities, we will take merciless action," he

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



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee along with the daughter of TMC MP

# Didi visits kin to boost confidence before CBI grills nephew's wife

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, FEB. 23

West Bengal Minister Mamata Tuesday morning met her MP nephew Abhishek Banerjee and his family apparently to boost their confidence minutes before the Central Bureau of Investigation reached their palatial residence in South Kolkata and questioned Abhishek's wife Rujira Banerjee Narula for her suspected link to overseas financial transactions in the coal smuggling case.

At around 11.30 am, a worried Trinamul Congress supremo, on her way to the state secretariat Nabanna in a convoy from her Harish Chatterjee Street residence in the vicinity, dropped at Shantiniketan on 188A Harish Mukherjee Road, which was already turned by the Kolkata Police personnel

team including two legal officers and a female officer among others reached the same address within five minutes.

into a fortress, after learning that a CBI team would arrive at the same address anytime to quiz Narula.

Walking into the multistoreyed apartment, Banerjee paid a surprise visit to Abhishek, his wife and others and also spoke to them. In less than ten minutes, she however walked out of the building with Abhishek's little daughter. Boarding her car, the CM left for Nabanna while her grand

niece was taken inside.
A 10-member CBI team including two legal officers and a female officer among others from the anti corruption branch reached the same address within five minutes. They grilled Narula over the next one hour and a half

Majhi alias Lala, the absconding kingpin of the coal smuggling case, who allegedly used to deposit around ₹36 lakh monthly to the Kasikorn Bank account at Bangkok in Thailand and another bank in London, accord-

ing to sources. The CBI also wanted to know from her about her job profile, foreign tours and it's purpose, details of bank accounts, her whether she holds more than one passport and it's purpose and if she is associated with any registered company, sources claimed. After recording Narula's statement, the CBI investi-

> In the afternoon sources close to the CM nephew claimed, "all questions were replied. All sort of cooperation was extended. The questioning session

> completed smoothly."
> Slamming the CM for her visit to her nephew's house ahead of CBI's

arrival, BJP spokesperson Shameek Bhattacharya claimed, "Common people understand it well that the CBI does not enter some one's residence to unleash political vendetta. In such a situation, the CM's pres ence is unexpected. It was an attempt to create a mental pressure on the CBI. Had she refrained from paying the visit, it would have been better for her as the CM."

TMCspokesperson Ghosh, however, Kunal alleged that the BJP has been trying to politicise the issue, "Abhishek has been on the forefront boldly. First he himself tweeted the CBI notice to his wife. Now Rujira also cooperated with the CBI. However, there are many others with allegations of corruption against them who are in the BJP. Still no action is taken against them. Rather those who are out of BJP, are being targeted unnecessarily

# **ICMR: Strains not linked** to surge in Covid cases

Punjab orders new restrictions on indoor, outdoor gatherings

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 23

Union health ministry officials have said that two mutated variant of SARS-CoV-2 — N440K and E484Q — have been detected in Maharashtra and Kerala but there is no direct relation between the recent surge in Covid-19 cases in these states and some others with the mutant virus strains.

Maharashtra and Kerala account for 75 per cent of total active Covid-19 cases in

the country.
Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka and Gujarat are some other states that are also witnessing a surge in the cases.

Besides, people have also been detected with the South African and Brazilian strains of SARS-CoV-2 in India apart from the mutated UK variant.

Director General of ICMR, Dr Balram Bhargava, said that these two virus strains — N440K and E484Q — have been detected in other coun-

Moreover, they have been found earlier in some states in India.

The E484Q strain was earlier detected in four sequences in Maharashtra as early as March and July 2020.

The N440K mutation has been reported on 13 different occasions between May and September 2020 Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Assam.

The current upsurge in Maharashtra cannot be attributed to the currently discussed point mutations, Dr Bhargava said

The spike in Coronavirus numbers in some states comes as 240 new strains of the virus have emerged across the country. Health ministry sources said that between 800 and 900 samples from Maharashtra and Kerala — had been sent for genome sequencing in the past month. Samples for genome sequencing — to understand the complete genetics of the virus — have also been sought from Punjab and Bengaluru, where, in the past few days alone, two apartment complexes have been declared

### Kerala CM writes to PM over virus curbs

**GILVESTER ASSARY | DC** THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Tuesday sought immediate intervention of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to lift the restrictions on movement of people and vehicles from Kerala to Karnataka.

In a letter to Modi, the Chief Minister said that the people and vehicles from Kerala were being blocked at the interstate check posts areas bordering along Karnataka in the name of restrictions. Following the stringent restrictions, people seeking medical treatment in hospitals in Mangalore and Dakshina Kannada districts and students pursuing studinstitutions Karnataka were facing a

He said the Karnataka action was against the Centre's standing direction that there should be no restrictions in the interstate transportation. Hence the Prime Minister should intervene and ensure the matter is settled amicably at the ear-

harrowing time. Even vehi-

cles bringing in essential

commodities were being

liest, he added. Meanwhile, the workers of CPM, CPI, Congress and Muslim League led organisations took out separate marches to the Karnataka border demanding the lifting of restrictions on interstate

in the name of Covid restrictions. Even vehicles bringing in essential commodities were being blocked. travel. The workers took out processions towards the Talapady interstate border and blocked vehicles coming

CM SAID that the people

and vehicles from Kerala

were being blocked at the

interstate check posts along

areas bordering Karnataka

from Karnataka. demanded that the restrictions which warrant mandatory Covid negative test for Karnataka should be lifted completely.

Though the Karnataka government had put the restrictions on hold for two days, political parties in Kasargod roll back. The ensuing Assembly elections has also The ensuing aggravated the situation. With the BJP having a size

able presence in areas in Kasargod bordering Karnataka, parties like the CPM, Congress and Muslim League have turned the issue into a political fight. These parties are accusing the BJP led government in Karnataka of causing innumerable problems for the people of Kerala. It is learnt that the

Kasargod district BJP president has conveyed to the Karnataka officials that if the restrictions continued it would adversely affect the party's electoral prospects in the coming polls.

containment zones and sealed. So far genome sequencing nearly 6,000 samples have been completed. Amid spike

Coronavirus cases, a meeting was held at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) on Tuesday to review the pandemic situation. Union home minister Amit

Shah held a meeting and

directed multiple central agencies to monitor the situation on a daily basis in states where Covid-19 cases started increasing again. India on Monday had

10,584 fresh cases and 78

Meanwhile, the Punjab government on Tuesday ordered curbs on indoor and outdoor gatherings from March 1 and

deaths.

Commissioners to impose night curfew in Covid-19 hotspots in their districts, if needed.

The move comes amid a growing concern over an upswing in the number of Coronavirus cases in the

Chairing a virtual meeting to review the Coronavirus situation, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh ordered restrictions on gathering of people from March 1, with 100 people allowed indoors and 200 people allowed to gather outdoors, according to a government

statement. He also directed that wearing of face masks and social distancing norms be strictly enforced, with testing to be ramped to 30,000 a day, it

Health officials said presently 200 people were allowed to gather indoors and 500 people outdoors, while 20,000 to 22,000 tests are conducted every day.
Chief secretary Vinni
Mahajan ruled out closure of

and said the department is taking all steps to ensure the safety of students. Amarinder Singh autho-

rised deputy commissioners to impose night curfew in hotspots in their districts, if needed, with a micro-containment strategy to be adopted. He also directed the police

force to ensure strict enforcement of wearing masks. There will be monitoring of

adherence to Covid-19 norms at all restaurants and marriage palaces and the Department of Excise and Taxation will be the nodal agency for it.

The Chief Minister said a decision on reducing occupancy in cinema halls will be taken after March 1.

Private offices and restaurants shall be encouraged to display the last tests done for all employees, he added.

Punjab is among the five states that have been asked by the Centre to refocus on strict surveillance, containment and RT-PCR testing to check the growing number of cases. The other four states are Maharashtra, Kerala, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh.



### **GUJ CIVIC POLLS: MODI TERMS RESULTS 'SPECIAL'**

New Delhi, Feb. 23: With the BJP set to retain power in six Gujarat municipal corporations, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday termed the results "very special" and said that for a party serving a state for over two decades to record such a phenomenal win is noteworthy.

He said the results of municipal elections clearly show the unwavering faith people have in politics of development and good governance.

The BJP appeared on course to retain power in the six municipal corporations, winning 409 of the 474 seats where results were declared till evening.

"Thank you Gujarat! Results of municipal clearly show the unwa-vering faith people have towards politics of development and good governance," Modi said in a series of tweets. "Grateful to the people

of the state for trusting BJP yet again. Always an honour to serve Gujarat," he said. Modi also hailed the efforts of Gujarat BJP workers who reached out to people with the party's vision for the state. -PTI

# India nods for Pak PM flight plan

CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs DELHI/COLOMBO, FEB. 23

India granted per-

mission to overfly

Indian airspace for the aircraft carrying Pakistan Minister Imran Khan en route to Sri Lanka on Tuesday evening, news agenreported. Permission reportedly granted despite the fact that Pakistan had refused permission in 2019 for Indian VVIP aircraft carrying President Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi to overfly

Pakistani airspace.
The Pakistan PM reached Colombo on Tuesday evening for an official visit to the island nation. ministry in New Delhi did not issue any comment on the permission that was reportedly granted. Sources confirmed

that Pakistan had officially sent its flight plan to India in advance regarding the aircraft that was to carry the Pakistan PM on his way to Sri Lanka, after which New Delhi granted permission for the

same. The aircraft reached Colombo from Islamabad on Tuesday evening and flew over the waters of India's Exclusive Economic Zone or in its vicinity on the flight path parallel to peninsular Indian sources said.
Khan, who will hold wide-ranging talks with top Sri

Lankan including President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and PM Mahinda Rajapaksa on issues like trade, defence and technology, is the first government head to visit Sri Lanka since the Covid-19 pandemic. It is his first visit to Sri Lanka after assuming office in 2018. His last visit to Sri Lanka was in 1986 when he was the captain of Pakistan's cricket team duhe accused the local umpires of bias.

the Sri Lankan gov ernment cancelled Khan's planned speech to Parliament, citing the Covid-19 pandemic.

