

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | SATURDAY 27 | FEBRUARY 2021

## WEATHER



**Max:** 36°C  
**Min:** 21°C  
**Rainfall:** Nil

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Maasi 15  
**Tithi:** Pournami  
**Star:** Magam/ Puram  
**Rahukalam:**  
9 am to 10.30 am  
**Yamagandam:**  
1.30 pm to 3 pm

### PRAYERS

**Fajar:** 5.17 am  
**Zohar:** 12.28 pm  
**Asar:** 3.44 pm  
**Maghrib:** 6.17 pm  
**Isha:** 7.28 pm

**SUNSET TODAY 6.18 PM**

**SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.26 AM**

**MOONRISE TODAY 6.28 PM**

**MOONSET TOMORROW 7.13 AM**

## CORONA COUNT

### CASES

(+16,019)  
1,10,79,094

### DEATHS

(+109)  
1,56,970

covid19india.org

### STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+481)

TN: 8,50, 577 12,488

### WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

11,37,80,919

### DEATHS

25,23,695

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES  
219

worldometers.info

## Rear Admiral Sanjay Sharma takes charge of Naval Ship Repair Yard, Kochi

**New Delhi:** Rear Admiral Sanjay Sharma took over as Admiral Superintendent, Naval Ship Repair Yard, Kochi Friday, the Navy said in a statement. Rear Admiral Sharma was commissioned into the Indian Navy on August 1, 1986. Prior to this appointment, the flag officer has held various important appointments at IHQ MoD (N), Advanced Technology Vessel Program and Headquarters Eastern Naval Command in Visakhapatnam.

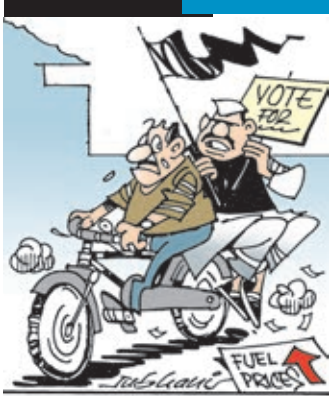
## Terrorist hideout busted in J&K's Reasi, arms and ammunition seized

**Jammu:** Security forces busted a terrorist hideout in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district on Friday and seized a huge cache of arms, ammunition and explosive materials, officials said. Based on specific information from a reliable source regarding suspicious movement in upper Sildhar and the adjoining areas of Ranjati top and Rousowali top, a joint party of the police, Army and CRPF launched a cordon-and-search operation in the upper Sildhar forest, Ranjati top, Rousowali top and the adjoining Dagantop hills areas.

## Canadian regulator authorises AstraZeneca vaccine

**Toronto:** Canadian regulators Friday authorised AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine for all adults. It is the third Covid-19 vaccine given the green light by Canada, following those from Pfizer and Moderna. Health Canada approved the vaccine for use in people 18 and over. Some countries, including France, have authorized the AstraZeneca vaccine only for use in people under 65, saying there is not enough evidence to say whether it works in older adults.

## COUNTER POINT



**We will save 99% of election expenses by campaign on bicycles!**

## STATE | 3

**Pondy LG gets two advisers**



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**Police make public 'threat letter' to Mukesh Ambani**

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**Rohit bats for batting intent**



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Vol. 11 No. 61 Established 1938 | 8 PAGES| ₹4.00

# TN, Puducherry to vote on April 6

■ Kerala polling also on April 6 ■ West Bengal to have 8-phase voting; Assam 3 ■ Election Commission to appoint two special poll observers to West Bengal

**DC CORRESPONDENTS**  
CHENNAI/NEW DELHI, FEB. 26

Elections to the 234-member Tamil Nadu assembly along with 30 seats to the Puducherry assembly will be held on April 6, the Election Commission of India announced in New Delhi Friday. The first elections to the state assembly after the departure of the towering figures of state politics and former chief ministers M. Karunanidhi and J. Jayalalithaa will be conducted in a single phase and the results will be announced on May 2 along with the results to the elections to the assemblies in Kerala, West Bengal and Assam.

Kerala, which will elect a 140-seat assembly, will also go to polls along with Tamil Nadu and Puducherry on April 6. The polls for 294 seats in West Bengal will be conducted over a record eight phases, from March 27 till April 29, and that of Assam's 126 seats in three phases — from March 27 to April 6. The term of the Assemblies in Assam, West Bengal and West Bengal will end in May while that of Kerala and Puducherry expires in June.

Nearly 18.68 crore voters are expected to cast their votes at 2.7 lakh polling stations for 824 Assembly seats across Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora said. He added that all officials and other personnel on poll duty will be vaccinated against Covid-19 before the polling begins.

