

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | TUESDAY 16 | FEBRUARY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 31°C
Min: 21°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Maasi 4
Tithi: Panchami
Star: Puratathi
Rahukalam:
3 pm to 4.30 pm
Yamagandam:
9 am to 10.30 am

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.20 am
Zohar: 12.28 pm
Asar: 3.44 pm
Maghrib: 6.15 pm
Isha: 7.27 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.15 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.32 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 9.36 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 10.04 PM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+8,831)	(+72)
1,09,25,278	1,55,840

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+455)
TN: 8,45,575 12,425

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

10,95,15,475

DEATHS

24,14,092

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
219

worldometers.info

Amit Shah reviews preparation for celebrating India @75

New Delhi: Union home minister Amit Shah on Monday reviewed the preparations for the celebrations of 75th year of India's independence, 400th 'Prakash Purab' of Guru Teg Bahadur and 125th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.

The central government has already decided to celebrate the three events in a befitting manner. "HM @AmitShah held review meeting with officials of MHA, @MinOfCultureGol & @MIB_India on preparations for celebration of India@75."

Congress demands rollback of fuel price hike

New Delhi: The Congress on Monday demanded immediate rollback of hike in prices of petrol, diesel and LPG cylinders as it accused the BJP-led government at the Centre of being insensitive towards the problems of the common people. Party leader Rahul Gandhi attacked the government for the LPG price hike alleging that it was 'looting' people for the "development of only two".

Rain triggers landslide in Indonesia; 10 dead, 9 missing

Nganjuk (Indonesia): Torrential rains triggered a landslide on Indonesia's main island of Java that killed at least 10 people, with rescuers digging desperately with their bare hands and farm tools Monday to locate nine missing people, including four children, officials said. Dozens of soldiers, police and volunteers took part in the search in the village of Selopuro in East Java's Nganjuk district, National Disaster Mitigation Agency spokesperson Raditya Jati said.

COUNTER POINT



You can't meet any minister. But don't worry. They will come to your house shortly!

STATE | 3

Share of seats at DMK's will, says Vaiko



NATION | 4

Nadda meet next Sunday to ready for 4 state polls

SPORT | 8

Nadal closes in on Slams record



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IN TOUCH WITH KHALISTANIS

Warrants out for two more activists in 'toolkit' case

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA | DC
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, FEB. 15

Non-bailable warrants were issued against two more people for allegedly sharing the "toolkit" related to the farmers' protest on the social media, the Delhi police said Monday, two days after it arrested climate activist Disha Ravi over the case. Meanwhile, hitting out at the police and other official agencies, scores of social activists and environmentalists called for the immediate release of Ms Ravi, asking the government to stop targeting India's youth.

This Delhi police action also triggered a war of words between the Opposition parties and the ruling BJP.

The Delhi police procured a non-bailable warrant from a local court against lawyer Nikita Jacob and environmental activist Shantanu Muluk over the protest "toolkit" shared by Swedish teen activist Greta Thunberg to support the Indian farmers' protests.

The police claimed Poetic Justice Foundation, the organisation allegedly behind Ms Thunberg's "toolkit", had contacted Mumbai-based Ms Jacob to organise a "tweet storm" ahead of the farmers' Republic Day protests.

Delhi police joint commissioner Prem Nath said at a press conference on Monday that the two, Ms

SPREADING DISAFFECTION?

Activists Disha Ravi, Nikita Jacob and Shantanu Muluk have been accused by the Delhi Police of collaborating with the pro-Khalistani group Poetic Justice Foundation for the creation of the 'toolkit' document - shared earlier this month on Twitter by Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg in support of the ongoing farmers' protest - to "spread disaffection against the Indian state".



➤ **Ms Disha Ravi**, 22, has been arrested and non-bailable warrants have been issued against the other two activists.



➤ **Ms Nikita Jacob** has approached the Bombay high court seeking protection from arrest for four weeks.



➤ **Shantanu Muluk** is a native of Beed, Maharashtra. He is an engineer by education, the police said, adding he runs an NGO. His email account is the owner of the toolkit Google doc, the police said.

Twitter U-turn on Haryana min tweet

New Delhi, Feb. 15: In a tweet, Haryana Home Minister Anil Vij said that those with "seeds of anti-nationalism... should be destroyed... whether Disha Ravi or anyone else". Twitter said the tweet had been investigated and "is not subject to removal" under rules governing extreme speech online.

That was on Monday afternoon but just hours earlier, it had issued a notice to the minister saying it had deleted the tweet based on a complaint from a user in Germany. The tweet in Hindi was restored and it

reads as — "If seeds of anti nationalism have been sown in somebody's thought process, he/ she should be destroyed from roots... whether she is Disha Ravi or anyone else."

In a screenshot that Mr Vij shared a message from Twitter read — "Twitter is required by German law to provide notice to users who are reported by people from Germany via the Network Enforcement Act reporting flow... We have investigated the reported content and have found that it is not subject to removal under the Twitter rules." —PTI

India liberalises mapping policy; will spur innovation, says PM

New Delhi, Feb. 15: In sweeping changes in the country's mapping policy, the government on Monday announced liberalisation of norms governing the acquisition and production of geospatial data, a move that will help in boosting innovation in the sector and create a level-playing field for public and private entities.

Under the new guidelines, the sector will be deregulated and aspects such as prior approvals for surveying, mapping and for building applications based on that have been done away with, Department of Science and Technology Secretary Ashutosh Sharma said.

For Indian entities, there will be complete deregulation with no prior approvals, security clearances, licenses, for acquisition and production of geospatial data and geospatial data services, including maps, he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the liberalisation of policies governing the acquisition and production



● **The reform will benefit the country's farmers, start-ups, private sector, public sector and research institutions to drive innovations and build scalable solutions, the Prime Minister said.**

of geospatial data is a "massive step in government's vision for an Aatmanirbhar Bharat".

The reform will benefit the country's farmers, start-ups, private sector, public sector and research institutions to drive innovations and build scalable solutions, he said. Science and Technology Minister Harsh Vardhan in a press conference said the easing of norms will greatly help in several sectors that were suffering because of non-availability of high quality maps.

"Availability of comprehensive, highly accurate, granular and constantly updated representation of geospatial data will significantly benefit diverse sectors of the economy, significantly boost innovation in the country and greatly enhance its preparedness for emergency response," Vardhan said.

He said earlier even the Survey of India, the organisation entrusted with making maps, had to seek permission for mapping from different agencies, thus delaying its work by at least three-to-six months. In a series of tweets, Modi said, "Our government has taken a decision that will provide a huge impetus to Digital India. Liberalising policies governing the acquisition and production of geospatial data is a massive step in our vision for an Aatmanirbhar Bharat," he said. —PTI

Ton-up 'Ash' puts India in driver's seat at Chepauk

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR | DC
CHENNAI, FEB. 15

For someone who grew up watching Sachin Tendulkar's epic knocks at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium here, R. Ashwin lived his childhood dream on Monday. He delivered a batting masterclass by scoring a majestic century (106 off 148 balls) on a tricky surface where most batsmen bit the dust. Ashwin's brilliant knock after coming in at No. 8 took India closer to a thumping win over England in the second Test. The all-rounder completed

a few milestones in front of his vociferous home crowd who chanted "Ashwin... Ash-win".

He became only the second Tamil Nadu cricketer, after Kris Srikkanth, to score a Test hundred at Chepauk. It was the third time in his career that Ashwin scored a century and took a five-for in the same match. Only the legendary Ian Botham has done it more times (five).

"The moment I scored the century, I looked up at the terrace. I can't thank the crowd enough. The applause was thunderous," said Ashwin. ■ **Report on P8**



R. Ashwin celebrates his century against England in the second Test on Monday.

— BCCI

CM reiterates his party always kept its promises

WELFARE FOR WOMEN

AIADMK government had distributed over ₹4,200 crore worth marriage assistance in the last 10 years benefiting about 11.8 lakh women.



Under the 'thaaliku thangam' (gold for mangalasutra), a pet scheme of Jayalalithaa, it had given 6,086 kg of gold worth ₹1,796 crore.

With a conducive climate, more investments were coming to the state, he said, claiming Tamil Nadu stood number one in the country in maintaining law and order.

Deputy Chief Minister O Panneerselvam said the AIADMK rule was successful in getting various development projects from the Centre for Tamil Nadu.

TN political parties kick off poll process

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, FEB. 15

The DMK beat the ruling AIADMK and actor Kamal Haasan's Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) in fixing the earliest date to start the electoral process, calling for applications from its members desirous of contesting the coming Assembly polls.

Though it was the AIADMK that first made the announcement on Monday that the applications can be filed from February 24, which happens to be the birth anniversary of the late J Jayalalithaa, MNM's subsequent statement in the day gave the date as February 21 and the DMK that gave the call quite late in the night fixed the dates from February 17 to 24, ahead of the other two.

While the AIADMK and DMK have called for applications for allotment of Assembly seats in

Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Kerala, the MNM has declared that it would be contesting in the 234 Assembly constituencies of Tamil Nadu, 30 constituencies in Puducherry Union Territory and in the Kanyakumari Lok Sabha by-election.

Those wishing to seek tickets from the AIADMK have been asked to pay a fee of ₹15,000 for seats in Tamil Nadu, ₹5,000 for seats in Puducherry and ₹2,000 for seats in Kerala at the party headquarters and obtain the necessary application form between 10 am and 5 pm from February 24 to March 5.

The forms should be filled up, providing the information asked for, and summarily submitted at the headquarters, a joint statement by the AIADMK coordinator O. Panneerselvam and co-coordinator Edappadi K Palaniswami said on Monday. ■ **P3**

SC grants 5-day bail to Kerala journalist

New Delhi, Feb. 15: (PTI) The Supreme Court Monday granted 5-day interim bail to journalist Siddique Kappan, arrested on his way to Hathras where a young Dalit woman had died after being allegedly gang-raped, to visit his ailing mother.

A bench headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde said the interest of justice would be served if appropriate safeguards are built into the order for the proposed visit of the prisoner. The apex court said that during his visit he shall not give any interview to the media, including social media.

"We, accordingly, permit the prisoner — Siddique Kappan to go to Kerala for a period of five days only for the purpose of seeing his ailing mother."

"He shall not meet the members of the public. He will be entitled to meet his relatives and doctors and anybody else in connection with his mother's health," the bench said.

The bench, also comprising Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian, said that Kappan would be escorted by a UP police team and the Kerala police would co-operate with the UP police in the matter. "It shall be the responsibility of the UP Police to ensure that the prisoner — Siddique Kappan travel to and from his mother's house. — PTI

SC notice to Centre, WhatsApp over user privacy

New Delhi, Feb. 15: The Supreme Court Monday asked the Centre and WhatsApp to reply to a fresh plea alleging lower standards of privacy for Indians in comparison to European users saying it is the duty of the judiciary to protect citizens' privacy.

People have grave apprehensions that they will lose their privacy and it is our duty to protect them, the top court said. "You may be two or three trillion companies but people value their privacy more than money" a bench headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde told WhatsApp even as it sought to argue that Europe has special data protection laws which India doesn't.