Ahead of his visit,

It is said the Parliament speech, due on February 24, was included in Khan's itinerary at the Pakistan govern-

## Maha minister denies links to woman's death

PARAB | DC MUMBAİ, FEB. 23

Saniay minister Rathod made his first public appearance on Tuesday after being linked with the death of a 22-year-old woman in Pune. Though the minister dismissed the allegations against him, he landed himself in another soup over his show of strength defying Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's public appeal against large gatherings due to Coronavirus pan-

Maharashtra forest

demic. Rathod visited Pohradevi temple in Maharashtra's Washim district, where he sought blessings and took part in rituals. The temple is revered by the Banjara community, to which he belongs.

The Shiv Sena leader was conspicuous by his absence in public eye after his name was connected to the death of Pooja Chavan (22). On February 8, the deceased, hailing from Beed district, allegedly

committed a suicide by jumping off a building in Pune. Her death had kicked off a political storm in the state, as several audio clips of her purported conservation have gone viral in the social media linking the incident to Rathod.

However, the minister claimed 'dirty politics' was being played in the name of the woman's 'unfortunate' death. "The death of Pooja Chavan, who belonged to our community, in Pune was unfortunate. entire community is pained by the death. Me and our entire community is part of the

Chavan family's grief," he said. Rathod also said that Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has ordered

a probe into the matter and the truth will come out following a probe into the matter. On the images of him and the woman doing

rounds on social media, the minister said his community loves him and several people get themselves

"I have been working in the social sector for 30 years. Don't put me in the wrong box because of one incident," he added. However, his visit to

Pohradevi proved controversial as the minissupporters thronged the venue defying the Covid-19 guidelines issued by the state government. Praveen Darekar. Leader of Opposition

in the Maharashtra Vidhan Parishad, said "The way Rathod organised a huge gathering at the temple in Washim demnable. We have asked a district administration to take strict action against him for

violating the norms. State BJP chi Chandrakant said that the state government has been shying away from taking action against the minister despite many evidences of him connecting to the death of a deceased woman coming out in open. The culprit should be pun-

ished, he added.

### **DEFENCE | PROPOSALS Prime Minister had formally handed over the Arjun Mk-1A to Army** DAC clears 118 main battle tanks for ₹ 8,379 cr

PAWAN BALI | DC NEW DELHI, FEB. 23

Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) headed by defence minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday accorded Acceptance of Necessities (AoNs) to proposals worth ₹13,700 crore including indigenous main battle tank Arjun

The DAC accorded AoNs for 118 indigenous Arjun Mk-1A tanks for Indian army worth

₹8,379 crore. This is the second biggest "Make-in-India" project "Make-in-India" project cleared in 2021 after the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) last month

THIS IS the second biggest 'Make-in-India' project cleared in 2021 after the Cabinet Committee on Security last month approved procurement of 83 Tejas Mk-1A fighter jets for the Indian Air Force.

• THE ARJUN Mk-1A tanks would be joining the fleet of the first batch of 124 Arjun tanks which have already been inducted into the Army and are deployed in the western desert along the Pakistan front.

Гејаs Mk-1A fighter jets for the Indian Air Force (IAF) in a deal worth around ₹48,000

The tank has been fully designed and developed by the DRDO in close coordination with the Indian Army. Last week Prime Minister

Narendra Modi had formally

handed over to the Army the Arjun Mk-1A in Chennai. The Indian Army will now issue Request for Proposal

(RFP) to DRDO and after a contract will be signed. The Arjun Mk-1A tanks

would be joining the fleet of the first batch of 124 Arjun

tanks which have already been

Army like the first 124 tanks. Arjun Mark 1-A is equipped with a 120mm main gun and weighs 68 tonnes. The Arjun has been designed by the Vehicles DRDO's Combat Research

(CVRDE)

Chennai

Development Establishment

based

out

inducted into the Army and "To meet the Atmanirbhar are deployed in the western desert along the Pakistan Bharat goals of the govern-ment on time-bound defence procurement process and Arjun Mk-1A has 72 improvefaster decision making and to systematically work towards reducing the time ments over the existing version, of which 14 are major taken for capital acquisition, the DAC also approved that upgrades. The 118 Arjun tanks would also form two regiments in the all capital acquisition con-Armoured Corps of the Indian tracts (delegated and non-delegated) other than design and development (D&D) cases shall be concluded in two years,"

said defence ministry in a It said that the ministry, in consultation with the services and all stakeholders, will come up with detailed plan of action



for achieving the same.







### U.S. CURBS ON 2 **MORE MYANMAR JUNTA LEADERS**

**Washington, Feb. 23:** The United States on Monday announced sanctions against two more leaders of Myanmar's junta and warned of further action as hundreds of thousands defiantly rallied for the restoration of the nation's

democracy.
The US said it was blocking any US property and suspend ing the entry into the country of two members of the newly ruling State Administrative Council — General Maung Maung Kyaw, who commands the air force, and Lieutenant General Moe Myint Tun.

'We will not waver in our support for the people of Burma," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said, using Myanmar's former name.

### **ZUMA GRAFT TRIAL SET TO BEGIN IN MAY**

**Johannesburg, Feb. 23:** Former South African president Jacob Zuma's corruption trial is set to begin in May, more than 16 years after he was first implicated in the

graft allegations.
Zuma, South Africa's president from 2009 to 2018, is accused of receiving bribes from French arms manufacturer Thales. However, both Zuma and Thales have refuted the charges levelled against them, which include corruption. fraud, racketeering, and money laundering.

Zuma's trial and the order for him to appear before a judicial inquiry into corruption are seen as tests of President Cyril Rampahosa's campaign again-

### **NEPAL: HOUSE OF** REPRESENTATIVES REINSTATED

**Kathmandu, Feb. 23:** Nepal's Supreme Court on Tuesday reinstated the dissolved House of Representatives, in a major setback to embattled Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli who was preparing for snap polls amidst a tussle for power with his rivals in the ruling communist party. In a landmark ruling, a five-member Constitutional bench led by Chief Justice Cholendra Shumsher annulled the Oli government's "unconstitutional" decision to dissolve the 275-member lower house of Parliament.

The court also ordered the government to summon the House session within the next 13 days. Nepal plunged into a political crisis on December 20 after President Bidya Dev Bhandari dissolved the House.

### **PUTIN HOSTS BELARUSIAN PREZ FOR TALKS**

Moscow, Feb. 23: Russian President Vladimir Putin hosted his Belarusian counterpart Alexander Lukashenko for talks on Monday, amid media reports suggesting that he was coming to Russia to secure another loan. The Kremlin extended both economical and political support to Lukashenko after his disputed re-election in August triggered the largest and the most sustained wave of mass protests in Belarus' history. In September, Putin said Moscow would provide a \$1.5 billion loan to its ex-Soviet neighbor. Earlier this month, the Kommersant newspaper cited government sources saying that another loan, this time of over \$3 billion, would be discussed during his visit to Russia.

### **AFGHAN PEACE TALKS RESUME IN QATAR**

Islamabad, Feb. 23: After more than a month of delays, escalating violence and a flurrv of diplomatic activity, peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government have resumed in the Middle Eastern State of Qatar. Taliban spokesman Dr. Mohammad Naeem tweeted on Monday night

that talks had resumed There were no details other than the atmosphere was "cordial", a commitment that negotiations should continue and an announcement that the fi rst item of business will be setting the agenda. When talks ended abruptly in January, both sides submitted their wish lists for agendas. The task now is for the two sides to sift through the respective wish lists, agree on items to negotiate and the order in which they will be tackled.

# FB to restore news services in Oz

### Firm to pay local media companies for content after deal on pending landmark legislation

Sydney, Feb. 23: Facebook said Tuesday it will lift a contentious ban on Australian news and pay local media companies for content, after a last-gasp deal on pending landmark legislation. Australia's Treasurer Josh Frydenberg announced a face-saving compromise that will see Google and Facebook plunge tens of millions of dollars into the struggling local news sector.

In return the US digital firms will, for now, avoid being subjected to mandapayments that could cost them vastly more and create what they see as an alarming global prece-

Just hours after the compromise was unveiled, Facebook announced its first proposed deal with an Australian media company, Seven West, and was said to be pursuing com-

local news organisations. The company is expected to use the content to launch a dedicated news product in Australia later this year. "As a result of these changes, we can now work to further our investment in public interest journalism, and restore news on Facebook for Australians in the coming days," said Will Easton, managing director of Facebook Australia. The social media firm sparked global outrage last week by blacking out news for its Australian users in protest at the proposed legislation, and inadvertently blocking a series of non-news Facebook pages linked to everything from cancer charities to emergency response services.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison had angrily accused Facebook of making a decision to "unfriend" Australia. Google has already

• THE SOCIAL media firm sparked global outrage last week by blacking out news for its Australian users in protest at the proposed legislation, and inadvertently blocking a series of non-news Facebook pages linked to everything from cancer charities to emergency response services.

ions of dollars with local media companies, including the two largest: Rupert Murdoch's News Corp and Nine Entertainment. Commentators described

the eleventh-hour amendments — which came as parliament looks set to pass the law this week as "a reasonable compromise". "Everybody can walk away saying, well we

got what we wanted," Uni-versity of New South ry code could be passed by Wales business professor Rob Nicholls said.

Both companies now have an additional two months to reach further agreements that would stave off binding arbitration. The tech firms had fierc-

ely opposed the legislation from the get-go, fearing it would threaten their business models.
In particular, the compa-

nies objected to rules that made negotiations with media companies mandatory and gave an independent Australian arbiter the right to impose a monetary settlement.

That process will now be avoided if companies are deemed to have made a "significant contribution" to the Australian news industry through unspecified "commercial agreements". "We now face the strange possibility that parliament and it applies to precisely no one," said Marcus Strom, head of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, a union.

"It will just sit in the Treasurer's (drawer) as a threat to misbehaving digital companies." Google was also keen to avoid creating a precedent that platforms should pay anyone for links, something that could make their flagship search engine unworkable.