The Election Commission has decided to appoint two special observers for West Bengal and a third may also be sent if required, Mr Arora said, even as West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee questioned the rationale behind the eight-

## Draw a line, CEO asks govt secys

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
CHENNAI, FEB. 26

Tamil Nadu Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Satyabrata Sahoo urged all government secretaries to draw a line after the last entry made in the GO register once the election dates were announced to ensure that there were no complaints of new schemes being announced or new order issued in violation of the Model Code of Conduct.

In a letter to all government departments on Friday, Mr Sahoo said that allegations are sometimes made of the government issuing new orders and announcing new schemes even two days after the election dates are announced in the media.

phase Assembly polls announced by the EC - one more than the seven phases in the last election. West Bengal has in the past seen major political violence during elections, and accordingly, a huge deployment of security forces has been put in place to prevent that.

Tamil Nadu will see a fight which will decide if the ruling AIADMK will be voted back for a third straight term. The party started its winning streak in 2011 when it stormed to power under party supremo Jayalalitha. The party repeated its feat in 2016 under the charismatic leader, who, however, passed away within months of the consecutive win. The election will also decide if the Edappadi K. Palaniswami-O. Panneerselvam combination will be able to take her legacy along or will have to concede it to her former aide V.K. Sasikala.

| STATE ELECTIONS 2021                            |  |
|---|--|
| PUDUCHERRY (30 seats, single phase)             |  |
| ● Issue of notification: March 12               | ● Last date of nomination: March 19            |
| ● Date of polling: April 6                      | ● Scrutiny of nomination: March 20             |
|   | ● Last date of withdrawal: March 22            |
|   | ● Date of polling: April 6                     |
| KERALA (140 seats, single phase)                |  |
| ● Issue of notification: March 12               | ● Last date of nomination: March 19            |
| ● Date of polling: April 6                      | ● Scrutiny of nomination: March 20             |
|   | ● Last date of withdrawal: March 22            |
|   | ● Date of polling: April 6                     |
| ASSAM (126 seats, 3 phases)                     |  |
| Phase-1 (47 seats)<br>Date of polling: March 27 | Phase-2 (39 seats)<br>Date of polling: April 1 |
| Phase-3 (40 seats)<br>Date of polling: April 6  |  |

| TAMIL NADU (234 seats, single phase)  |   |
|---|---|
| ● Issue of notification: March 12   | ● Last date of nomination: March 19             |
| ● Last date of nomination: March 19   | ● Scrutiny of nomination: March 20              |
| ● Scrutiny of nomination: March 20  | ● Last date of withdrawal: March 22             |
| ● Last date of withdrawal: March 22   | ● Date of polling: April 6                      |
| ● Date of polling: April 6  |   |
| WEST BENGAL (294 seats, 8 phases)   |   |
| Phase-1 (30 seats)<br>Issue of notification: March 2<br>Date of polling: March 27 | Phase-5 (45 seats)<br>Date of polling: April 17 |
| Phase-2 (30 seats)<br>Date of polling: April 1                                    | Phase-6 (43 seats)<br>Date of polling: April 22 |
| Phase-3 (31 seats)<br>Date of polling: April 6                                    | Phase-7 (36 seats)<br>Date of polling: April 26 |
| Phase-4 (44 seats)<br>Date of polling: April 10                                   | Phase-8 (31 seats)<br>Date of polling: April 29 |
|   | <b>RESULTS: MAY 2</b>                           |

# TN passes bill to provide 10.5% quota to Vanniyars

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
CHENNAI, FEB. 26:

Just before the Model Code of Conduct kicked with the Election Commission of India announcing the poll schedule for Tamil Nadu, Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami hurriedly brought in a bill in the Assembly providing 10.5 per cent exclusive reservation for Vanniyars, carving it out of the present 20 per cent Most Backward Classes (MBC) quota.

The bill splits the MBCs into three categories - Vanniyars (10.5 per cent), Seer Marabhar (7 per cent) and rest of the castes (2.5 per cent).

Making it clear that the government was taking the decision on exclusive Vanniyar reservation following the demand made by PMK founder S. Ramadoss, the Chief Minister, in his speech,

said that it was being implemented on a temporary basis.

The work on the caste-wise census would start in another six months to ascertain the backwardness of individual communities. Once the report was ready the government would change the representation for the various castes based on the findings, he said.

The 'statement of object and reasons' for bringing in the bill said that it was done on the recommendation of the Tamil Nadu Backward Commission, which examined the demands by various communities, to promote equitable development among the MBCs.

The reservation would be made available in educational institutions and in government jobs, the Chief Minister said, recalling history that gave 20 per cent quota for MBCs and 30 per cent for Backward Classes.

## CM announces gold loan waiver scheme

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
CHENNAI, FEB. 26

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami announced in the state assembly on Friday that jewel loans taken by farm labourers and the other cooperative loans given to women Self Help Groups (SHGs) in the state will be waived.

Mr Palaniswami referred to the pandemic and said both the sections, the women members of the SHGs and the farm workers, had suffered due to the lockdown and loss of livelihood. There are about 15 lakh women who have organised themselves into rural and urban areas. Most of them are from below the poverty line. All the loans taken from cooperative banks and cooperative associations by the SHGs have been now written off.