The apex court issued notice to the government and the Facebook-owned app on an interim application filed by Karmanya Singh Sareen in a pending petition of 2017.

Senior advocate Shyam Divan, appearing for the petitioner, argued that the messaging app was applying lower standards of privacy for Indians and they be barred from sharing data with Facebook.

The bench observed, "We are impressed by Mr Divan's argument that it was proposed before us that a data protection law would be brought into force. "Now under this policy you will share data of Indians." Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for WhatsApp, contended that Europe has a special law (General Data Protection Regulation) and it will follow law if the Parliament makes it a similar law. — PTI

OTHER STORIES

TN unit of SP to back DMK

DC CORRESPONDENT
TRUCHY FEB. 15

The Tamil Nadu unit of the Samajwadi Party has decided to extend its support to the DMK-led front in the forthcoming elections to the state assembly, according to party state principal secretary and spokesman Thameemul Ansari Nizami.

Mr. Nizami said in a release at Tiruchy on Monday that a resolution to this effect was adopted at the party's state administrative council meeting held here on Sunday under the leadership of party's senior general secretary K. Vasu.

He said it was also decided to join the DMK-led front and work for the victory of the DMK in all the 234 assembly segments and to approach M.K. Stalin to get a few assembly seats where chances were bright for the Samajwadi Party.

The meeting also decided to convene a meeting of the party state office-bearers at Tiruchy on February 21.

Among others, party's general secretary S.Muthuramalingam, agriculture wing secretary Balasubramanian and traders wing state president Ramanathapuram Balakrishnan spoke.



Former two time CPM MLA of Madurai East constituency N Nanmaran submits a representation to District Collector T Anbalagan seeking house under government's free housing scheme. The former MLA had submits the representation during the grievance meeting organised at Madurai Collectorate on Monday. — DC



Actor-turned politician Khushbu begins election campaign for BJP in Triplicane on Monday.

— DC

144th anniversary of Kumbakonam railway station celebrated

G. SRINIVASAN | DC
KUMBAKONAM, FEB. 15

The Thanjavur district rail users association organised a function to celebrate the 144th anniversary of Kumbakonam railway station on Monday.

Sweets were distributed to people and staff and surviving retired rail staff were honoured on the occasion.

K. R. Aravamudan, retired station superintendent, was honoured at the function. During his tenure, the Kumbakonam railway station won the division's best cleanliness award thrice.

The Kumbakonam railway station is located between Villupuram and Thanjavur. It was on 15-2-1877, train service between Sirkali and Thanjavur started first to pass through Kumbakonam. Indo-Ceylon Express (Boat Mail) was operated via Kumbakonam to connect Chennai and Colombo in a train-streamer combine. The passengers bound for Colombo travelled up to Dhanuskodi near Rameswaram by train and

Now after completion of gauge conversion many long distance trains to Varanasi, Ayodhya, Bhubaneswar, Hyderabad, Mysuru, Tirupati, Tiruchendur and Rameswaram are operated via Kumbakonam.

ferried to Thalaimannar in a streamer. They continued their journey to Colombo by train. Direct combined tickets were issued to the passengers bound for Colombo.

During the 70s, a diesel engine mounted train with foreign technology was first operated on a trial basis from Trichy to Kumbakonam. Travelling in that train, popularly called "Coach Express", was considered as a status symbol those days. Swami Vivekananda came to Kumbakonam by train on 26 January, 1897 to deliver first his clarion call "Arise awake stop not till goal is reached". To commemorate this event a plaque of Vivekananda is installed in the station platform.

Now after completion of gauge conversion many long distance trains to

Varanasi, Ayodhya, Bhubaneswar, Hyderabad, Mysuru, Tirupati, Tiruchendur and Rameswaram are operated via Kumbakonam. The Villupuram-Thanjavur section is now fully electrified. The train users expect operation of ordinary passenger trains with main line electric multiple units. Their long pending demand of track doubling the highly saturated Villupuram-Thanjavur section and an early approval for the new railway line between Needamangalam and Vridhasalam via Kumbakonam is yet to be fulfilled. But the prime demand now is restoration of all train services operated before the Covid-19 pandemic.

M. A. Jameel, vice-president (TANDRUA) presided over the meet. A. Giri, secretary, highlighted the importance of Kumbakonam railway station. V. Muruganandam, station superintendent, V. Sathyanarayanan, secretary, Federation of Kumbakonam All Trade and Association participated among others.

AIADMK will never compromise on its ideology of secularism: CM

Coimbatore, Feb. 15: Chief Minister K. Palaniswami on Monday assured religious minorities of continued support and announced an increase in the annual number of beneficiaries, from 600 to 1,000 a year, to visit Jerusalem for pilgrimage with financial assistance from the state government.

Promising to positively consider several representations of Christians including site for cemeteries, Palaniswami, in an apparent reference to his party's alliance with the BJP for Assembly polls likely in April, said electoral tie-ups were different from ideology.

Parties may switch alliance during elections but ideology is permanent and there shall absolutely be no compromise on adhering to AIADMK's ideology of secularism, brotherhood, harmony and not discriminating people, the Chief Minister asserted.

"Ideology is different from alliance for elections which come and go," he said addressing a conference of Tamil Nadu Christian Democratic Federation here.

"We will not compromise on our ideology. No one born in the Tamil land need have any apprehensions and our government is safeguarding all people and it will continue," he said, adding AIADMK leaders visited places of worship belonging to all



CM Edappadi K. Palaniswami, Dy CM O. Panneerselvam and rural and municipal administration minister S.P. Velumani bless 123 couples at a mass marriage to mark late CM J. Jayalalitha 73rd birth anniversary in Coimbatore on Monday.

— DC

faiths. "We don't differentiate anyone. God is one."

People followed their respective religions and the government would never allow anyone to interfere in matters of faith, the chief minister said. "Hence, you (minorities including Christians) need not have any apprehensions. You have given a representation seeking land for cemetery. I am happy to say that wherever possible, the land allocation will be made," he said.

Announcing an increase in the number of beneficiaries to 1,000 from 600 for Jerusalem pilgrimage, he

noted that the government had already increased the assistance to ₹37,000 from ₹20,000 per pilgrim based on the request of the Christian community.

So far, 4,328 Christians have undertaken the pilgrimage with ₹8.25 crore financial assistance from the government.

On other requests made by them, he said it would be positively considered and suitable action shall be initiated expeditiously.

Rather than eyeing votes, the AIADMK had all along been committed to the welfare of the people, he said.

"Consider the AIADMK government as yours," he

said and assured continued support to the minorities.

"In Tamil Nadu, nobody can do anything on the basis of religion," he said and underlined that the state was the forerunner in maintaining law and order in the country.

Praising Christian educational institutions for their services, he said the foundation for Tamil Nadu's development in the education sector was laid by Christians. He also listed several other welfare initiatives like an increase in allocation of subsidy for renovation of churches from ₹1 crore to ₹5 crore.

— PTI

SHARE OF SEATS AT DMK'S WILL, SAYS VAIKO

ARULOLI M | DC
TIRUNELVELI, FEB. 15

The Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) may not get the number of seats it desires in the DMK alliance, said a party functionary, adding that party general secretary Vaiko himself has lost his fighting spirit to demand more seats in the election.

At a fund raising meet here a few days ago, Vaiko had repeatedly stressed to his party cadres

not to nurse any grudge even if the party was given the least number of seats in the alliance. Pointing to that comment, an MDMK worker said, "Our general secretary said so in the larger interest of the secular forces, but we fear that the DMK may misread this magnanimity of Vaiko and take it as his weakness, and allot seats as they wish."

Reacting to Vaiko's talks, sources in the DMK said that Vaiko remained a strong negotiator till the 2019 parliamentary elections, but in due course, turned reluctant due to health issues. In fact, the MDMK got its importance in Tamil Nadu politics mainly because of Vaiko's talent as a vociferous political campaigner.

But now, due to health issues Vaiko restrains himself from political discourses, and hence, is losing his hold on state politics, they said.

From P1

Those interested in contesting the elections as an MNM candidate will have to pay a fee of ₹25,000 which would not be refunded even if the person failed to get the ticket. Not only those who are not members of the MNM can also apply for seats and one candidate can apply for as many number of seats by paying the fee of ₹25,000 to each seat.

Applications recommending eligible candidates can also be filed, said a press release by party president Kamal Haasan, who added that applications could be filed online by logging on to the party website, www.maiaam.com or by obtaining the printed form from the party headquarters and sending the filled form by post.

For the first time in the history of Indian politics, MNM was using blockchain technology to receive application from desirous candidates, Haasan said.

The brief announcement by DMK general secretary Durai Murugan said the application fee for general constituencies was Rs 25,000 and that for

women and reserved constituencies it was Rs 15,000. If the particular constituency to which a candidate applies goes to the alliance partners in the seat sharing arrangement, the fee would be returned, the statement said.

For both the AIADMK and DMK seat aspirants, there is always that risk of the constituency they evince interest in contesting being allotted to one of the allies since the seat allotment has not been announced though, it is said, that both the Dravidian majors have almost finalized the process.

Palanisami, during the 10 minute private conversation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday in Chennai is said to have given him the seat allocation plan. With the AIADMK keen on contesting in at least 170 seats, it is said to have earmarked 25 for PMK, 20 for BJP, 10 for DMKD, seven for Tamil Maanila Congress and two for Puthiya Tamizhagam.

The DMK, on its part, is still having talks with the allies with its second rung leaders doing the negotiations. While the smaller

parties have agreed to the number of seat the DMK is prepared to give them, the Congress is said to be expecting more than it is being offered now.

The mad scramble for seat among Congress members would start once the seat sharing talks are finalized, while the other smaller parties might have already chosen the prominent members of their parties as candidates for the elections.

Meanwhile, with Palaniswami and Panneerselvam planning to visit Delhi on February 21 to inaugurate the three-storied AIADMK party office that is being constructed there, the talk is that BJP national president J P Nadda would attend the function and also give the final seal of approval for the seat sharing arrangement.

Both the DMK and AIADMK have not mentioned anything about the Kanyakumari Lok Sabha by-election because their allies Congress and BJP would be fighting it out there as they did in the 2019 general elections that saw the late H Vasanthakumar emerging victorious.

Ather Energy, a reality of 'Make in India' plans

SANJEEVI ANANDAN | DC
KRISHNAGIRI, FEB 15

It was not a smooth ride for Tarun Mehta and his friend Swapnil Jain, both graduates from Chennai IIT, in their journey to build India's first electric scooter. Rising from a non-working prototype to the level of building a Rs 130 crore worth EV unit, remained an uphill task for the duo.

"Our prototype stopped working a few hours before our meeting with the person who promised to invest Rs 75 crores on it. But, our team was not upset. We managed to make the model work and got the approval to start our venture," Tarun Mehta proudly told reporters.

On Friday, Tarun Mehta and Swapnil Jain came to Madakondapalli village near Hosur of Krishnagiri, where 'Ather Energy', a company promoted by them into the business of manufacturing India's first electric scooters is located.