Facebook - which is much less reliant on news content — had initially said being forced to pay for news was simply not worth it and shut down "There is no doubt that Australia has been a proxy battle for the

world," said Frydenberg. Critics of the law say it punishes innovative companies and amounts to a money grab by struggling but politically connected traditional media.

Thousands of journalism jobs and scores of news outlets have been lost in Australia alone over the past decade as the sector watched advertising revenue flow to the digital players.

For every \$100 spent by Australian advertisers today, \$49 goes to Google and \$24 to Facebook according to the country's competition watchdog.

Tech insiders see the legislation as driven, in par ticular, by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, which dominates the local media landscape and has close ties with Australia's conservative government.

A new provision in the law gives Facebook and Google more discretion over who they do deals with, and what the sums involved would be.

# Sex assault: Jail for Queen's kin

London, Feb. 23: A relative of Queen Elizabeth II was on Tuesday sentenced to a 10-month prison term for sexually assaulting a woman at his ancestral home in Angus, Scotland. Earl of Strathmore Simon Bowes-Lyon, who is the son of a cousin of the 94-year-old British monarch, was found to have forced his way into sleeping woman's room during an event he was hosting at Glamis Ca-stle. The 34-year-old was sentenced at Dundee Sheriff Court after he had pleaded guilty.

According to the BBC, Sheriff Alastair Carmic-hael told Bowes-Lyon in court that he had repeatedly ignored his victim's pleas during the attack.

Even now — one year on — she still, occasionally, has nightmares and feels panicked because of being sexually assaulted by you. This has also had an impact on her emotional

Manila, Feb. 23: Philipp-

ine forces have arrested

nine women who were re-

lated to Abu Sayyaf com-

manders and militants in

the south and could have

been "potential suicide bombers," the military said Tuesday.

The women were cap-

houses in three towns in

the predominantly Musl-

im province of Sulu, said

Lt. Gen. Corleto Vinluan.

Jr., who heads the mili-

tary's Western Mindanao

Command. The southern

province is the strongho-

ld of Abu Sayyaf, which is

ppings, beheadings and

bombings. Troops also se-

ized bomb parts, includi-

ng batteries, detonating

cords, suspected explosi-

ve powder and oil, an iron

pipe and nails, along with

known for ransom kidna-

Friday in raids on

wellbeing," said Sheriff Carmichael. Last month, Bowes-Lyon apologised for his actions after entering his guilty plea, saying he felt "greatly ashamed for causing "such distress to a guest in my home"

He said he had "drunk to excess" on the night of the assault, although he noted that this was "no excuse" for what transpired. "I did not think I was capable of behaving the way I did but have had to face up to it and take responsibility," he said outside the court.

"Over the last year this has involved seeking and receiving professional help as well as agreeing to plead guilty as quickly as possible. My apologies go, above all, to the woman concerned but I would also like to apologise to family, friends and colleagues for the distress I have caused them," he

a grenade, cellphones, backpacks and a sketch of

a suspected targeted bo-

welcome those who wish

to return to the folds of

the law but if you will

refuse to do so, we will

surely hunt you down and

prevent you from inflict-

ing havoc in the commu-

nities," said Maj. Gen.

William Gonzales, who

heads government forces

in Sulu. "May this serve

as a clear message to the

supporters and remain-

ing members of the Abu

The suspects would face

criminal charges for illeg-

al possession of explosiv

es, military officials said,

adding that intelligence

and surveillance helped

troops track down the

suspects.

Sayyaf," Gonzales said.

"We are always ready to

mbing area.

### Volcano erupts in Italy



The moon is partially seen in the sky as lava flows from the Mt. Etna volcano, near Catania, Italy, early Tuesday. The explosion started before midnight on Monday, provoking a huge plume that rose for several kilometres from the top of Etna, as reported by The National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology, Etneo Observatory. - AP/PTI

### Ex-security officials to answer for Jan. 6 failures at Capitol Bomb plots: Nine women arrested

Washington, Feb. 23: Congress is set to hear from former US Capitol security officials for the first time about the massive law enforcement failures on Jan. 6, the day a violent mob laid siege to the building and interrupted the presidential

electoral count. Three of the four scheduled to testify Tuesday before two Senate committees resigned under pres-sure immediately after the deadly attack, including the former head of the Capitol Police. Much remains unknown about what happened before and during the assault, and lawmakers are expected to aggressively question the former officials

about what went wrong. How much did law enforcement agencies know about plans for violence that day, many of which were public?

Cape Canaveral (US),

Feb 23: Nasa has released

the first high-quality

video of a spacecraft land-

ing on Mars, a three-minu-

te trailer showing the eno-

rmous orange and white

parachute hurtling open and the red dust kicking

up as rocket engines lowe-

red the rover to the sur-

face. The quality was so

breathtaking — that members of the rover team

said they felt like they

"It gives me goosebumps

every time I see it, just

amazing," said Dave Gruel, head of the entry and

descent camera team. The

Perseverance rover landed

last Thursday near an

ancient river delta in

Jezero Crater to search for

were riding along.

— and the images so

America's relationship with China is one of "strong competition" and the Biden administration will work in close coordination with partners and allies to make sure that it is coming from a position of strength, the White House has said, a day after Beijing urged the US to stop inter-fering in its internal affairs and lift trade sanctions. White House Press Secr-

etary Jen Psaki made the comments on Monday while responding to a question on a statement made by Chinese State Councillor Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the China-US ties. Wang said that the US should stop "smearing" the ruling Communist Party of China and its one-party political system, lift sanctions on trade and halt Washington's backing of "separatist forces" in Taiwan, Tibet, Hong Kong and Xinjiang. He also said that the Biden administration should "adjust" the hardline policy pursued by for-mer President Donald Trump towards Beijing to check its growing influence.

China relation is one of

strong competition: WH

At the White House briefing, Psaki said, "there is, of course, a review of our tariffs and the tariffs that were put in place. I don't have any update on that at this point in time. "We believe the relation-

3-MINUTE | TRAILER | Rover searching for signs of ancient microscopic life

Nasa releases video of Mars landing

strong competition. We want to come to that relationship from a position of strength.
"That means working in

close coordination with our partners and allies around the world: Europeans, other partners in the region, also with Democrats and Republicans in Congress. And it also means we want to do work at home, and focus on doing work at home, to make sure we are coming to that from a position of streng th," Psaki said.

The relations between China and the US are at an



### **IRAN IMPOSES CURBS ON UN N-INSPECTIONS**

Tehran, Feb. 23: Iran officially has begun restricting international inspections of its nuclear facilities, state TV reported Tuesday, a bid to pressure European countries and US President Joe Biden's administration to lift crippling economic sanctions and restore the 2015 nuclear deal. The state TV report gave little detail beyond confirming that Iran had made good on its threat to reduce cooperation with International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors. Iran's move to limit international inspections underscores the daunting task facing Biden as he seeks to rever-se Trump's policies and return to the deal, the most significant pact between Iran and major world powers since its 1979 Islamic revolution.

"The law has gone into effect from this morning," said Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, reiterating that Iran would no longer share surveillance fo-otage of its nuclear facilities with the UN agency.

'We never gave them live video, but (recordings) were given daily and weekly," Zarif said of the IAEA's access to information recorded by camera monitors. "The tape recording of our (nuclear) programme will be kept in Iran."

### **DRUG KINGPIN EL CHAPO'S WIFE ARRESTED**

Washington, Feb. 23: The wife of Mexican drug kingpin Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman was arrested Monday in the United States and accused of helping her hus-band run his multibillion-dollar cartel and plot his audacious escape from a Mexican prison

Emma Coronel Aispuro, a 31-year-old former beauty queen, was arre-sted at Dulles International Airport in Virginia and is expected to appear in federal court in Washington on Tuesday. She is a dual citizen of the United States and Mexico. Her arrest is the latest twist in the bloody, multinational saga involving Guzman, the longtime head of the Sinaloa drug cartel.

Guzman, whose two dramatic prison escapes in Mexico fed into a legend that he and his family were all but untouchable, was extradited to the United States in 2017 and is serving life in prison. And now his wife, with whom he has two young daughters, has been charged with helping him run his criminal

# Biden: 5L deaths heartbreaking

Washington, Feb. 23: The United States on Monday crossed a grim "heartbreaking milestone" in its fight against Covid-19 as the death toll due to the disease crossed 500,000, a staggering figure that is more than the combined American casualties during World War I, World War II and the Vietnam War. "As a nation, we can't accept such a cruel fate. We've been fighting this pandemic for so long. We have to resist becoming numb to the sorrow. We have to resist viewing each life as a statistic or a blurb or on the news, President Joe Biden said on Monday as he led the nation in mourning the "Today we mark a

truly grim, heartbreak-

ing milestone — 500,071 dead," Biden said at a can-

the grim milestone.

More than 28.1 million Americans have also been infected — another global record. He also participated in a moment of silence, standing by 500 lighted candles outsi de the White House, joined by first lady Jill Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and second gentleman Doug Emhoff.

Biden, a Democrat, said efforts should be made to end the politics and misinformation that has divided families, communities in the country. Noting that the pandemic has cost too many lives alrea dy, he said it is not the Democrats and the Rep ublicans who are dying from the virus — it's the

fellow Americans. — PTI

signs of ancient microscopic life. After spending the weekend binge-watching the descent and land ing video, the team at Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, shared the video at a news

conference on Monday.

'These videos and these images are the stuff of our dreams," said Al Chen, who was in charge of the landing team. Six off-theshelf cameras were devoted to entry, descent and landing, looking up and down from different perspectives. All but one camera worked. The lone microphone turned on for landing failed, but Nasa got some snippets of sound after touchdown: The whirring of the rover's systems and wind

FLIGHT CONTROLLERS were thrilled with the thousands of images beamed back - and also with the remarkably good condition of the rover. It will spend the next two years exploring the dry river delta and drilling into rocks.

gusts. Flight controllers were thrilled with the thousands of images beamed back — and also with the remarkably good condition of the rover. It will spend the next two years exploring the dry river delta and drilling into rocks that may hold evidence of life 3 billion to 4 billion years ago. The core samples will be

set aside for return to land successfully in Jeze-Earth in a decade. Nasa ro Crater with Perseve-added 25 cameras to the \$3 rance," he said. billion mission — the most ever sent to Mars.

The space agency's previous rover, 2012's Curiosity, managed only jerky, grainy stop-motion images, mostly of terrain. Curiosity is still working. So is Nasa's InSight lander, although it's hampered by dusty solar panels.

Deputy project manager Matt Wallace said he was inspired several years ago to film Perseverance's harrowing descent when his young gymnast daughter wore a camera while performing a backflip.
Watching the video "I

are getting a glimpse into what it would be like to

Thomas Nasa's science mission chief, said the video and also the panoramic views following touchdown "are the closest you can get to landing on Mars without putting on a pressure suit." The images will help Nasa prepare for astronaut flights to Mars in the decades ahead, according to the engineers.

There's a more immediate benefit. "I know it's been a tough year for everybody," said imaging scientist Justin Maki, 'and we're hoping that

# Chronicle

**24 FEBRUARY 2021** 

# Puducherry: Democracy on backfoot, hold polls on time

he V. Narayanasamy-led Congress government lost a trust vote in Puducherry paving the way for an alternative mode of governance till the elections in April-May. Those wishing to bring down an elected government have succeeded in their efforts at demolishing democratic functioning backed by the will of the people as reflected from free and fair polls. The southern Union Territory is just another regime which in being brought down fulfils the "Congress *mukt*" aims of the national ruling party. The indecent hurry shown in dismantling the regime even at the cost of sacrificing a faithful "lieutenant" in Kiran Bedi has been linked to the Prime Minister's visit to Puducherry on February 25 to inaugurate a renovated landmark. The machinations were complete once the Speaker was convinced into falling line with a Supreme Court order investing three nominated MLAs with the vote on such matters as the Budget and trust vote. The Puducherry imbroglio follows the classic pattern of destabilisation of

This does not absolve those who continue to bring down governments through the clever strategy of resignations when anti-defection laws

regimes not owing allegiance to the ruling dispensation at the Centre. It began with Arunachal Pradesh and swept through Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh and is another milestone for the BJP as it sought more footholds in the south while denying the Congress any share in power in a vast region. An emaciated Congress had not been politically appropriate the south while the south was a superfect of the south through the sou cally smart enough to nominate three MLAs to the UT in time and now suffers the fate of are in place

ruling only in Punjab, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, besides backing the Shiva Sena and NCP government in Maharashtra. The laidback manner of political operations in the grand old party played into the

hands of a manoeuvring BJP, so brazen in its use of the office of governors and lieutenant governors in throttling the functioning of governments.

The Puducherry question should help bring the focus back to whether nominated members of Parliament and legislatures can be allowed to vote. The Speaker's decision to abide by a Supreme Court judgment may have helped avert an awkward confrontation with the higher judiciary. Whether this only places a crown on the supremacy of the judiciary in present-day India is moot and needs a lot more debating on the delineation of powers among three pillars in a democracy. The Puducherry Speaker's action can be questioned as to due procedure not followed in the trust vote though the chief minister and his alliance MLAs walking out before the confidence motion may only have helped him arrive at his own conclusion within the sweeping ambit of a Speaker's power in the House.

The hunger for power driving toppling games is as old as the hills in India and may have evolved from ancient palace intrigues. This does not absolve those who continue to bring down governments through the clever strategy of resignations when anti-defection laws are in place. This is not a good advertisement for a democracy that mandates honouring of popular verdicts in a modern setting. It remains to be seen if Puducherry is in for a spell of President's Rule but the aim should be to give an immediate opportunity for the people to vote again and it is incumbent on the forces that be to support the case for elections to be held in Puducherry as slated.

### Judiciary's late intervention

The order of Bombay high court on Monday granting bail to poet Varavara Rao, an accused under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in the Bhima-Koregaon violence case, is a welcome intervention by the judiciary to stop state agencies from using stringent special laws to keep citizens behind bars as undertrials forever. Given his age and health condition, "sending him back to Taloja central prison would amount to endangering his life, thereby violating his fundamental right under Article 21", the court held, and said it could not be a "mute spectator" as Mr Rao's health deteriorated in government facilities.

While granting him bail, the court also widened the scope of the writ jurisdiction of the high court under Article 226 of the Constitution to invoke Article 21 on the right to life and offer relief to people who face the stringent sections in special laws, which make it difficult even for the courts to grant relief.

In a similar case earlier this month, the Supreme Court held that statutory restrictions should not stop constitutional courts from granting bail on grounds of violation of Part III of the Constitution. It had also asked the constitutional courts to consider the inordinate delay in the start of the trial while considering bail petitions. "Such an approach would safeguard against the possibility of provisions like Section 43-D (5) of UAPA being used as the sole denial of bail or for wholesale breach of constitutional right to speedy trial," it said.

These two orders together send a message to the law enforcement and investigating agencies that they have to use their professional excellence to get people convicted of crimes and keep them in jail instead of using provisions in special laws to do so. The courts' resolute interventions also offer a ray of hope to hundreds of undertrial prisoners languishing in our jails due to the delay in

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Anantapur: Thapovan colony, Bangalore By-Pass Road, Anantapur - 515004, Ph: 08554-276903; Fax:

Karimnagar: Survey No.1341, Vavilalapally Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar - 505 001, Ph. 0878-Nellore: Survey No.527/2, Burranpur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chemmudugunta Panchayat, Nellore, Ph.

0861-2348581/82; Telefax: 0861-2348580 Chennai: SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Ph: 044-22254747/ 48/50/51:

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# Afghan challenges for India & Taliban factor



Anand K. Sahay

**Far & Near** 

n the Afghanistan context, the present juncture can be characterised the twilight hour embedding the deepest uncertainty. India cannot but be greatly con-cerned as it has indicated interest in being invested over the long term. It has unmistak-able strategic interests in a geopolitical (and geo-economic) area that marks the junction of South Asia, West Asia

and Central Asia. India's interest has lately been underlined in spite of the unsettling political and military situation in Afghanistan, which may well permit the return of the Taliban to the seat of power in Kabul. Indeed, India's commitment to the people of Afghanistan was restated when earlier this month it signed the \$300 million Shahtoot dam project that will provide clean drinking water to the once great city of Kabul, which has fallen on hard times in

The Taliban, a strong politico-military outfit specialising in the terrorist method, are a spe-cial product of Pakistan, manufactured to permit Islamabad to have a long-term hold over Kabul. This is widely recognised. The Taliban leadership lives in Pakistan. Whether the Taliban will continue to be under Pakistan's thumb over the long haul is a matter for the future.

Pakistan influences Afghanistan in deep, malignant ways as it has a long border with that country. Pakistan's best friend China, now militarily and economically very powerful, also has a border with Afghanistan. India, on the other hand, does not, and is thus disadvantaged by geography.

And yet, it must remain engaged with Afghanistan. Whether the Taliban's recapture of Kabul comes to pass or staying engaged Afghanistan India's foremost chal-

lenge in the region.

New tools need to be devised. A new diplomacy with the friendly countries of the region, in particular Iran and Russia, which enjoy contiguity with Afghanistan (Russia via Tajikistan, where Moscow's influis paramount), must be envisioned. Indeed, the process of better gauging the Taliban, and forging the terms on which a relationship with this group can be reached, is also a part of the challenge for India.

The uncertainty in the Afghan theatre has been of the agreement reached by America's erstwhile Trump administration with the precipitated on account Taliban one year ago this month. Under the Doha accord, all US troops must leave Afghanistan by May 1 this year in return for the Taliban cutting links with Al Qaeda. Alongside, the Taliban are enjoined to engage in an intra-Afghan dialogue in which the Afghan government is included. This is with a view to the formation of a govern-ment that will enjoy wide acceptability in the country The Taliban have, how-

ever, scuttled meaningful negotiations. They have instead unleashed violence on an unheardof scale, killing around 50 people daily over the past year, and engaging in targeted assassinations. The prognosis is dire. If the American forces pull out wholesale as planned, it is widely thought that civil war will break out. Armed factions are likely to emerge to resist the Taliban as the latter attempt to take control in Kabul with the help of Pakistan (and possibly China), while some

with the Taliban.
All eyes are on the new
US administration of
President Joe Biden.
Will he stick to the timetable of withdrawal of American forces envisaged by his prede-cessor? Or will he, as many have urged, adopt a conditions-based

approach whereby the

regional powers, are naturally watching the situation closely. Iran and Russia, which carry considerable weight in Afghanistan, would Argnanistan, would want the Americans to withdraw soonest, but not in a rush. They fear that a hasty US pullout will inexorably pave the path for a quick Taliban or Pakistan takeover as other leading political and armed factions (over which Iran and Russia have natural leverage) will be disadvantaged if

political process. India — while it has commonalities Tehran and Moscow on the Afghan issue — desires that the US ensure a smooth political process for the future governance of Afghanistan in which all participants, including the Taliban if they are interested, engage in political competition on the basis of an agreed Constitution, without resort to arms, in a sovereign, de-

such a goal for long but has done all too little to work in that direction. It practically found itself rooted to the ground for more than six months after the US and Taliban signed the Doha agreement in February 2020,

US forces will persevere with a withdrawal scheme that will be guid-ed by conditions on the ground and not by an artificial timetable. The Afghans, and the

the Taliban cut through militarily, pre-empting a

mocratic, Afghanistan. New Delhi has nursed

Zamir Kabulov, the **Russian President's** special envoy for Afghanistan and a respected Kabul hand, is said to have noted wryly: 'If India wants to come to the party, it must dance!'

Evidently, the war was

ies and doing little else.
India showed yet again that while it has influence in Africania.

ence in Afghanistan, especially with the peo-

ple, it possesses little

leverage. Lately, howev-

er, attempts are being made to change this state of affairs. To the

satisfaction of the Ashraf Ghani govern-ment in Kabul, New Delhi actively engaged the United States and

Nato to resist a precipi-

tate military withdrawal

and has shown other signs of engaging more

deeply.