"We initially had our manufacturing facility at



The electric scooter unit.

Whitefield in Bengaluru, and later moved to Hosur. The unit was shifted to Hosur because the place has lots of vendors into the business of supplying components required by us" Tarun said.

'Ather' is the perfect example of the 'Make in India' vision as 90 percent of our product including the batteries is locally made," added

Tarun. 'Ather Energy' began its operations in January 2021 in Hosur. This unit is supported by the government of Tamil Nadu under its electric vehicle (EV) Policy. Apart from EV manufacturing, the facility will also focus on lithium-ion battery manufacturing. The investment is an opportunity for

value creation in the sector and will create job opportunities in the region. As part of this initiative, more than 4,000 employees will be trained in requisite skills in the EV sector over the next five years. 'Ather' also plans to increase its investment in Tamil Nadu from Rs 130 crore to Rs 635 crore in the next five years from 2021.

Implement tribal forest rights act: Nilgiris tribals

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, FEB. 15

As the rift between the tribals here and the forest department seems to widen, the tribals have appealed to the Nilgiris district administration to implement the 'Tribal forest rights act' soon, and to take steps to return tribal lands taken over by the forest department in the past.

While a section of the tribals held a demonstration here on Monday to highlight their demands, K.M. Alwas, president, Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group in the Nilgiris, said that though the 'Tribal forest rights act' was passed in 2006 itself, it is yet to be implemented in the Nilgiris, where in half-a-dozen primitive tribal communities live

While a section of the tribals held a demonstration here on Monday to highlight their demands, K.M. Alwas, president, Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group in the Nilgiris, said that though the 'Tribal forest rights act' was passed in 2006 itself, it is yet to be implemented in the Nilgiris, where in half-a-dozen primitive tribal communities live

mented in the Nilgiris, where in half-a-dozen primitive tribal communities live.

In Sholur revenue village alone, tribals are eligible for possession of 350 acres of land which are coming under the revenue-forest joint registry. Unfortunately, the district administration failed to give pattas to eligible tribal families under the 'forest right act' in Sholur village. Instead, it is shocking to see that the forest

department had issued notice to the tribals to vacate lands under their possession and enjoyment, he added.

Many of the tribal hamlets across the Nilgiris are still lacking good road facilities. Though funds had been already allotted under the 'Tribal forest right act' to provide road facility and improve road infrastructure to the tribal hamlets, action has still not been taken in this regard due to objections

from the forest department. Due to this, the tribal communities suffer a lot in times of medical emergencies, and also for regular transportation of their farm produce, he noted.

The tribal communities should be given exclusive rights for collection and sale of minor forest produce. The district administration should take steps to provide patta to lands under the possession of the tribes across the Nilgiris. The tribes demand that construction of a bridge at Kallampalayam area over Moyar river in the wooded zone, should be fulfilled at the earliest as this plea is pending for decades, Alwas added.



A bull chasing event at Katpadi Senguttai on Monday.

— K. Senthil Nanthan

SPEAK

OUT



The battered old GST road, Tambaram, near railway track, makes life miserable for motorists and pedestrians.

— DC

IN BRIEF

FOREIGN
SECRETARY TO
VISIT MOSCOWDC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB 15

Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla will visit Moscow on a two-day official visit beginning Wednesday to hold the next round of India-Russia Foreign Office Consultations with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov, during which “the two sides will review the entire gamut of bilateral relations, including the forthcoming high level exchanges”, New Delhi announced on Monday.

Russian President Vladimir Putin was initially expected to visit India last year for the India-Russia Annual Summit but both the visit and Summit could not take place then due to the Covid pandemic. Both India and Russia are time-tested friends and continue to have a strong relationship especially in the defence and civil nuclear sectors.

In a statement on Monday, the MEA said, “Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla will pay an official visit to Moscow on 17-18 February 2021 at the invitation of Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mr. Igor Morgulov. Foreign Secretary will hold the next round of India-Russia Foreign Office Consultations with Deputy Foreign Minister Morgulov, during which the two sides will review the entire gamut of bilateral relations, including the forthcoming high level exchanges.”

COVID: NIGHT
CURFEW IN 4 GUJ
CITIES EXTENDEDDC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB 15

Amid a significant decline in the number of active cases of Covid-19 in the country, particularly National Capital Delhi, the government has asked all Central government employees to start attending offices as it was before lockdown.

There will be no exemption to any category of employees, except for those living in the containment zones. Such staff and officers will work from home and come to office only after their containment zone is de-notified. Offices will, however, follow staggered timings to avoid overcrowding in work-places and meetings will be largely conducted through video conferencing. Biometric attendance for the time being will remain suspended. All department canteens too will be opened with safety protocols in place to avoid crowding.

The country on Monday registered 11,649 fresh cases and 90 deaths. While new cases in most of the states are on a decline, in a major worry Maharashtra has once again started reporting high number of cases.

India till now has vaccinated 85.16 lakh persons.

Meanwhile, Gujarat announced to extend its 12 am to 6 am curfew in four cities – Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodra, and Rajkot - till February 28.

SPURIOUS LIQUOR
CLAIMS 4 LIVES IN
MADHYA PRADESHRABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, FEB 15

Four people died after consuming ‘spurious’ liquor in Chhatrapur district, police said on Monday. The incident took place in the village of Paretha.

According to the police, around 150 people had gathered at the place of one Shital Ahirwar (60) in the village for a party on February 9.

Some of them procured liquor of brand “Dilse” from a liquor contractor hailing from Uttar Pradesh.

Many of them who consumed the liquor were taken ill, according to the police.

While Ahirwar's son died on Friday, he succumbed on Saturday. Two more people, Tulidsa Brar and Laluram Ahirwar, died on Sunday night.

“Viscera of the four deceased were sent for tests”, Chhatrapur district superintendent of police Sachin Sharma said. A team of district officials and police officers rushed to the village to ensure proper medical treatment of the affected people.

The incident comes in the wake of the death of 24 people caused by spurious liquor in Morena district in Chambal division in the state last month.

Covid cases jump in Maha



A Royal Bengal Tiger jumps from a pond inside an enclosure at the Byculla Zoo in Mumbai on Monday. The zoo reopened on Monday after 11 months of closure due to the coronavirus pandemic. The “3T formula” of tracing, testing and treatment will have to be implemented strictly to tackle a rise in Covid-19 cases in some parts of Maharashtra, state health minister Rajesh Tope said in Aurangabad on Monday.

- PTI

BJP, Oppn clash over
climate activist’s arrest

Vij calls for ‘extermination of seeds of anti-nationalism’

Chandigarh, Feb 15: The action taken by the Delhi Police on an FIR related to a toolkit shared by climate campaigner Greta Thunberg in support of the ongoing farmer protests has triggered a war of words between the Opposition and the ruling BJP.

Accusing the government of “murdering democracy” by using force against a 21-year-old, the Opposition on Monday said the voice of India cannot be silenced even as the BJP defended the action, saying a crime is a crime no matter at what age.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi led the Opposition offensive following the arrest of 21-year-old Disha Ravi in the case and said the country will not be silenced.

“Your lips are free to speak. Say that the truth is still alive. They are scared, not the country,” he said in a tweet in Hindi.

“India will not be silenced,” he added.

Delhi Chief Minister

Arvind Kejriwal said, “Arrest of 21 year old Disha Ravi is an unprecedented attack on Democracy. Supporting our farmers is not a crime.”

RJD leader Manoj Jha said democracy is under threat. “I am worried about democracy, as it is passing through the most difficult times,” he said.

Union minister and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Gajendra Singh Shekhawat tweeted: “If age is the criteria then Param Veer Chakra Second Lt Arun Khetarpal, martyred at 21 is who I am proud of. Not some toolkit propagandists.”

BJP general secretary B L Santosh tweeted, “21 year old...environment activist...student...Are these credentials for becoming a part of breaking India forces? How does she get the access for editing tool kit...? Why she is part of anti-national WhatsApp groups...? Many questions...But only one answer...21 year old.”

“Bengaluru, Greta Thunberg, Vegan, sole bread winner, student, 21 year old, passionate activist...so many attempts to white wash a sin...!! Not one anarchist ready to answer the question...How 21 year old student got access to edit Toolkit,” he asked.

Meanwhile, in a comment on the arrest of climate activist Disha Ravi, Haryana Home minister Anil Vij on Monday urged “extermination from the roots” wherever seeds of anti-nationalism found. The minister's remarks came two days after Disha Ravi was held by the Delhi Police for allegedly sharing with climate activist Greta Thunberg the toolkit related to the farmers' protest against the Centre's farm laws.

The Delhi Police had claimed that the 21-year-old activist was an editor of the “toolkit Google doc” and “key conspirator” in the document's formulation and dissemination.

In the document, various urgent actions, including

creating a Twitter storm and protesting outside Indian embassies, were listed to support the protest. “Whoever harbours the seeds of anti-nationalism in their mind, that has to be destroyed from the roots (*samool naash*), be it #Disha_Ravi or anyone else, Vij said in a one line tweet in Hindi.

Later, the minister posted a response from the Twitter after a complaint was filed regarding his tweet. The response from Twitter read, We have received a complaint regarding your account, @anilvijminister for the following content (Vij's particular tweet in Hindi (*Desh virodh ka beej* Whoever harbours the seed...).

We have investigated the reported content and have found that it is not subject to removal under the Twitter Rules or German law. Accordingly, we have not taken any action as a result of this specific report, the response said.

- PTI

11,649 cases, 90 deaths in 24 hrs ■ Office timings staggered

All Central staff told to join
work; cases rising in MahaDC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 15

Amid a significant decline in the number of active Covid-19 cases across the country, particularly in Delhi, the Central government has asked all its employees to start attending office as they did before the lockdown.

There will be no exemption for any category of employees, except for those living in containment zones. Such staff and officers will work from home and come to office only after their containment zone is denotified.

Offices will now follow staggered timings to avoid any overcrowding in work-places and meetings will largely be held via video conferencing. Biometric attendance systems will for the time being remain suspended. All department canteens too will be

There will be no exemption for any category of employees, except for those living in containment zones. Such staff and officers will work from home and come to office only after their containment zone is denotified.

opened, with safety protocols in place, to avoid any crowding.

So far officers of the level of undersecretary and above were attending office due to the restrictions imposed since March last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Centre had in May asked 50 per cent of its employees below the level of deputy secretary to work from their offices through staggered timings. The country on Monday registered 11,649 fresh Covid-19 cases and 90 deaths. While new cases in most states are on the

decline, in a major worry Maharashtra has once again started reporting a high number of cases.

The state, that was once the pandemic's epicentre, on Monday reported 4,092 fresh cases after nearly six weeks. With the cases going up, health experts have sounded the alarm, saying this may lead to a “third wave” in the state, particularly in Mumbai. Some believe the resumption of local trains, and not adhering to Covid-19 protocols, could be the main reason for this rise. If the cases are not controlled soon, the state government may be compelled to reimpose some restrictions. Gujarat has announced that it will extend its midnight to 6 am curfew in four cities — Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara and Rajkot — till February 28. India has till now vaccinated a total of 85.16 lakh persons.