It may be appropriate to make mention in this

context of the Afghan

charge d'affaires in New Delhi, Tahir Qadiry, who worked with ener-gy, and some foresight, in a most difficult

moment to impress upon

India to step up its act

and be proactive to

mobilise Afghan factions

in the democratic direc-

tion even as the US-sanc-

tioned Doha process

(which may conceivably

unravel) plays its music

in a different register. Kabul has not had an

ambassador in New

Delhi for more than two

years and it fell to this

young diplomat to fill a

big gap. It is this spirit that saw in the recent period the arrival in

New Delhi of senior

Afghan personalities

such as Abdul Rashid

Dostum and Ata Mohammad Noor and others

although the Covid-19

pandemic inhibited trav-

viable consensus among

the top political figures of Afghanistan is crucial

in the context of a post-

India enjoys the good-

will to be a catalyst. But

will it play that part? Zamir Kabulov, the

Russian President's spe-

cial envoy for Afghanistan and a respected Kabul hand, is

said to have noted wryly:

to the party, it must dance!" Perhaps prelimi-

nary steps have been

taken in that direction.

But it is still early days. What New Delhi must

really prepare for is to

remain on *terra firma* in

the Afghan theatre even

if the US troops pull out

completely in the next

'If India wants to come

US Afghanistan.

The building of a

**OIL FROM IRAN** 

one-sided even as the senior-most politician in the country with 40 plus years of industry experience had faltered for the umpteenth time in assessing the mood of the rural electorate. Telugu Desam chief and former chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has apparently miscalculated the situation thinking that people in general are not happy because of the economic conditions and wanted the gram panchayat polls to be held. But the people voted diligently to teach a bitter lesson once again to the TD and its leadership.

Govardhana Myneedu

### **RISING FUEL PRICES**

There seems to be no respite in the near future from ever-growing fuel prices in India. It's ironic that a litre of petrol costs ₹100 in India when the barrel of crude oil in international market is around \$60 now, whereas it was ₹60 only when the crude oil barrel was hovering at \$100 in 2012. The taxes levied on fuel are more than the actual price Instead of passing the buck to oil companies for the entire woes and blaming the previous regimes for the present need of imports, the government should cut the taxes.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao Vizianagaram

### 50 YEARS AGO IN **Ihronicle Separation will be** suicidal for

HYDERABAD, February. 23

**Telangana: CM** 

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister K. Brahmananda Reddy today warned that if the demand for separate Telangana was conceded, it might end up in violence and bloodshed as in West Bengal because of frustration among the

Addressing separately the meetings of Congress (R) Advocates' Forum and National Union of Students, he said the avenues and opportunities for employment would be far less in a small State than in a bigger one and consequently there would be greater frustration leading to unpleasant situations. The division of the State might lead to the demands for further division of the region. This course would not solve the problem, he added.

# Dilip Cherian



'Takeover' of Gymkhana Club strikes fear in Lutyens' Delhi

capital's Gymkhana Club, the 107-year-old watering hole favoured by the high and mighty of currently beleaguered Lutyens' Delhi, is back in the news. With its seemingly endless saga of mismanagement and irregularities, the Club has been in the limelight a lot, unfortunately.

The present crisis has emerged after the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) dissolved the Club's governing council and appointed M.M. Juneja, director general of the ministry of corporate affairs, as "administrator" to oversee the club's functioning even as the legal case continues. Among Mr Juneja's first actions after his appointment sent a notice to all members to clear pending dues amounting to Rs 1.2 crores!

This is the first time in the Club's history that an administrator has been appointed to run its affairs. Mr Juneja has been given the mandate to introduce "the best practices that can bring the club to the 21st-century norms"

The current imbroglio dates back four years when the ministry of corporate affairs decided to open an inquiry into the Club's management after the growing number of complaints and court cases against the Club. The petition was filed early last year at the NCLAT in which the ministry sought to take over the Club management. It seems to have got its way, for now. Other clubs in Lutyens' Delhi are trembling now that serious action has begun. Any guesses about who's next? DKB is listening to your chatter, so send it in...

### **ED ON AN EXPANSION SPREE**

As it seeks to become nimbler as well as to strengthen its reach due to growing responsibilities, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is on an expansion spree. This requires more officers for new zonal and sub-zonal offices.

The agency, a part of the revenue department of the Union finance ministry, is responsible for enforc-

ing economic laws and fighting economic crime. But with a wider iurisdiction now with new responsibilities under the FEMA, PMLA and FEO acts, it will need to expand

its footprint. According to sources, the expansion will involve a considerable restructuring of its cadre strength. At present, ED has a sanctioned strength of 2,064 posts including five special directors and 27 joint directors. Since there is a shortage of officers for even the sanctioned posts, there is a greater urgency for selecting more officers to fill existing vacancies as well as for the new offices. Apparently, there is a move to create new posts of additional/joint directors and deputy directors for the new zonal and sub-zonal offices.

Recently, ED promoted 10 assistant directors as deputy directors of enforcement. They include P. Radhakrishnan, P. Vinod Kumar, P. Nandini, Rajesh Kumar, M. Nair, Shubhendu Parthi, Diptesh Mon-dal, Benjamin S.N. Chattair, Pad-

ma, V.G. Thomas and Krishna Jain. The agency has also recently opened two new zonal offices in Bhopal and Gurugram and raised the status of sub-zonal offices in Raipur and Bhubaneshwar to zonal offices. It has also opened several sub-zonal offices across the country.

two months.

#### **BIHAR EX-DGP'S POLITICAL CAREER STILL AT START LINE**

The political ambitions of the highprofile former DGP of Bihar Gupteshwar Pandey have been

thwarted, yet again.
Though Mr Pandey waited patiently for his hoped-for induction into the NDA government, chief minister Nitish Kumar has instead appointed another former IPS officer. Sunil Kumar, as a cabinet minister in the state with the excise and prohibition portfolio, barely a few months after his retirement.

Mr Pandey shot into the headline with his comments during the furore over actor Sushant Singh's suicide. Even as the controversy

raged, Mr Pandey took voluntary retirement and joined the Janata Dal (United) Party hoping to get a party ticket. However, the ticket went to the BJP candidate under the seat-sharing agreement within the NDA.

This denied, many were certain that Mr Pandey would be inducted into the Nitish Cabinet sooner than later. But Sunil Kumar has pipped him to that. Neither has Mr Pandey been made an MLC either.

Curiously, this was Mr Pandey's second attempt at a career in politics. In 2009, he had taken voluntary retirement in the hope of getting a BJP ticket, which he was denied. Luckily for him, Nitish Kumar allowed him to withdraw his resignation from the IPS and subsequently even elevated him as state police chief.

Will Mr Pandey's patient wait fructify or has he run out of options? We'll wait and see.

Share a babu experience! Follow

# E FINANCIAL DECCAN CHRONICLE | NELLORE | WEDNESDAY | 24 FEBRUARY 2021

# quick BITES

INDICATO	%	
Sensex	49,751.41	0.01
Nifty 50	14,707.80	0.22
S&P 500*	3,841.84	-0.89
Dollar (₹)	72.44	0.08
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.73	-0.13
Euro (₹)	88.05	-0.31
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,372▲337	0.72
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	65.24	0.00
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.172	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.372	0.003
* As of 8:30 PM IST		

### Punjab & Sind Bk to allot ₹5,500 cr shares to govt

Punjab & Sind Bank will allot preferential shares to the government next month in lieu of Rs 5,500 crore capital infusion An EGM of the shareholders is scheduled on March 25 in this respect, the bank said. In September, the government had approved a Rs 20,000 crore fund through Parliament for capital infusion into public sector banks. Of this, Rs 5,500 crore was approved to be infused into P&SB.

### NTPC inks pact to buy Gail's 25% in Ratnagiri Gas



NTPC said it has signed a share purchase agreement to buy Gail's 25.51 per cent stake in Ratnagiri Gas and Power Pvt Ltd (RGPPL), commonly known as Dabhol project. Once the transaction is complete, NTPC will have 86.49 per cent stake in RGPPL. Earlier in January, NTPC had announced acquiring 35.47 per cent stake in RGPPL from its lenders. Initially, NTPC and Gail had 25.51 per cent stake each in the Dabhol project.

### Sebi: Pre-expiry margins to curb -ve prices soon

The Sebi will put in place pre-expiry margins on cash settled contracts wherein the underlying commodities are deemed to be susceptible to possible near zero or negative prices— like that happened in crude oil futures las year. The decision, to be effective from April 1, is aimed at encouraging reduction of open interest as the contract approaches the expiry date. The margin will be applicable on some commodities under ARMF.

### Bajaj launches new Pulsar 180 priced at ₹1.08 L

Bajaj Auto has launched the new version of Pulsar 180 bike priced at Rs 1,07,904, ex-showroom Delhi. The 178.6 cc model gets sporty split seats, black alloy wheels, LED tail lamp, five-speed transmission gear box with telescopic anti-friction bush in the front suspension and a five-way adjustable nitrox shock absorber at the rear. Currently, 20 per cent of the sports biking segment is in the 180-200cc motorcycles.



### ■ Separation could help revive stake sale to Aramco

# RIL to spinoff O2C unit with \$25 billion loan

DEBJIT CHAKRABORTY & ARCHANA CHAUDHARY

Reliance Industries Ltd has started carving out its new oil-to-chemicals operation into an independent unit with a \$25 billion loan from the parent, as billionaire Mukesh Ambani steps up efforts to unlock the value of his businesses

The wholly owned unit's assets will be funded by the interest-bearing loan, which will be an "efficient mechanism to upstream cash, including any potential capital receipts," in the unit, according to a presentation filed with the stock exchanges. Oil-to-chemicals

contributed more than 60 per cent in the last financial year to the group's revenue that's been lately pivoting toward consumer businesses such as technology and retail. Splitting the business will make it easier for Ambani to bring in investors and help expedite a proposed stake sale to Saudi Arabian Oil Co. Creating the unit "facili-

strategic and financial investors," Reliance said. It expects the separation to be completed by September. Approvals have been received from the markets regulator and stock exchanges, and the company will seek a nod from shareholders and creditors in the first quar-

participation by

Ambani amassed more than \$27 billion last year from global investors,

#### **SLICING AND DICING VALUE**

- RIL to house only upstream oil and gas E&P biz, including KG-D6 block, financial services, group treasury and legacy textile businesses
- Even though the O2C assets will move into a new arm, its debt will continue with RIL
- O2C unit houses Singapore and UK-based oil trading subsidiaries and Reliance Industries Uruguay Petroquimica SA.
- It also houses Reliance Ethane Pipeline Ltd that operates a pipeline between Dahej and Nagothane as well as a 74.9% stake RIL holds in the JV with Sibur

including Facebook Inc and Google through stake sales in his retail and digital ventures, tur Reliance net-debt-free. turning

Reliance has floated separate units twice earlier for funding two refineries on the west coast. The entities were merged with the parent on the completion of plants, which can together now process 1.4 million barrels of crude daily, making it the world's biggest refining complex.
Once the spin-off is com-

pleted, Reliance Industries upstream oil and gas exploration and production business, including the KG-D6 block, financial services, group treasury and the legacy textile businesses, and act as a holding com-

pany of the group.