Nadda meet next Sunday
to ready for 4 state pollsDC CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, FEB. 15

In what appears to be yet another attempt by her to outclass the BJP with sops for the voters in poll-bound West Bengal, chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday launched a scheme ‘Maa Kitchen’ offering daily meal at ₹5 to the poor.

The menu includes rice, daal, vegetables and egg (one piece) curry in a plate available on a first come first served basis from 1 pm to 3 pm.

Kickstarting the project from Nabanna, Ms Banerjee informed that her government would bear a subsidy of ₹15 per plate in

the initiative which would be run by self-help groups and would expand across the state.

Two outlets have been started in South Kolkata.

“It is a unique idea which was announced in the state budget. I will go to taste the food one day. This programme is aimed for the common people. It will create a business set-up,” Ms Banerjee said about the concept which is the brainchild of election strategist of the ruling Trinamul Congress: Prashant Kishor. The move resembles to ‘Amma Kitchens’ launched by late AIADMK leader J Jayalalithaa in Tamil Nadu.

‘RSS marking houses of
donors for Ram Temple’

Bengaluru, Feb. 15: Former Chief Minister H D Kumaraswamy on Monday accused the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh of marking houses of those who gave donations for Ram Temple in Ayodhya and alleged it was similar to what the Nazis did in Germany.

The RSS dismissed the allegations, saying they do not qualify for any response. In a series of tweets, the Janata Dal-Secular leader claimed

that the RSS was born in India around the time Nazi Party was founded in Germany. ‘It appears that those collecting donations for the construction of Ram Mandir have been separately marking the houses of those who paid money and those who did not.

‘This is similar to what Nazis did in Germany during the regime of Hitler when lakhs of people lost their lives,’ Kumaraswamy tweeted.



S Jaishankar

EAM: ASSAM IS
SPRINGBOARD
OF ACT EAST
POLICYMANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, FEB. 15

External Affairs Minister (EAM) S Jaishankar here on Monday said that Assam is the springboard of India's Act East Policy which aims at to create connectivity that will make the state more energetic, contributing and employed.

Asserting that all-round development of Assam is central to the success of the policy, the minister told reporters that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is deeply committed to the development of Assam, and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)-aided projects in the state are examples of how international partnerships can contribute to the development of states. The minister, accompanied by Japanese Ambassador Satoshi Suzuki, was here to review JICA-assisted projects.

Security up along other
parts of Indo-China borderDC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB 15

Even as Indian and Chinese forces have started the disengagement process in the Ladakh sector, Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), which is the Indo-China border guarding force, is clearly not taking any chances.

It has further increased its deployment along other parts of Indo-China border like North-East, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh to ensure that the Chinese Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA) “does not open a new front and confrontation zone” in these areas.

Home Ministry sources said that the ITBP has

taken timely action by enhancing deployment along the Indo-China border so that the Chinese security personnel do not try any transgression exercise in other sectors.

“We had some information that in an attempt to deflect attention from the ongoing disengagement process in Ladakh, Chinese PLA could create problem in some other areas along the border. So we have deployed additional ITBP troops in Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, higher and remote areas of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. Our security forces are alert and we will not let PLA create any further mis-

chief,” a senior Home Ministry official remarked.

Both Indian and Chinese security forces agreed on a withdrawal formula in the Ladakh region following prolonged negotiation lasting several months. But Indian security forces remain on “very high alert” all along Indo-China border.

Sources said that all sector commanders of the ITBP are taking daily reports from even advance and remote check posts on Chinese activity in their respective zones. These daily reports are then compiled and a detailed analysis is being sent to the Home Ministry.

U'KHAND | TRAGEDY

Toll stands at 54 while officials say 150 people are still missing

Atmosphere in Tapovan village grim as kin lose hope

Tapovan, Feb 15: As bodies are being continually pulled out of the muck-filled power project tunnel here, the atmosphere outside is getting grimmer with families of the missing people losing hope of seeing them alive. Every time a body is brought out of the adit tunnel, families waiting outside for over a week, take some time to pluck up the courage to see if the mortal remains are of a loved one or not.

And the temporary relief of not finding a family member among the dead is brief as they are soon gripped by despair when

they see rescue personnel battling through tonnes of sludge choking the tunnel and are reminded that eight days have elapsed since the calamity happened. Nine bodies have so far been recovered from the tunnel at Tapovan. Vishnugad hydel project site taking the toll in the tragedy to 54, while officials say 150 people are still missing.

Out of the three bodies recovered from the tunnel on Monday one is of Satyapal Singh Bartwal from Masoli village in Pokhri area of Chamoli district. “We hoped

Satyapal would return alive. But now we will have to return home with my brother's body. It's unbearable,” said his elder brother in a choked voice.

Over a dozen relatives of Bartwal including his brother, who had been camping at Tapovan village since the day the tragedy struck, broke down inconsolably after identifying the body.

The crowd of disheartened relatives at the tunnel site has begun to disperse. Those who remain are found hanging around the mortuary where the bodies are being brought

one after another.

Relatives of Jitendra, a resident of Jammu brought out dead from the tunnel on Sunday are also packing up to leave.

“Seven of us had come from Jammu after we heard of the glacial disaster in Chamoli on February 7 and my brother's phone was switched off. We had been scouring different areas of Tapovan and Joshimath for four days in search of Jitendra until his body was brought out of the tunnel on Sunday. It's tragic,” Jitendra's younger brother Pavan said.



Mother Chuttku Devi and other family members of Mithilesh Kumar, who has been missing after flash floods in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand, at her village Chokad, in Ramgarh district of Jharkhand on Monday.

- PTI

SHORT TAKES

RUSSIAN CARGO SHIP LAUNCHED TO ISS

Moscow, Feb. 15: An unmanned Russian cargo ship launched successfully Monday with a load of supplies for the International Space Station.

The Progress MS-16 cargo ship blasted off as scheduled at 09:45 am (0445GMT) from the Russia-leased Baikonur launch facility in Kazakhstan and reached a designated orbit en route to the station.

It is carrying water, propellant and other supplies and is set to dock at the space outpost Wednesday.

The space outpost is operated by NASA's Kate Rubins, Michael Hopkins, Victor Glover and Shannon Walker. Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Soichi Noguchi and Russian Space Agency Roscosmos' Sergey Ryzhikov and Sergey Kud-Sverchkov.

NICKI MINAJ'S FATHER KILLED IN HIT-AND-RUN

New York, Feb. 15: The father of rapper Nicki Minaj has died after being struck by a hit-and-run driver near New York City, police said Sunday.

Robert Maraj, 64, was walking on a road in Mineola, Long Island at 6:15 pm (2315 GMT) on Friday when he was hit, Nassau County Police Department said in a statement.

The driver left the scene of the accident, and Maraj was taken to hospital, where he was pronounced dead on Saturday. "The investigation is ongoing," police added.

The statement did not specify Maraj's relationship to Minaj, but a police spokesman confirmed he was her father.

Minaj, 38, was born in Trinidad and Tobago and raised in the Queens borough of New York City.

The rapper has been nominated for 10 Grammy awards during her career.

SUSPECT HELD IN NYC SUBWAY STABBINGS

New York, Feb. 15: A 21-year-old Brooklyn man was arrested in the fatal stabbings of two people on New York City subway trains, police said Sunday.

Rigoberto Lopez was taken into custody Saturday night and was formally arrested Sunday on charges of murder and attempted murder, police said. One of the victims was discovered dead on a train in Queens late Friday with several stab wounds to his neck and torso, police said. Two hours later, a 44-year-old woman was found stabbed to death in a subway car in upper Manhattan. Two nonfatal attacks — one involving a 67-year-old man and the other involving a 43-year-old man — also occurred in upper Manhattan.

Authorities believe all four victims were homeless. Police said they believe Lopez may have committed all of the attacks. It wasn't clear if he had an attorney who could speak for him. Police leaders said they would deploy an additional 500 officers into the subway system to guard against future assaults.

LANDSLIDE IN INDONESIA: 10 DIE, 9 MISSING

Nganjuk (Indonesia), Feb. 15: Torrential rains triggered a landslide on Indonesia's main island of Java that killed at least 10 people, with rescuers digging desperately with their bare hands and farm tools on Monday to locate nine missing people.

Dozens of soldiers, police and volunteers took part in the search in the village of Selopuro in East Java's Nganjuk district, National Disaster Mitigation Agency spokesperson Raditya Jati said.

The mud that rolled down from surrounding hills late Sunday struck at least eight houses, injuring 14 people and leaving 21 people buried under tons of mud. Two were rescued on Sunday.

Rescuers on Monday found bodies buried under as much as 6 metres (10 feet) of mud and were searching for the nine people still missing, Nganjuk district chief Novi Rahman Hidayat said. Heavy equipment arrived later to help in the search.

Overnight rains caused rivers to burst their banks in other districts of the province on Monday, sending nearly 1 metre (about 3 feet) of muddy water into some residential areas and forcing hundreds of people to flee from their submerged homes, Jati said.

Myanmar rattled by army movements, Net shutdown

People around the country flout orders to protest military's seizure of power

Yangon, Feb. 15: Sightings of armored personnel carriers in Myanmar's biggest city and an internet shutdown raised political tensions late Sunday, after vast numbers of people around the country flouted orders against demonstrations to protest the military's seizure of power.

Public concern has already been heightened for the past few nights by what many charge is the military's manipulation of criminals released from prison to carry out nighttime violence and stir up panic. Ambassadors from the United States and Canada and 12 European nations called on Myanmar's security forces to refrain from violence against those protesting the overthrow of their legitimate government. They condemned the arrests of political leaders and activists as well as the military's interference with communications.

"We support the people of Myanmar in their quest for democracy, freedom, peace, and prosperity, they said in a joint statement issued late Sunday night. The world is watching.

The military seized power on Feb. 1, detaining the country's elected leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, and members of her government and preventing recently elected lawmakers from opening a new session of Parliament.

The junta, led by Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, said it was forced to step in because the government failed to properly investigate allegations of fraud in last year's election, which Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party won in a landslide. The state election commission



Protesters raise their hands with clenched fists during an anti-coup rally in front of the Myanmar Economic Bank in Mandalay, Myanmar on Monday.

found no evidence to support the allegations.

There was no official word about why armored personnel carriers traversed the streets of Yangon in broad daylight Sunday, making their way through busy traffic. As night fell, there were videos and other reports on social media of the movement of trucks packed with soldiers, and in the central city of Mandalay as well.

An order that appears to be from the Ministry of Transport and Communications told mobile phone service providers to shut down internet connections from 1 a.m. to 9 a.m. Monday. — AP

Suu Kyi detention extended

Yangon, Feb. 15: Myanmar's military leaders have extended their detention of deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi, whose remand was set to expire Monday and whose freedom is a key demand of the crowds of people continuing to protest this month's military coup.

Suu Kyi will now be remanded until February 17, when she will likely appear in court by video conference, according to Khin Maung Zaw, a lawyer asked by Suu Kyi's party to represent her.

The Nobel laureate remains under house arrest on a minor charge of possessing unregistered imported walkie-talkies.

Suu Kyi's extended detention is likely to further inflame tensions between the military, which seized power during a Feb. 1 coup, and the protesters who have taken to the streets of cities across the Southeast Asian nation seeking the return of the government they elected.

Protesters continued to gather across Myanmar on Monday following a

night in which authorities cut the country's internet access and increased the security presence in major cities seeking to curtail demonstrations.

Thousands of engineers marched on the streets of Mandalay, the country's second-largest city, chanting and holding signs that read: Free our leader; Who stands with justice? and Stop arresting people illegally at midnight.

In Yangon, the country's most populous city, fewer protesters gathered on Monday. — AP

Virus: Tougher travel rules come into force in Britain

London, Feb. 15: The UK's tougher new travel rules to contain the spread of Covid-19 variants came into effect from Monday, involving compulsory hotel quarantines for anyone returning to England from one of the 33 high-risk "red list" countries. Those arriving will have to pre-book and pay £1,750 to spend 10 days quarantining in government-sanctioned hotels, covering the cost of the hotel, transport and two separate tests post-arrival.

Extremely serious breaches of the new norms could result in a 10-year jail term and fines of up to £10,000. Those who have not visited a "red list" country, such as India, must still quarantine for 10 days at home and complete two mandatory Covid-19 tests on the second and eighth day after arriving. "With the emergence of new variants, we must go further. The rules coming into force today will bolster the quarantine system and provide another layer of security against new variants at the border," said UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock.

"These new measures are important to protect our vaccination programme, which has now seen 15 million people vaccinated, we all work towards restoring normal life," he said. Starting Monday, any UK or Irish resident

who has been in a high-risk destination on the UK's red list — comprising 33 hotspots with Covid-19 variants in circulation — will have to enter England through a designated port and have pre-booked a quarantine package to stay at one of the government's "Managed Quarantine Facilities". Non-residents are currently not part of the essential-only travel rules of

Briton breaks S'pore quarantine order

Singapore, Feb. 15: A British citizen pleaded guilty on Monday to violating a coronavirus quarantine order in Singapore by visiting his fiancée several times in another hotel room. They are to appear in court for sentencing on February 26, and face a possible sentence of up to six years in jail and a fine of 10,000 Singapore dollars (\$7,500) on each charge. Skea Nigel left his room at The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore hotel on three occasions in September, according to the charge sheets. He was not wearing a mask.

Nigel climbed an emergency stairwell and entered a room that his Singaporean fiancée had

booked. The two spent nine hours together. Most travellers have to stay in an assigned hotel room or at home for 14 days after arriving in Singapore under Coronavirus quarantine rules. They receive meals and regularly record their temperatures.

Nigel arrived at the State Courts on Monday with Agatha Maghesh Eyamalai, whom he has since married. The Briton said he was guilty of two charges for flouting the rules. Four other charges against him were temporarily withdrawn. The prosecution asked that Nigel be jailed for four weeks and fined 1,000 Singapore dollars (\$750). — AP

the Coronavirus lockdown. The government said it has tough measures already in place requiring all travellers into the UK, from any location, to provide proof of a negative Covid-19 test taken no more than three days before departure and non-UK residents from the 33 red list countries are already banned from entering Britain. — PTI

UK'S CHIEF MOUSER CELEBRATES 10 YEARS ON THE PROWL

London, Feb. 15: Larry the cat, a four-legged inhabitant of London's 10 Downing St., is marking a decade as Britain's mouse-catcher in chief on Monday. The tabby cat was recruited by then-Prime Minister David Cameron to deal with a pack of rats seen scuttling close to the British leader's official residence, and entered Downing Street on Feb. 15, 2011. The former stray, adopted from London's Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, was given the title Chief Mouser to the Cabinet Office, an unofficial pest control post.

He was the first cat to hold the rat-catching port-

folio since the retirement of Humphrey in 1997, and has loyally served three prime ministers. But it seems like yesterday that Larry was just another cat — as opposed to a media superstar — said Lindsey Quinlan, the head of cattery of Battersea.

"Throughout his time at Number 10, Larry has proven himself to not only be a brilliant ambassador for Battersea but also demonstrated to millions of people around the world how incredible rescue cats are," she said. "His rags to riches tale is yet more proof of why all animals deserve a second chance — one minute

they may be an overlooked stray on the streets, the next they could become one of the nation's beloved political figures, with fans around the world."

Larry, who has met a number of world leaders, has been largely unfriendly to men but took a liking to former US President Barack Obama. When former President Donald Trump visited in 2019, Larry took a nap under his car. His grip on the public imagination is clear — and political leaders know better than to ignore that popularity. The tomcat was a sentimental topic of conversation in Cameron's final appear-

ance in Parliament as prime minister when he said he wanted to quash a rumour that — perish the thought — he didn't like Larry. And just to prove it, he whipped out evidence: A picture of Larry lying on his lap.

"He belongs to the house and the staff love him very much — as do I," he said at the time, explaining why he wasn't taking Larry with him after leaving office. After the December 2019 election, rumours swirled that Larry might be headed for retirement with the news that the new prime minister, Boris Johnson, was a dog man. — AP

Israeli hit kills 9 fighters in Syria

Beirut, Feb. 15: Israel fired several missiles early on Monday targeting areas near the Syrian capital, Damascus, Syria's state news agency reported. An opposition war-monitoring group said the strikes killed nine Iran-backed fighters.

The SANA news agency claimed that Syrian air defences shot down most of the missiles, which it said were fired from Syria's Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor with a network of activists on the ground, said the strikes hit positions of the Syrian army's Fourth Division in the mountains near the highway that

links Damascus with the Lebanese capital of Beirut. It said another strike hit Syrian army positions in Kisweh, just south of Damascus.

The Observatory said that of the nine Iran-backed fighters killed, seven were near the Damascus-Beirut highway and two in Kisweh. Weapons depots were also struck in both areas, it added.

Syria's foreign ministry filed a complaint with the UN Security Council and called on the international community to condemn Israel and prevent it from carrying out such attacks in the future. Israel has launched hundreds of strikes against Iran-linked military targets in Syria over the years. — AP

Meghan again in the family way

London, Feb. 15: Britain's Prince Harry and his wife Meghan Markle are expecting their second child, their spokesman said in a Valentine's Day announcement on Sunday. The couple released a black and white image of them under a tree, all smiles, with Markle, 39, showing signs of pregnancy.

"We can confirm that Archie is going to be a big brother," the spokesman said, referring to the couple's son. "The Duke and Duchess of Sussex are overjoyed to be expecting their second child." Meghan and Harry, 36, who is Queen Elizabeth II's grandson, quit frontline royal duties in March last year and now live in California. The news follows Mar-

kle's disclosure in *The New York Times* in November that she had suffered a miscarriage in July.

A Buckingham Palace spokesman said: "Her Majesty, Duke of Edinburgh, Prince of Wales and the entire family are delighted and wish them well." Misan Harriman, a friend of the couple who took the photograph they released, wrote on Twitter: "Meg, I was there at your wedding to witness this love story begin, and my friend, I am honoured to capture it grow." The couple's departure last year — dubbed "Megxit" by the British press — was a far cry from 2018, when they married in a ceremony at Windsor Castle watched around the world.

Oz: Google near media pay deals

Canberra, Feb. 15: Google and Facebook were close to striking "significant commercial deals" to pay Australian media for news ahead of Australia creating world-first laws that would force the digital giants to finance journalism, a minister said Monday. Parliament is scheduled to consider the draft laws on Tuesday after a Senate committee last week recommended no changes to the proposed regulations that Google and Facebook have condemned as unworkable.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg, one of ministers responsible for the legisla-

on, said he had discussions at the weekend with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Sundar Pichai, chief executive of Alphabet Inc. and its subsidiary Google. Frydenberg had also spoken with Australian news media executives. "We've made real progress, I think, in the last 48 to 72 hours and I think we're going to see some significant commercial deals which could be of real benefit to the domestic media landscape and see journalists rewarded for generating original content, as it should be, and this is a world-leading reform," Frydenberg said.

GREATER CHENNAI CORPORATION Storm Water Drain Department			
S.W.D.C.No. B3/0097/2021			
Short E-Tenders are invited for the following work as per details furnished below:			
Name of the Work	Approx. Value of work including 12% GST	EMD Rs	Eligible Class
Construction of compound wall, Pathway at Jayachandran Nagar Kulam in Dn-191, Zone - 14	Rs.88.22 Lakhs	1% of the work value	Class-I
1. Tender last date and time of submission: 22.02.2021 upto 3.00 pm. 2. Bid document will be available in website https://tenders.gov.in 3. Tender open date and time: 23.02.2021 at 3.30 pm. DIPR/1089/Tender/2021			
Superintending Engineer /SWDD			

GOVERNMENT OF TAMILNADU DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND PREVENTIVE MEDICINE DISTRICT HEALTH SOCIETY TENKASI DISTRICT			
NOTIFICATION			
Ref: 1. G.O.(Ms)No.513, H&FW (EAP-II) Dept, Dated : 03.12.2020 2. G.O.(Ms)No.515, H&FW (EAP-II) Dept, Dated : 03.12.2020 3. W.P.(MD)No.19565 of 2020 and W.M.P(MD)Nos.16296 & 16297 of 2020 Before the Madurai Bench of Madras High Court Order Dated : 22.01.2021 4. W.P.(MD)No.1935 of 2021 and W.M.P(MD)Nos.1650 & 1651 of 2021 Dated:04.02.2021 5. RC No.7852/NHM/P14/2020 Dated.11.02.2021 of the Mission Director of National Health Mission, Chennai - 6			
In Tenkasi District 1 Dental Surgeon post are sanctioned in Taluk government Hospital. Hence application for the post of Dental Surgeon temporarily on contract basis are being welcomed on or before 23.02.2021 5.00 PM.			
Sl. No	Name of the Post	No. of Vacancy	Qualification
1	Dental Surgeon	1	1.BDS Degree from Government or Government approved Private Dental Colleges which are recognized by Dental Council of India. 2.Should have been registered with the Tamil Nadu Dental Council.
Conditions:- 1. The above mentioned posts are temporary only. 2. Regularisation won't be done at any point of time and they will not be permanently absorbed. 3. The candidate should submit their undertaking to this effect before joining the duty.			
Applications to be sent to: The Deputy Director Health Services, The Secretary, District Health Society, O/o The Deputy Director of Health Services Tenkasi @ Sankarankovil.			
Note: 1. Application can be sent via Speed Post / Email or in person to above mentioned address only. 2. Application forms are available for issuing in office of the Deputy Director of Health Services, Tenkasi and all Block Primary Health Centres. 3. E-mail ID: dphskk@nic.in 4. The above mentioned number of posts is liable to change.			
The Deputy Director Health Services District Health Society, Tenkasi @ Sankarankovil DIPR/296 /DISPLAY/2021			The District Collector The Chairman, District Health Society Tenkasi District.