The retail business is held in Reliance Retail Ventures and telecom and digital ventures are nested in Jio Platforms.

RIL holds 85.1 per cent of Reliance Retail and 67.3 per

cent of Jio Platforms. The rest it had sold to global investors for over Rs 2 lakh

RIL will provide the \$25 billion loan to the O2C subsidiary at floating interest rate for 10 years. The subsidiary has about \$42 billion of assets (28 per cent of consolidated assets).

In August 2019, KIL had agreed to upstream Rs 1.08 lakh crore of Jio's debt to make its telecom venture debt-free, ahead of inducting strategic and financial investors like Facebook, Google and KKR.

As of December 2020, RIL's gross debt stood at Rs 2.57 lakh crore.

Even though the O2C assets will move into a new arm, its debt will continue to sit inside RIL. The O2C unit also houses

the firm's Singapore and the UK-based oil trading subsidiaries and marketing subsidiary, Reliance Industries Petroquimica SA.
It also houses Reliance

Ethane Pipeline Limited that operates a pipeline between Dahej in Gujarat and Nagothane in Maharashtra as well as a 74.9 per cent stake that Reliance holds in the joint

venture with Sibur. It's very large ethane carriers, gas pipelines such as one that transports coalbed methane from its coal bed methane (CBM) blocks, overseas oil and gas asset holding company Reliance Industries (Middle East) DMCC, and domestic exploration and production assets would not form part of the O2C unit. Also, RIL's textiles busi-

ness as operated out of the Naroda site, Baroda township and land, including cricket stadium, Jamnagar power assets, and Sikka and Terminals Limited would also not be part of the O2C unit.

RIL owns and operates twin oil refineries at Jamnagar in Gujarat, with a combined capacity of 68.2 million tonnes per annum. It is also the country's

largest petrochemical manufacturer with units at Jamnagar, Dahej, Hazira, Nagothane, Vadodara, Patalganga, Silvassa, Barabanki, and Hoshiarpur.

The company holds a 66.6 per cent stake in the KG-D6 block where it is investing about \$5 billion in develop ing a second set of gas discoveries along with BP. It also has a similar stake

in the NEC-25 block in the Bay of Bengal and operates two CBM blocks in MP. These upstream assets are not part of the O2C unit. -Bloomberg/PTI

### **INDIA INC MAY OFFER 7.7% SALARY HIKE**

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 23

Indian Inc is likely to offer an average salary hike of 7.7 per cent in 2021 after the decade's lowest hike of 6.1 per cent in 2020. The year will also see a reversal from the 10-year declining trend in salary hike. However, this may not increase higher cash-inhand for employees if organisations make higher provident fund contributions as per the new labour codes

According to a survey by global professional services firm Aon, almost 88 per cent of surveyed companies reported they intend to increase salaries in 2021. up from 75 per cent in

Over 34 per cent companies said that they would offer salary hike between 8 and 10 per cent, while 30.6 per cent would offer 5 to 8 per cent. Only 12.2 per cent companies said they would not give any hike and this is lower than 25.4 per cent in 2020.

Hirings are, meanwhile, picking up in India Inc. Job site Scikey Market Network, which has analysed data from over 15,000 job postings, said the IT sector is experiencing a sequential growth in hiring since the lockdown. Job postings were up 39 per cent in January compared to December.

The IT sector was followed by BPO (10 per cent growth) and banking (6 per cent).

Job postings have seen a jump in several metro cities, including Hyderabad and Pune.

### China returns as top trade partner amid border standoff

KARTHIKEYAN SUNDARAM & ARCHANA CHAUDHAR

China regained its position as India's top trade partner in 2020, as New reliance Delhi's imported machines outweighed its efforts to curb commerce with Beijing after a border conflict. Two-way trade between

the economic and strategic rivals stood at \$77.7 billion last year, shows provisional data from India's commerce ministry. Although that was lower than the previous year's \$85.5 billion, it was enough to make China the largest commercial partner displacing the USbilateral trade with which came in at \$75.9 billion amid muted demand for goods in the middle of a pandemic.

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi banned hundreds of Chinese apps, slowed approvals for investments from the neighbour and called for self-reliance after a deadly clash along their dis-puted Himalayan border, India continues to rely heavily on Chinese-made heavy machinery, telecom equipment and home appliances. As a result, the bilateral trade gap with China was at almost \$40 billion in 2020, making it India's largest.

Total imports China at \$58.7 billion were more than India's combined purchases from the US and the UAE, which are its second- and third-largest trade part-



2018 2019 Source: Ministry of Commerce

Note: Data for 2020 is provisional ners, respectively. That said, India did manage to lower imports from its neighbour amid demand disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic. India also managed to increase its exports to China by about

11 per cent from a year

ago to \$19 billion last year. The tense relations are already weighing on India's ambitions to bolster its manufacturing capabilities. New Delhi has been slow to issue visas to Chinese engi-neers needed to help Taiwanese companies set up factories under a socalled production-linked incentive programme, or PLI, to promote local manufacturing. "Still a very long way to

Palit, an economist specialising in international trade and investment at the National University of Singapore, described New Delhi's efforts to wean itself away from Beijing. "The PLI schemes will take at least four-five years to create fresh capacities in specific sec-

go" is how Amitendu

tors. Till then reliance on China would continue.

### **HSBC TO CUT OFFICE SPACE BY 40% OVER YEARS**

**LAWRENCE WHITE** LONDON, FEB. 23

HSBC plans to nearly halve its office space globally over the long term as part of a cost-cutting drive set out on Tuesday, in a further sign the pandemic could mean permanent changes to working pat-

HSBC aims to cut its office footprint by 40 per cent over the long-term. the bank said in an analyst presentation.

The bank's CEO Noel Quinn said the reduction would come from axing office buildings as their leases come to an end and would not include branches or HSBC's headquarters building in London's Canary Wharf. Retained buildings will be used more flexibly, Quinn said. Several banks have said

they will adopt more hybrid working after most of their staff switched to working from home, but few have spelled out a specific space target.

Asia-focused rival Standard Chartered moved to permanent flexible working in November, later signing an agreement with flexible workspace provider IWG. -Reuters

# Broking income set to hit ₹27,500 cr

**RAVI RANJAN PRASAD** 

Due to high turnover in the first nine months of current fiscal, the brokerage industry is estimated to clock a record broking income of Rs 27,500-28,500 crore in FY21, up 30-35 per cent growth compared to Rs 21,000 crore in FY20, says rating agency Icra. equity market

reported an aggregate turnover of Rs 4,222 lakh crore in the first nine months of FY21, register-ing year-on-year (YoY) growth of 66 per cent. The average daily turnover (ADTO) rose to Rs 22.46 lakh crore till December

in FY21 compared to Rs 13.89 lakh crore in the comparable period last year and Rs 14.39 lakh crore in FY20. "The industry growth

rate, however, is expected to moderate in the fiscal 2021-22 with gradual moderation in transaction volumes," Icra said. rating

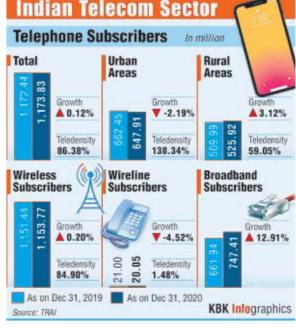
expects industry aggregate broking income of Rs 29,500-30,500 crore (YoY growth of 7-8 per cent), in FY22. Growing retail FY22. Growing retail share along with increased interest and other fee income is expected to support profitability of bro-

Large established enti-

in online broking have increased their market share in the current environment. As per NSE data, the top 20 brokerage houses together accounted for about 84 per cent of overall active client accounts as of December 2020, up from 75 per cent as of March 2020 and 57

Discount brokerage houses have been able to garner a predominant share of the new accounts sup-ported by their technology-driven business model. But many traditional brokerage companies had a slow start to the year in terms of client additions.

per cent as of March 2019.



# Airtel partners with Qualcomm to drive 5G services

Bharti Airtel Ltd said on Tuesday it will work with US chipmaker Qualcomm for 5G services in India, as telecom firms in the second-largest wireless market gear up to usher in the latest generation of wireless networks.
Airtel, placed second to

Reliance Industries-owned

Jio by subscribers, said in

Qualcomm's Radio Access Network platforms, which runs services on the cloud to roll out 5G networks in the country. "This collaboration

exchanges that it will use

aims to allow a faster rollout of broadband services ... across India for "last mile" connectivity challenges that are becoming increasingly important in today's remote, mobile-

Although the need for high-speed internet has been highlighted in the pandemic-led work-fromhome year, India's 5G ambitions have been buffeted by delays in auction of airwaves that support the technology.
Concerns have also been

raised by telecoms around the relatively high pricing of spectrum in India.

to auction some airwaves in March, bands that support 5G will only be auctioned in the next six months, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology said in a report on India's 5G preparedness. The technology ultimate-

While the country is set

promises internet speeds up to 20 times faster than existing networks.

Jio has previously said it built an in-house 5G solution and is ready to roll out services as soon as airwaves are made available. Parent Reliance last year raised about \$97 million from Qualcomm for its digital unit that houses Jio. Still, Airtel has seen

gains in market share faster than Jio over the last few months of 2020.