DECCAN Chronicle

16 FEBRUARY 2021

21-year activist's arrest is a blot on India's democracy

While it's in the fitness of things to expect the judicial system to speak up to protect a citizen against the State's over-reach and high-handedness, it is no surprise that civil society across the country should be furious over the arrest of the 21-year-old Bengaluru climate activist Disha Ravi by the Delhi police over the weekend.

In a Kafkaesque act, a Delhi police team swooped on Ms Ravi at her home in the southern metropolis, whisked her to Delhi without even informing her parents, and produced her before a magistrate without the benefit of counsel, a legal requirement. The activist was charged with being part of a conspiracy with "Khalistan" proponents and is being held for sedition and causing disaffection against the State.

Ms Ravi appears to be a supporter of the ongoing farmers' agitation in the country. In support of this and to oppose the high-handed police action over it, global celebrities, including teenaged Swedish environment activist Greta Thunberg, sent out tweets, unleashing a ferocious campaign, much to the discomfort of the government. FIRs were filed against Ms Thunberg and others for sedition. In the government's eyes, she is guilty of spreading the idea of a "toolkit" to back the farmers' agitation.

In order to understand the maliciousness, indeed the enormity, of what the Indian State has done by arresting Ms Ravi (and two others), making itself a laughingstock among democracies, it is important to be aware that this so-called "toolkit" is not a handbook of terrorism.

In fact it's no more than guidelines on ways to propagate the farmers' cause through the social media, and is a common expression among activists of all kinds. Indeed, it's no more than what the Hindutva brigade, including the ruling party, have been doing. The difference is that the causes of the climate activists and the Hindutva group are vastly different, with the latter identifying with vile ones like the so-called "love jihad", false propaganda of cow killing against Muslims and dalits, spreading fabrications against their political opponents, and disseminating hate against all voices that call for social harmony and sanity.

Ms Ravi's "crime" is that she edited two lines of Ms Thunberg's "toolkit". It is for this that the Delhi police is calling her an "editor" of the "toolkit". Since an outfit called the Poetic Justice Foundation, which apparently supports the idea of "Khalistan", a woolly-headed thought in the minds of some persons of Indian origin in the West, also backs the farmers' cause, all supporters of Indian farmers are being mischievously sought to be equated with "Khalistan" supporters. The practice of such sleight-of-hand by the government is clearly meant to discredit the farmers' agitation. This is a sign of the government running out of ideas about how to contain it. It is not inconceivable that the ground is also being prepared to play the State violence card against the farmers and their leaders, and Ms Thunberg or Ms Ravi, and others like them, are just collateral damage.

But taking unlawful actions against a young woman barely out of her teens can backfire. To many ordinary people, it seems that the Delhi police, which directly operates under the Union home ministry, is degenerating into becoming the praetorian guard of the government in power.

Trump escapes conviction

Former US President Donald Trump may have escaped conviction by the Senate, but history will judge him culpable for the attack on democracy.

Only seven Republican Senators voted to convict, like 10 Congressmen had done in the House of Representatives vote to impeach him for the second time. The action of 43 other Republican senators to vote against his conviction wasn't due just to partisanship. Self-preservation was their primary motive, petrified as they were by the prospect of a backlash by the Trump loyalists of a party that has been hijacked by the far right and swears blind loyalty to a President who subverted hoary democratic norms that embroilers American history.

The impeachment managers had built a compelling narrative in the House and laid before the Senate a body of irrefutable video evidence of the armed insurrection on January 6 that Mr Trump may have helped unleash through his bizarre hold on a highly motivated section of conservatives. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell chastised Mr Trump in a telling comment after the vote but hid behind a fig leaf of technicality in the presumed illegality of putting on trial an ex-President. The law may still get Mr Trump for his big lies on the election result, his overt canvassing of officials to overturn the popular verdict and his open embrace of retaliatory violence in egging on supporters.

Evidence has it that Mr Trump did little to act as legislators in the joint session of Congress at Capitol Hill and his own vice-president, Mike Pence, were scared for their lives. It is a comment on the popular vote in today's America that Mr Trump drew 76 million votes, the most after Joe Biden. Truth may have caught up with Mr Trump already. It is also reflected in the world's highest death toll as the President abdicated his responsibility in dealing with the coronavirus as he stood for re-election. What we have to fear is the Trump legacy of alternative facts, conspiracy theories and brazen thuggery. Democracy may have to face many more battles for survival against Trumpism.

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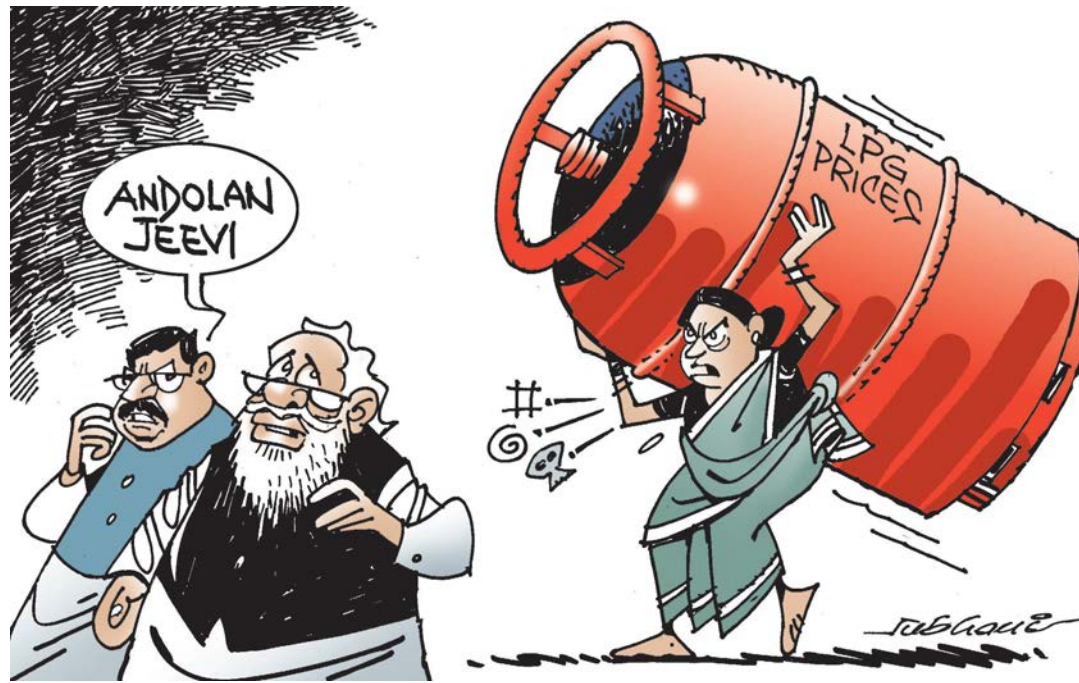
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Subhani



How PM can win hearts, keep bills, end protests



Sriram Karri

A political stalemate deadlocked in a seeming binary is dangerous. It is erroneous, an optical illusion, which often arises out of a bankruptcy of ideas premised in possibilities, leaves both sides strongly entrenched in a zero-sum game. The binary has left its predictable trail of bitterness on both sides of the current battlelines.

Hail George W. Bush, the modern proponent of the equation: You are with us or against us! But this is actually from a more ancient playbook.

It was the general-aristocrat from Athens who would famously terrorise opponents and convert every debate into a seesaw for testing loyalties: as he would thunder: Whose side are you one? Cleon, clearly, in 430 BC, was ready for Twitter trolling.

You are either with the farmers, a monolith, with one voice and demand, or with the government — says the modern commandment — no debate or amendment. This law limiting our positions and possibilities for a resolution to a mere binary isn't going away.

What follows is stereotyped playing the player, not the ball. You are a Khalistani anarchist, anti-Indian, out to destroy India's sovereignty at the behest of a neo-international cabal or a puppet of a fascist Hindutva government, out to pledge the farmers' destiny to a corporate crony club.

Even Arundhati Roy, who famously opposed Mr Bush's binary of having to choose between a "malevolent mullah or a mad Mickey Mouse" in the war against terror early in the new millen-

nium, sees no third option now.

There are several hostages to the etched in stone binary: the first is truth. The second is India's farmers' future. The third is the start of a resolution and solution, which can never be ours unless we set aside the mistaken notion that in the pitched battle on Delhi's borders, only one of the two — protesting farmers or the Narendra Modi government — can win. One must step down, after defeat, to ensure the other side wins.

But there is another possibility — the farmers can ensure Mr Modi wins, and the PM can strive to make the protesting farmers triumph — without either side having to make a moral compromise.

Let's begin with the position of common belief, since we lost sight of it: there is an accumulating agrarian crisis in India, marked by smaller landholdings, an unabatingly steep agflation (inflation of agri inputs like the price of seeds, fertilisers, urea, pesticides), transmission losses and unviable costs of financing (most farmers don't get bank loans, private money rates are backbreaking), self-defeating subsidies (loan waivers not applicable to most small farmers and landless tenant farmers), the impact of climate change in a largely rain-fed agri-sector, and unviable farmers (even rich farmers don't have cash to pay for health, education).

With the acknowledgment of a common problem comes an alignment of purpose — to solve the problem, reducing farmers' costs, reducing overall costs of production, eliminating waste, and increasing farmer incomes without making

food too expensive for a nation of over 1.3 billion.

A benevolent surgical strike on farmers' hearts

Enough commentary has flowed through editorials, columns, feisty television debates and vituperous social media exchanges about the transformed nature of the agitation. Not just Sikhs from Punjab but Jats, predominantly BJP voters and building blocks of Hindutva, are now resolved to stay put on the ground till the bills are withdrawn.

After Republic Day and the tearful breakdown of Rakesh Tikait, the bills have been reduced to a backdrop, an excuse. The protests are no longer primarily about fears around the potential reduction or doing away with minimum support prices (MSPs), or ending of the mandi system, or the visceral paranoia around corporates getting legal backing to do contract farming or store grain — it is now about hurt farmers set against the hubris of the government.

If the farmers were not emotionally hurt, their pride not invested in staying put on the ground, they would have been convinced by Narendra Modi's defence in Parliament of the three bills. Mr Modi has put the cart ahead of the horse in trying to logically convince people who are plain angry and see the government as arrogant. The resolution can only begin by appealing to the hearts of the Jat farmer protesters with an act to show that the government is not arrogant.

In the next many days, on any day and at any hour of his choosing, Mr Modi should just walk into a protest site and spend several hours. Let him make some rotis at

In the next many days, on any day of his choosing, Mr Modi should just walk into a protest site and spend several hours.

the langar, let him listen and to the ladies cutting vegetables, sit on the ground with the leaders as they pass the hookah. Ask them if they are comfortable, if they have everything they need for now. Let him break bread with them, the ice will break on its own.