### **PIAGGIO ENTERS CARGO ELECTRIC 3-WHEELER SPACE**

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNF, FFB, 23

Piaggio Vehicles, the Italian manufacturer of small commercial vehicles, on Tuesday entered the cargo electric threewheeler segment with the launch of Ape' E-Xtra FX priced at Rs 3.12 lakh. This is the second product in the EV space by the company with the first being the passenger electric three-wheeler Ape' E-City which was launched in late 2019 and came with swappable battery technology.

These small commercial vehicles are powered by the FX (fixed) range of battery solutions. The Ape' E-City is priced at Rs 2.83 lakh. Both prices are introductory.

The Ape' E-Xtra FX gives 9.5 kW power output and has a payload capacity of 506kg.

The top-speed of both

E-Xtra FX and E-City FX is 45km/hour. The ďrive range of the cargo variant is 90km and the passenger variant, 110km.

The charging time for both the vehicles is three hours and 45 minutes.

# Thailand may set income criteria for crypto traders

**ANUCHIT NGUYEN** FEB. 23

Thailand plans to introduce new rules to curb individuals' cryptocurrency trading after a surge in inflows from young people sparked concern.

Retail investors will probably be required to show their income or assets before opening trading accounts with the nation's six licensed cryptocurrency exchanges, said Ruenvadee Suwanmongkol, the secretary general of the Securities & Exchange Commission. Anyone who isn't allowed to trade crypto via their

own accounts can invest through licensed fund managers or financial advisers, she said, declining to elaborate. "It's a big concern as

most crypto investors on domestic exchanges are very young, such as stu-dents and teenagers," Ruenvadee said. "We realise those people love innovations and technology, but investments in these assets have enor-

mous risk. Thai authorities are joining other countries' regulators in warning

about cryptocurrencies.

even as price rallies draw

retail investors searching

for higher returns amid record low interest rates. Bitcoin, the largest token, has added more than \$450 billion of value in 2021 and reached \$1 trillion in market capitalisation for the first time last week.

The new rules may require individual investors to possess some knowledge of crypto markets before being allowed to open accounts to trade them, said Ruenvadee.

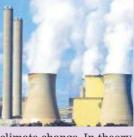
Trading of cryptocurrencies on the nation's licensed bourses more than tripled in January from December to 65 bil-lion baht (\$2.17 billion).

### GOING | GREEN | Warming potential of underlying assets a concern Funds vex over 'portfolio warming'

ALASTAIR MARSH

All good money managers expect to outperform their benchmark, and by one such metric the French insurer and investor Axa SA recently scored a market-beating success. Not by delivering higher returns, but by generating a lower level of global warming.

If human activity is driving carbon emissions and temperatures to dangerous highs, then a giant asset owner like Axa with a 650 billion-euro (\$790 billion) horde of stocks, corporate bonds and sovereign debt is one of the principal proprietors of



climate change. In theory, that means every investment portfolio can be evaluated for the "warming potential" of its underlying assets.

After a painstaking process of self-evaluation that took two years, including a significant shift away from heavy polluters, Axa concluded

its assets would warm the planet by 0.8 degrees Celsius less than if it held all the companies in major global stock and bond indexes. That was good news for an early adopter of portfoliowarming metrics. The bad news: Axa's portfolio implied a tem-

perature increase of almost 3°C above preindustrial levels by 2100. At that level, scientists warn of mass extinctions of animal species, large parts of the planet becoming uninhabitable due to extreme heat, rising sea levels swallowing up coastal cities, and lush rainforests turning into savannas. It also would

put Axa, despite its climate-conscious efforts, on the wrong side of the 2015 Paris Agreement in which every nation agreed to limit warming

And it's not only Axa that's taking the temperature of its assets. UK insurer Aviva Plc and Japan's \$1.7 trillion Government Pension Investment Fund have published data on warming potential. New York-based BlackRock Inc, with \$8.7 trillion of assets, plans to do the same for some of its funds. The practice is likely to spread in the years ahead.

—Bloomberg



### **Bedi undergoes** bypass surgery

New Delhi: Legendary spinner Bishan Singh Bedi has undergone a bypass surgery at a city hospital a few days back after he complained of heart prob-

lems and he is recovering well. The 74-year-old Bedi underwent the procedure 2-3 days back and he is expected to be discharged from the hospital soon, according to a close confidant of the former India captain. "As far as I know, he was having some heart issues and he underwent a bypass surgery 2-3 days back on the advice of the doctors," he said. "He is currently doing fine and recovering from the surgery and is expected to be dis-

charged from the hospital soon," he added. Bedi, a premier left-arm orthodox spinner in his playing days, represented India in 67 Tests and 10 ODIs between 1967 and 1979, scalping 266 and seven

wickets respectively. - PTI

### **Deepak in last 8** of Strandja meet

New Delhi: Asian silver-medal-list Deepak Kumar (52kg) advanced to the quarterfinals with a facile win as Indian boxers got off to a mixed start at the 72nd Strandja Memorial Tournament in Sofia, Bulgaria. Deepak, also a 2019 India Open gold-medallist, defeated Kazakhstan's Olzhas Bainiyazov 5-0 in his opening bout to make the last-eight stage. Other winners on Monday included Naveen Kumar (91kg) among men and Jyoti (51kg) in the women's draw. While Naveen defeated American Darius Fulghum in a close fight that ended 3-2 in his favour, Jyoti got the better of Ukraine's Tetiana Kob 4-1. India has sent a 12-member team for the prestigious event

### **Shooters look to** shine in Cairo WC

seven men and five women.

Cairo: A 13-member Indian squad will seek medals in the Shotgun World Cup starting here on Wednesday as the International Shooting Sport Federation's marquee events return after a break of almost a year due to pandemic. The eight-day competition is the year's first Shotgun World Cup stage, beginning with men's and women's skeet competitions on the opening day. There will be 10 events in the competition. As many as 191 athletes from 33 countries have entered the fray and for the first time, the men's and women's team competitions will be held based on the new team event formats

### **Jazz hammer Hornets in NBA**

world ranking points. - PTI

declared last year by the ISSF

The Cairo event assumes addi-

this will be the final chance for

the shooters to qualify for the

Tokyo Olympics on the basis of

tional significance given that

Los Angeles: Donovan Mitchell had 23 points and eight assists as the NBA-leading Utah Jazz rained a franchise-record 28 three-pointers in a 132-110 rout of the Charlotte Hornets on

Monday Joe Ingles and Georges Niang scored 21 points apiece as the Jazz got a superb offensive performance from their bench to win for the 21st time in their last 23 games and improve to

25-6 overal Jordan Clarkson (five threes) Mike Conley (four threes) Mitchell (three threes) and Royce O'Neale (two threes) contributed to the Jazz's domination from beyond the arc. Conley also had 15 points. Gordon Hayward scored 21 points but had to leave the game in the fourth quarter with a hand injury as the Hornets six-game road trip got off to a

### Live on

rocky start. - AFP

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

South Africa T20 Challenge: Titans vs Narriors from 1.30 pm; Lions vs Dolphins from 5.55 pm on Star Sports Select 2

**FOOTBALL** 

Europa League: Tottenham Hotspur vs Wolfsburg from 10.30 pm; Atalanta vs Real Madrid from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2; Monchengladbach vs Manchester City from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Sonv Ten 1

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# MOTERAW

India, England look to exploit 'unexplored' strip in pink ball conundrum

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

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

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

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

advantage.
It would prefer a square turner to go 2-1 up in a high-stakes game but whether it actually gets one remains to be seen.

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

There are a few more questions that would demand answers.

How would the twilight period be for the batsmen as James Anderson feels that the ball swings more in that phase?

Will the extra lacquer on the 'SG Test Pink' make it difficult for the Ashwin-Axar combo which wreaked havoc on the which Chepauk snake pit?

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

His opposite number James Anderson however has no doubts whatsoever that by the time clock ticks 2:30 pm on Wednesday, the track will bear a bald look, similar to Chepauk.

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



### **LEACH READY FOR NEW ROLE** IN THIRD TEST

Ahmedabad, Feb. 23: England's lead spinner Jack Leach says he is ready for a new role as the day/night pink ball Test against India looks set to bring the seamers back into the forefront after the tweakers' domination in the first two matches.

Leach is aware that with the pink ball, which tends to move around a lot more than the traditional red cherry, his role could change over the next few "We want to be adaptable, we feel like we've got all bases cov-ered in our squad so I think it's going to be a fascinating Test match if the ball is moving around, and if so, it might be a slightly different role for me," Leach said.

'I've definitely thought about that — it'll be a different challenge and I'll

be ready."

Both sides are wary of how the pink ball would behave under lights on a newly laid strip. Batting in the twilight phase has been one of the talking points going into the

On England's preparations, Leach said, "We had a good session under lights that started in that twilight period and while I don't have much experience of playing in these day-night games, I've heard that during twilight can be a tough time

# Spinners, pacers both in game: Virat

Ahmedabad, Feb. 23: A rank turner is being anticipated at Motera but India captain Virat Kohli expects pacers to have as big a role as spinners in the day-night third Test against England, a side riddled with "many weaknesses" according to him.

Both teams have won a game each in the fourmatch series and ahead of third Test here starting Wednesday, the talk has been incessantly focussed on the nature of the virgin track at the refurbished stadium.

Asked if the ball is unlikely to swing much in the third Test, Kohli said he expects the pacers to be in the game till the ball is "nice and shinv"

"I don't think that is an accurate assessment (that bowl will not swing). The pink ball does tend to



swing a lot more than the red ball. We experienced that when we played for the first time in 2019 Bangladesh),' (against

Kohli said. Kohli also rejected the

assessment that England would have an edge if the

pitch favours pacers.
"...Not really bothered about what the strengths and weaknesses of the English team are.

have beaten them in their home as well, where the ball does way more and hold them out every time so we're not really bothered with that. It's just about playing well as a team," he said.

"And yeah, there are many many weaknesses in the opposition side as well, if you are keen to exploit them. If it's a

of playing both

more lateral

movement".