Yes, that's all it might end up taking to end these protests. Just that. Mr Modi is capable of magic with some sections of people and the protesting Jat and Sikh farmers are part of that section. Once they are no longer angry, and his humble arrival at the protest site will convince them that neither he nor his government is actually arrogant, the stalemate will lead to a thaw.

It is then that Mr Modi can explain that the existing policies have failed the farmer for 50 years and expecting a different result with the same policies would be an Einsteinian measure of insanity. The BJP can talk about how corporate and cooperative procurement of milk have enriched farmers in the dairy sector; and how this policy wishes to replicate the same success for grain.

Prime Minister Modi in their midst will be a visual story for all farmers, the soothing touch needed, the surgical strike on their hearts. It will calm farmers in all protest sites and those elsewhere simmering with anger with a new belief in his leadership, and that his government cares for farmers everywhere. Before he leaves the protest site, having told the world he was there himself, he can throw in a final gesture of affection by asking for some jalebis and rotis to be packed for his dinner — the entire gamut of security and Covid-19 precautions set aside — and he will leave with their hearts.

A little haggling, a little willingness to give in on an odd thing here or there; and the farmers will be happy to leave, with the optics of victory, their pride intact, and return home, their heads held high.

LETTERS

TTV ALL OUT FOR SASI

Apropos your report *Exploring legal options for Sasi to contest polls: TTV* (Feb. 15). Sasikala's nephew and AMMK leader TTV Dhinakaran is trying hard through legal forces, to make his aunt contest the upcoming elections. In the field of politics, it is never rare or surprising for any politician, however corrupt he/she may be, to find loopholes in making a re-entry into the arena. Whether Sasikala will be supported or not is secondary but making blind guesses by the fanatic crowd and the reception she received may not be a sure-shot prospect of winning the polls if given a chance. Dravidian politics can never be foretold as the pulse of the people cannot be estimated or underestimated.

Jacqueline Netto,
Chennai

MIRED MYANMAR

ARMY MADE a blunder in Myanmar by declaring an emergency and arresting all democratically elected leaders including the Nobel laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi (*Protests again rock Myanmar*, Feb.15). The entire population including students, railway workers and office going staff are on the streets, in the face of brazen threats of brutal army power. The country was under harsh regime of Gen. Ne Win for close to three decades and the people are fed up. Except for China, all the countries spearheaded by America want Suu Kyi to be reinstated or face harsher sanctions. India needs to take a pro-active stand and activate its diplomatic channels to make Gen Hlaing see the writing on the wall and in a dignified manner restore democracy as soon as possible.

Parthasarathy Mandadi, *Thirupati*

WITHDRAWAL AT LAC

THE PHASED disengagement of troops of India and China from their earlier posts along the LAC will be welcomed by all those who desire a peaceful settlement of the border dispute (*PM a coward, ceded land, alleges Rahul*, Feb. 13). When the military commanders assert that India reserves the right to patrol on traditional routes in eastern Ladakh, Rahul Gandhi must take the Prime Minister and the military commanders at their word. On the contrary, he denigrates the Prime Minister as a coward who has ceded territory to China. Rahul must learn from history. He must recall Winston Churchill's insight: "The further backward you look, the further forward you can see". His great grandfather Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had ceded thousands of sq. km of India's territory to China in the 1962 India China war.

Kangayam R. Narasimhan,
Chennai

Aakar Patel



Vital areas in kids' health left ignored in Budget 2021

The Union Budget delivered earlier this month was praised for two things. First, that it was spending money in the right place: capital expenditure, which would create value over the long term. And second, that it was transparent. The deficit is three times what it should be, but at least the government has accepted it. Perhaps these two things are enough to make it a good Budget, though one doesn't know. There has not really been any Budget I can remember that made any difference to most people's lives, except perhaps one, and that was in 1991.

However, it is clear the Budget has ignored something that was really urgent. The National Family Health Survey 2019-20, conducted by the government, revealed some terrible numbers.

On four key metrics which represent the nutritional status of children, states recorded a significant fall in 2019-20 compared to the levels in 2015-16. In states like Gujarat, Maharashtra and West Bengal, the share of anaemic and wasted (low weight for height) children was significantly higher than the levels recorded 15 years earlier in 2005-06.

This indicated a reversal of progress that had been hard to win. Even in states such as Kerala, which continued to lead in these indicators, the levels recorded in 2019-20 were poorer than the 2015-16 figures.

The survey put out data for 22 states and Union territories and an analysis of 10 major states was conducted. Anaemia among children was higher in all the 10 states in 2019-20 compared to 2015-16. In Gujarat, Himachal, Maharashtra and West Bengal, a higher percentage of children were anaemic in 2019-20 than were in 2005-06. The percentage of wasted (low weight for height) children was higher in half of the 10 states. In Assam, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra and West Bengal, a higher percentage of children were underweight (low weight for age) in 2019-20 compared to 2015-16.

Stunting (low height for age) was higher in six out of the 10 states compared to 2015-16. The study also found that the incidence of diarrhoea had increased in half the states, including Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and West

Bengal. In Bihar it was up from 10.4 per cent in 2015-16 to 13.7 per cent in 2019-20. This is the reality of the situation. We can debate what has caused this and that can wait for another day. The problem is that the Budget that was presented by Nirmala Sitharaman did not acknowledge and therefore didn't accommodate this problem. The mid-day meal scheme, on which crores of children depended for their one good meal of the day, found its budget cut from ₹13,400 crore in FY 2021 to ₹11,500 crore in 2022. This was lower in nominal terms than what it had been seven years earlier. Inflation adjusted, it was 38 per cent lower. The Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), meant to provide pre-school children with food, education, primary health-care, immunisation, health checkups and referral services to children under six and their mothers, was also lower in nominal terms, at ₹16,888 crore in FY 2022 versus ₹18,691 crore in 2014-15. The programme, running rural anganwadis or creches, is meant to improve the nutritional and health status of children "to lay the foundation for proper psychological, physical and social development of the child", to "reduce the incidence of

mortality, morbidity, malnutrition and school dropouts", and "to enhance the capability of the mother to look after the normal health and nutritional needs of the child through proper nutrition and health education".

Inflation adjusted, this figure was 36 per cent lower for 2022 than it had been the year Prime Minister Narendra Modi took over.

Poshan Abhiyan, the flagship programme meant to improve nutritional outcomes by 2022, was also damaged. The government had released only 46 per cent of the annual outlay by October 31, and for 2022 the budget was cut by 27 per cent.

The drinking water and sanitation department saw its budget officially rise from ₹21,000 crore to ₹60,030 crore, but of that ₹50,000 crore was for the "Central road and infrastructure fund", suggesting a fudge to avoid embarrassing questions. The numbers seemed deliberately made hard to compare with previous spends. ICDS was clubbed with Poshan Abhiyan, the Scheme for Adolescent Girls and the National Creche Scheme, and the whole thing was called Saksham. Its budget for 2022 was less than the previous year's

budget for ICDS alone. The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, the Centre's maternity benefit programme, was clubbed with the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme for girls' education, the Mahila Shakti Kendra and other general gender budgeting, and the whole thing was called Samarthya. It received ₹2,522 crore for 2022, less than the ₹2,858 crore allocated in 2021.

The allocation for Ayushman Bharat (dubbed "Modicare" by Amit Shah) was the same for 2022, ₹6,400 crore, as it was for the year before. There was no provision for minimum wage and health insurance for the Anganwadi and Accredited Social Health Activist (Asha) workers, the individuals whom Mr Modi had called "Covid warriors".

The numbers are not going to improve themselves. They will need external intervention from the government, but that has not happened in this Budget. Whether it was wise on an issue that concerns crores of our children we will not know till the government conducts the next survey.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	52,154.13	1.18
Nifty 50	15,314.70	1.00
S&P 500*	3,934.83	0.47
Dollar (₹)	72.68	0.09
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.02	-0.69
Euro (₹)	88.19	-0.12
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,826▼19	0.04
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	63.13	1.12
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.022	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.210	0.00

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Exports rise 6% in Jan; trade deficit narrows

Growing for the second consecutive month, the country's exports rose 6.16 per cent year-on-year to \$27.45 billion in January following healthy growth in pharma and engineering sectors. Commerce ministry data showed trade deficit narrowed to \$14.54 billion from \$15.3 billion a year ago. The deficit was \$15.44 billion in December. Imports in January 2021 rose 2 per cent to \$42 billion.

WPI inflation rises to 2.03%, food prices ease



The wholesale price-based inflation rose sharply to 2.03 per cent in January on costlier non-food manufactured items and experts are projecting further uptick in the rate of price rise in the next few months. The WPI inflation was 1.22 per cent in December 2020 and 3.52 per cent in January last year. Food inflation in January stood at (-) 2.8 per cent, against (-) 1.11 per cent in the previous month.

RBI sets up panel on urban coop banks

The Reserve Bank set up a committee to draw a vision document for strengthening urban cooperative banks and exploring the potential of consolidation in the sector. The committee, to be headed by former RBI deputy governor N. S. Vishwanathan, will suggest effective measures for faster rehabilitation and resolution of UCBs and also assess their potential for consolidation in the sector.

IT industry to grow by 2.3% in FY21: Nasscom

The Indian IT industry revenues are set to grow by 2.3 per cent to \$194 billion in FY21 and the exports will go up by 1.9 per cent to \$150 billion, industry lobby Nasscom said. The industry remained a net hirer in the fiscal year, with 1.38 lakh new jobs added to take overall employment to 44.7 lakh. "We have emerged more resilient and more relevant from the crisis," the body's president Debjani Ghosh said.



JLR to spend \$3.5 bn annually on electrification Jaguar cars to become all-electric from 2025

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, FEB. 15

Tata Motors-owned British luxury car maker Jaguar Land Rover, or JLR, plans to make its coveted Jaguar brand to be an 'all-electric luxury brand' to rival Tesla from 2025.

The move will see Jaguar completely axe the petrol engines that made its name within the next four years.

JLR will invest about 2.5 billion pounds (\$3.5 billion) annually into electrification and related connected technologies, the company said on Monday.

It plans to introduce six fully electric Land Rover variants in the next five years and aims to electrify all its models by 2030, it said.

JLR's new chief executive officer Thierry Bolloré made the announcement on Monday, with the new 'Reimagine' strategy also committing to retaining its production facilities in the UK. Bolloré said Land Rover will phase out diesel engines from 2026 and invest more heavily in hydrogen fuel cell technology.

JLR said it will have prototypes using hydrogen fuel cells on Britain's roads within the next year, as part of a long-range investment plan.

JLR has introduced plug-in hybrid variants of models, including the Range Rover Sport and new Defender, but its only fully electric vehicle is the I-Pace SUV, which it started selling in 2018.



RENAULT KIGER STARTS AT ₹5.45 L

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, FEB. 15

French car giant Renault has introduced its all-new Kiger, compact SUV at Rs 5.45 lakh at pan-India showroom, disrupting the growing B-SUV segment in Asia's third biggest car market.

Renault's first compact SUV is sold in four trim levels and four engine-gearbox combinations in the Rs 5.45 lakh to Rs 9.55 lakh range.

Renault's aggressive pricing means that the new Kiger undercuts all its compact SUV rivals. Apart from its Nissan sibling, the Magnite, the Renault Kiger rivals

other sub-4m SUVs like the Hyundai Venue, Kia Sonet, Mahindra XUV300, Tata Nexon, Ford EcoSport, Maruti Suzuki Vitara Brezza and Toyota Urban Cruiser.

"With this outstanding pricing, Renault Kiger is surely set to radically alter the dynamics in the B-SUV segment," Venkatram Mamillapalle, country CEO & MD at Renault India, said.

Renault Kiger is designed with collaboration of France and India teams. It is developed and produced in India, for Indian customers' first, before it is taken globally.

Car companies the world over are following zero-emission strategies to meet tough carbon dioxide emission targets in Europe and China.

Jaguar Land Rover is one of the hardest hit by the downturn in demand for

diesel vehicles in recent years.

Its range of models across both brands relied heavily on diesel engines, which have seen sales tumble in the years since the German Volkswagen emissions cheating scandal rattled the industry in 2015.

TESLA EYES PLANT NEAR BENGALURU

SARITHA RAI FEB. 15

Tesla Inc is closing in on an agreement to make electric vehicles in India, opening up a new growth front after founder Elon Musk set up plants in the US and China. Tesla has picked Karnataka for its first plant, the state's chief minister said over the weekend. The automaker has been negotiating with local officials for six months and is considering car assembly in the suburbs of Bengaluru, people familiar with the matter said.

Tesla is conducting due diligence for office real estate in the region and plans to set up an R&D facility. Tesla has focused on Bengaluru because it's shaping up to be a hub for electric vehicles and aerospace manufacturing talent, they said. —Bloomberg

Ballore was drafted into JLR last July.

JLR said it was a "on a path towards" a double-digit operating profit and positive cash flow, and aims to achieve positive cash without debt by 2025.

Financials push Sensex above 52K

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, FEB. 15

Resumption of business activity close to the pre-pandemic level and positive global cues, macro data and earnings season triggered more than one per cent gains for market benchmarks Sensex and Nifty-50.

The Sensex crossed 52000 for the first time, closing with 610 points, or 1.18 per cent, higher at 52154.13. The Nifty-50 closed at 15314.70, up 151.40 points, or 1 per cent.

"The Nomura India Business Resumption Index picked up to 98.1 (provisional) for the week ending



14 February from 95.9 the preceding week, which suggests business activity is now only around 2 points below pre-pandemic levels, said the Japanese brokerage. Inflation and IIP data released last week were also encouraging for the market.

"After a brief pause last week, the market resumed upward momentum on the back of global optimism and encouraging macro

GULF EXODUS: S&P WARNS OF RISKS AHEAD

FARAH ELBAHRAWY FEB. 15

S&P Global Ratings said Gulf Arab economies suffered population losses as a result of an "exodus" of expatriate workers, warning the outflow could complicate their diversification in the long run.

The population across the Gulf Cooperation Council may have declined

by 4 per cent last year, according to a report on Monday.

The share of foreigners relative to citizens is set to drop through 2023 "because of subdued non-oil sector growth and workforce nationalisation policies," S&P credit analysts led by Zahabia Gupta said.

"GCC countries' productivity, income levels, and economic diversification

numbers. Monday's move was mainly propelled by the financial space as the top seven contributors in Nifty were from this space only," an analyst said.

Even in the Sensex pack top nine gainers were from the financial space.

The Nifty Bank Index gained 3.32 per cent. The top gainers included Axis Bank (6.21 per cent) and ICICI Bank (4.17 per cent).

Realty, Telecom and Healthcare stocks also made sound gains.

Foreign portfolio investors were net buyers of equities by Rs 1,234.15 crore while the domestic institutions were net sellers by Rs 1,048.55 crore.

Babus out? Govt mulls new panel to speed privatisation

SIDDHARTHA SINGH FEB. 15

India is considering setting up a body comprising independent experts that will take over the role of privatising state-run companies once the government decides to divest, according to people with knowledge of the matter.

The panel will replace bureaucrats, who currently manage privatisation, as well as minority stake sales, the people said asking not to be identified because the discussions

are private. The proposal is at an early stage and a final decision hasn't been taken, they said.

An external panel will help accelerate the asset sale process and bypass red tape, according to the people. India still hasn't manage to find a buyer for debt-ridden Air India Ltd even after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cabinet approved the sale in 2017.

A finance ministry spokesman declined to comment.

The government earlier this month said it will

keep a "bare minimum presence" by running companies in atomic energy, space & defence; transport & telecommunications; power, oil & coal; banking & financial services, according to the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management.

India plans to raise 1.75 lakh crore (\$24 billion) selling stakes in state-run firms next fiscal, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said while presenting the budget.

—Bloomberg

Smartphone sales clock record growth in Q4

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 15

The fourth quarter of year 2020 saw record sales of smartphones in India at 45 million units. However, for the year as a whole, the smartphone market de-grew 1.7 per cent—the first decline after several years of runaway growth. But the online channel continued to grow even during the pandemic-hit year.

According to global market intelligence firm IDC, the October-December quarter posted record fourth-quarter smartphone shipments of 45 million devices, growing 21 per cent over the same quarter in 2019.

A total of 150 million smartphone units were sold in 2020, which was 1.7 per cent less than what was sold in 2019. Stay-at-home mandates, remote

work, remote education, travel restrictions and manufacturing shutdowns led to a sluggish H1'20, which saw a 26 per cent decline over the same period in 2019.

However, H2'20 recovered with 19 per cent growth as markets reopened gradually. Lockdowns and restrictions rendered an urgent need for devices supporting activities such as entertainment, work from home, and remote learning, resulting in more devices per household, and leading to a resurgence in demand for consumer devices including smartphones, consumer notebooks, and tablets in 2020.

The online channel outpaced the overall market, growing by 12 per cent annually, with a 48 per cent market share in 2020. The segment clocked a record 51 per cent share in

4Q20.

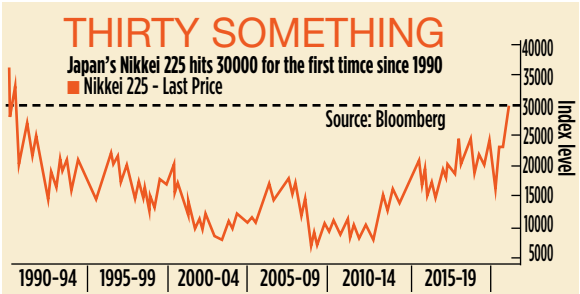
Further, the market saw 5G smartphone shipments crossing 3 million in 2020, with Chinese OEMs rolling out aggressively-priced devices. But adoption was limited due to higher prices and the lack of a 5G network.

Xiaomi continued to lead the smartphone market in volume terms with a market share of 27 per cent. But the brand registered a 6 per cent drop in sales.

Samsung held 20 per cent market, but sales declined by 4 per cent. Online channel registered strong 65 per cent growth, while the offline channel shipments declined by 28 per cent.

Vivo in the third slot with 18 per cent market share, recorded growth of 12 per cent. Realme too grew by 19 per cent and held a market share of 13 per cent.

Japan sights recovery, Nikkei at 1990-high



GEAROID REIDY & TOSHIRO HASEGAWA FEB. 15

Japan's Nikkei 225 Stock Average touched 30000 for the first time since August 1990 on signs economic recovery is intact at home and on progress with the US stimulus package.

The gauge rose as much as 1.6 per cent on Monday, taking it a step higher on the climb back to its bubble-era levels. While equities globally have hit new heights in recent months, the Nikkei 225 still needs to gain almost another 30 per cent to surpass its record of 38915.87. That was reached in the final trading session of 1989, before the index went on to lose

more than half its value in three years after the economic bubble burst.

The brief breach of the 30,000 shows "all sorts of investors are jumping in to buy Japanese equities with a totally bullish view," said Shoji Hirakawa, chief global strategist at Tokai Tokyo Research Institute.

In data announced Monday, Japan's gross domestic product (GDP) grew an annualised 12.7 per cent from the prior quarter in the three months through December, as exports continued to roar back, businesses started to invest again and government stimulus fuelled consumer spending despite the coronavirus. —Bloomberg

HUL expects Covid-hit products to rebound



New Delhi, Feb. 15: FMCG major Hindustan Unilever expects its "Covid impacted" product categories, such as ice-cream and vending solutions, to rebound strongly in 2021 with increase in mobility.

In an investor presentation, the company said categories such as skin care and colour cosmetics, which slowed down last year, will also rebound.

"These categories remain structurally attractive for us," HUL said in its presentation.

On the other hand, the company said "Covid obsessive" categories such as hand sanitisers and hand wash, which saw a sharp surge during the pandemic, are expected to normalise this year. The hand sanitiser category surged 16 times in 2020 compared to 2019, while the hand wash category grew 1.5 times.

Categories such as hand, body and face care, classified as "Covid resistant" items are expected "to normalise with increase in mobility in 2021."

From a peak decline of 73 per cent in the second quarter of the calendar year 2020 during the lockdown, these have recovered with the gradual unlocking that the country went through, to a decline of 51 per cent in the third quarter and 30 per cent in the fourth quarter.

Similarly, the company said "Covid impacted" categories, which include ice cream, food solutions business and vending business are also expected "to rebound strongly in 2021 with increase in mobility". —PTI

MILK-FREE | CHOCOLATE

Demand for plant-based food growing

Going Vegan: Nestle plans rice-based KitKat

CORINNE GRETHER FEB. 15

Nestle SA is adding its first vegan milk chocolate to its products as the world's biggest food company expands beyond meat alternatives.

The Swiss food giant will start offering plant-based KitKat bars this year, called KitKat V, according to Alexander von Maillot, head of Nestle's confectionery business. The product will be for sale online and at selected stores in a handful of markets including the UK as a test run before a possible wider rollout.

The bar, which uses a rice-based formula as a milk substitute, took about two years to devel-



op. The main challenge in making alternatives to milk chocolate is ensuring it blends well with cocoa and sugar for a creamy texture. Other substitutes, such as soy or almond formulas, can create off-notes, von Maillot said.

While there are quite a few small labels that make vegan milk chocolate, most

of the popular brands haven't yet joined in on the trend. Lindt & Spruengli AG, better known for its Easter bunnies wrapped in golden foil, has started selling oat milk-based chocolate bars under its Hello label. Mars Inc has introduced a vegan version of its Galaxy bars in the UK. Mondelez International Inc's Cadbury has also

announced plans to make plant-based milk chocolate.

"Demand for plant-based food is growing everywhere," von Maillot said in a phone interview. "KitKat was a logical choice, as it's by far the biggest brand and a global brand."

Confectionery is one of Nestle's last categories to join the plant-based trend. Nestle Purina last year introduced a blended pet food line, adding insects and plant protein from fava beans and millet to the meat protein.

Nestle introduced sausage substitutes last year and also makes plant-based mince and non-dairy ice cream and coffee products. —Bloomberg

— *Agencies*