**Anderson and Broad** 

together as the pink

squad and it remains to

be seen whether they can

keep in-form Ben Foakes

out or play both of them.
"We will get you the

squad when we're ready...

That's how we want to do

things. We just want to

make sure, we're really

sure on everything. When

days have gone as

ball will have "a bit

you know, among other teams, the best bowling attack in the world so we're not really bothered by what the ball might bring differently to the table. We're ready for anything that comes our way," he asserted. Senior batsman Rohit

them it's for us as well.

"And we probably have,

Sharma has already said that it will be another turning pitch. Kohli said facing the pink ball is more challenging than the red ball irrespective of the nature of the sur-"It is much more face. challenging to play with pink ball regardless of the pitch you play on. Especially in the evening, if as a batting team, you are starting your innings under lights then that one and a half hour is very challenging."

**ENGLAND SKIPPER** 

# Iyer hits century in Mumbai win

Jaipur, Feb. 23: Mumbai rode on skipper Shreyas Iyer's unbeaten 103 to beat Maharashtra by six wickets in their Elite Group D game of the Vijay Hazare

Trophy here on Tuesday. This was Mumbai's second successive win after they had beaten Delhi in

the lung-opener.
Opting to bat first,
Maharashtra posted 279/9, with centuries from Yash Nahar (119) and Azim Kazi (104) despite experienced Mumbai pacer Dhawal Kulkarni (5/44) running through their top-order.

But it was Iyer, who anchored the Mumbai chase and saw them home

in 47.2 overs. Chasing 280, Mumbai openers Yashasvi Jaiswal (40) and Prithvi Shaw (34) conjured 67 for the first wicket.

Iyer, who walked in at three, was in his elements hammered boundaries and one six, in his uneaten knock and after Jaiswal perished, he found able partners in Suryakumar Yadav (29), Shivam Dube (47) as they played their roles to perfection. Dube took the game away from Maharashtra, with his hitting, smashing five fours and a six, and

took Mumbai on the cusp

### **CHANDIGARH CLIMB**

Chandigarh continued their giant-killing run in their Elite debut, stunning hosts Bengal by five wickets in a Group E clash at the Eden Gardens.

Fresh from their win over neighbours Haryana, Chandigarh who were playing their second domestic season chased down Bengal's 253/9 with seven balls to spare to climb up to the top of the group table, ahead of Saurashra on net-run rate.

#### **BIHAR PLAYER TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19**

The event has seen its first case of Covid-19 with a Bihar player returning positive for the virus, following which all the other cricketers are being tested.

"It is confirmed and the concerned player has been isolated from other players. He is currently in Bangalore as he cannot travel." a senior official of the state's cricket body said.

A Bihar Cricket Association official believed that the game would go on as scheduled. -PTI

#### **BRIEF SCORES**

■ Maharashtra 279/9 in 50 overs (Yash Nahar 119, Azim Kazi 104; Dhawal Kulkarni 5/44) lost to Mumbai 280/4 in 47.2 overs (Shreyas Iyer 103 not out, Shivam Dube 47; Satyajeet Bachhav 3/59) by six wickets.

Delhi 354/4 in 50 overs (Nitish Rana 137, Dhruv Shorey 132; Sagar Trivedi 2/66) beat Pondicherry 175 in 39.3 overs (S. Suresh Kumar 42; Kulwant Khejroliya 4/32, Pradeep Sangwan 2/27) by 179 runs.

Rajasthan 199 in 47.5 overs (Mahipal Lomror 67, Arjit Gupta 45; Rishi

Dhawan 6/27) lost to Himachal Pradesh 201/6 in 33.3 overs (Rishi Dhawan 73 not out; A Singh 2/46, Ravi Bishnoi 2/60) by four wickets.

Bengal 253/9 in 50 overs (Shabaz Ahmed 59) lost to Chandigarh 257/5 in 48.5 overs (Arslan Khan 88, Shivam Bhambri 71 not out, Manan Vohra 45) by five wickets.

Services 274/7 in 50 overs (Ravi Chauhan 118, Pulkit Narang 48 not out,

Diwesh Pathania 42 not out) lost to Jammu & Kashmir 276/7 in 48 overs (Shubham Khajuria 84, Abdul Samad 63) by three wickets.

Haryana 264 in 50 overs (Chaitanya Bishnoi 84; Chetan Sakariya 3/63)

lost to Saurashtra 265/9 in 49.1 overs (Snell Patel 79, Arpit Vasavada 46) Manipur 148/9 in 50 overs (Jayanta Sagatpam 32, Mayank Mishra 2/18)

lost to Uttarakhand 152/3 in 23.1 overs (Jay Bista 71, Kamal Singh 41) by seven wickets.

Meghalaya 319/7 in 50 overs (Punit Bist 116, R. Sanjay Yadav 73 not out)

beat Sikkim 231/9 in 50 overs (Ashish Thapa 79, Robin Bist 59, Dippu Sangma 2/33) by 88 runs.

Arunachal Pradesh 222/7 in 50 overs (Rahul Dalal 123 not out) lost to Assam 226/5 in 36.4 overs (Sibsankar Roy 60 not out, Denish Das 59, Saahil Jain 48, Rakesh Kumar 4/58) by five wickets.

Nagaland 347/9 in 50 overs (Stuart Binny 80, R Jonathan 62, Varte Kima 5/66) beat Mizoram 318/6 in 50 overs (Pratik Desai 141, Taruwai Kohli 108, KB Pawan 40, Nagaho 2/30) by 29 runs.



Cristiano Ronaldo (centre) of Juventus scores against Crotone in their Italian league match at the Juventus stadium in Turin on Sunday. The hosts won 3-0.

Ronaldo brace

# Root yet to sort bowling attack

**Ahmedabad, Feb. 23:** England skipper Joe Root on Tuesday said he is yet to have "real clarity" on what should be his bowling combination for the day-night third Test against India starting Wednesday and will wait some more before finalis-

India crushed England by 317 runs on a turner in Chennai to level the fourmatch series 1-1. All eyes are now on the refurbished Motera which will make its debut with the pink ball Test.

"We're going to take our time with the limited information we have on this ground and pink ball cricket. You know, we are going to make sure, we give ourselves as much (time) as possible heading into the game before we make a decision," Root said on the eve of the

The England think tank has a selection headache both in bowling and bat-

ting departments. In bowling they have Jofra Archer fit and available along with veteran pace spearhead James Anderson, who is back in fray after workload management kept him out of the second Test. Stuart Broad is also in contention for a spot.



"It's great to see him (Archer) back bowling again, we are excited. He is a world class performer and have got all the skills...It's a very exciting place to be to have now a battery of fast bowlers to choose from," Root said.

Root hinted that they're weighing a three-seam option with the possibility of playing both Anderson and Broad together as the pink ball will have "a bit more lat-

as well," Root said.

eral movement' "Yeah, they have got a

chance and as I say it's a great selection headache to have... The fact that there might be extra lateral movement will obviously work in our favour Senior wicketkeeper batsman Jonny Bairstow

has also returned to the

we're absolutely ready we'll give you the full squad together." "I think having a real good understanding what this pitch might look like tomorrow morning and ahead of that first ball...It has got dryer and dryer as

you'd expect it to. "So just need to have real clarity on what balance of attack we want and utilise this practice tonight to see how much dew it might play and how big a factor that might be and whether that alters things at all."

— PTI

#### **WARY OF 'TRICKY' NEMESIS ASHWIN** Root hinted that they're weighing a Ahmedabad, Feb. 23: three-seam option Ravichandran with the possibility

has proved to be England's nemesis in the first two Tests and, well aware of his abilities now, visiting skipper Joe Root on Tuesday described the India off-spinner as a "world-class performer" in all conditions.

Ashwin has already taken 17 wickets in the series so far and is expected to add some more to his kitty in the third Test beginning here Wednesday.

"Yeah, he (Ashwin) is a world-class performer. I think it's been quite tricky for everyone but as you mentioned, in particular, the left-handers is against him... Because you know how skilful he is, how good his record is against left-handers in world cricket," Root said. The 34-year-old Ashwin

has been Virat Kohli's goto man in this series. Besides his nine wickets in the first Test and eight in second, Ashwin has also scored a century on a Chepuak track.

"So, he is a fine performer at home and guys just have to keep working hard to try and figure out how they're going to score every run."

floors Crotone Turin (Italy), Feb. 23: for the first time this sea

Cristiano Ronaldo scored twice as Juventus got back to winning ways by beating bottom club Crotone 3-0 in Ronaldo could even have

had a hat trick in the first half. Weston Mckennie sealed the result after the break.

Juventus moved up to third on the table, eight points behind Serie A leaders Inter Milan, having played a match less.

It was Crotone's fifth successive defeat and left them eight points from safety. Ronaldo hadn't scored for Juventus since the start of

the month. He came close on a couple of occasions before breaking the deadlock in the 38th minute when he headed in

an Alex Sandro cross. Ronaldo doubled his tally in first-half stoppage time with another impressive header, this time from an Aaron Ramsey cross.

#### **SEVILLA MOVES TO 3RD PLACE IN LA LIGA**

Sevilla comfortably defeated Osasuna 2-0 to extend their winning streak in the Spanish league to six matches and move into the top three in the standings Defender Diego Carlos

and striker Luuk de Jong scored in different halves to help Sevilla move a point in front of fourthplaced Barcelona on Monday. Sevilla trails second-placed Real Madrid by four points and are seven points behind league leaders Atlético Madrid.

### **PALACE STUN**

Crystal Palace manager Roy Hodgson defended his side's style after snatching a 2-1 derby win at Brighton in the EPL thanks to Christian Benteke's stunning 95th-minute volley. The Eagles had just two touches in the Brighton box, but scored with both whereas the Seagulls saw 25 shots and nearly 75 percent possession count for "We get so hung up on statistics these days The game is decided by goals. Goals are a question goals. Goals are a guestion of how well you take your changes and defend chances and def theirs," said Hodgson.

Victory takes Palace 10 points clear of the relegation zone, while Brighton remain just four clear of Fulham.