# Seniors, 45+ with comorbidities now can pick Covid vaccination site: Govt

# Covid-19 norms to be in force till March 31

**New Delhi, Feb 26:** The home ministry Friday said the existing COVID-19 guidelines will remain in force till March 31.

In a statement, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said while there has been a substantial decline in the active and new Covid-19 cases, there is need to maintain surveillance, containment and caution so as to fully overcome the pandemic.

The states and union territories have also been advised to speed up the vaccination of the target population so as to break the chain of transmission and overcome the pandemic. Accordingly, containment

zones continue to be demarcated carefully; prescribed containment measures strictly followed within these zones; COVID-appropriate behaviour promoted and strictly enforced; and the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) prescribed in respect of various permitted activities followed scrupulously, the home ministry said.

Therefore, the focussed approach on surveillance, containment and strict observance of the guidelines and SOPs, as envisaged in the guidelines issued on January 27 need to be enforced strictly by states and union territories, it said.

— PTI

## Prez Biden orders airstrikes in Syria, retaliating against Iran-backed militias

**Washington, Feb. 26:** The US military has struck Iran-backed militias in eastern Syria, killing at least 22 fighters according to a war monitor, in what the Pentagon said was a message from the new administration after recent rocket attacks targeting US troops in Iraq. In its first military action against Iran-linked groups since Joe Biden became

president five weeks ago, the Pentagon said it had carried out air strikes Thursday at a Syria-Iraq border control point used by Iran-backed groups, destroying "multiple facilities". "At President Biden's direction", the US raids targeted "infrastructure utilised by Iranian-backed militant groups in eastern Syria", spokesman John Kirby said. **AFP** ■ **P5**

## FOREIGN MINISTERS' CALL

# India tells China to disengage all points

**SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 26

India has now told China clearly that the disengagement of troops "at all friction points" in the Ladakh sector alone will lead to the restoration of peace and tranquility between the two countries, adding that "both sides should now quickly resolve the remaining issues along the LAC in eastern Ladakh" after the "successful" disengagement at the northern and southern banks of Pangong Tso lake. This was made clear by external affairs minister S. Jaishankar in a 75-minute phone call with Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi on Thursday afternoon, when the two ministers also agreed to establish a hotline between them. Mr Jaishankar told the Chinese minister that

● **The two foreign ministers discussed the situation along the LAC in eastern Ladakh and also issues related to overall India-China relations**

"bilateral relations have been impacted severely over the last year", adding in an obvious reference to — the deadly Galwan Valley clash last June — that "disturbance of peace and tranquility, including by violence, will inevitably have a damaging impact on the relationship".

But seeking to put the blame on India, the Chinese foreign minister claimed that "there has been some wavering and back-pedalling in India's China policy, and practical cooperation between the two countries has been affected".

**New Delhi, Feb. 26:** As India gears up to vaccinate people above 60 years of age and those over 45 years with comorbidities against Covid-19 from March 1, the Union Health Ministry on Friday said the facility of on-site registrations will be available so that eligible beneficiaries can walk into identified vaccination centres, get themselves registered and get inoculated.

The beneficiaries will be able to self-register in advance by downloading the Co-WIN 2.0 portal and through other IT applications such as Arogya Setu etc which will list the government and private hospitals serving as COVID-19 vaccination centres (CVCs) with the date and time of the available schedules.

The beneficiary would

● **The beneficiary would be able to choose the CVC of his/her choice and book an appointment for immunisation, the ministry said**

be able to choose the CVC of his/her choice and book an appointment for immunisation, the ministry said.

Vaccination will be free of charge at the government vaccination centres. Those taking the Covid vaccine at any designated/empanelled private health facility will have to pay a pre-fixed charge, it said.

The Centre shared this information with Health Secretaries and MDs (National Health Mission) of states and UTs during a high-level meeting. — **PTI**

# Azad, letter-writers head to Jammu in show of strength

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 26

Just a fortnight after his retirement from the Rajya Sabha, senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad headed to Jammu to address a series of public meetings. His outing is being seen as a show of strength to the party high command as several leaders who had written a letter to Congress president Sonia Gandhi demanding

● **The change seekers in the party realise that their "constructive suggestions" are being ignored. Even after a marathon meeting with Ms Sonia Gandhi in the last week of December there has been no movement**

organisational changes are accompanying him. These include Kapil Sibal, Anand Sharma, Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Vivek Tankha and Manish Tewari.

Most of these leaders have been sidelined in the party and none of them is

involved in preparing for Assembly elections in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Puducherry and Assam.

Mr Azad, who is well versed with the working of the DMK, was not sent to negotiate seat sharing.



A hideous figure watched Tarzan. -Brows so deep, eyes so sharp, he clutched an enormous spear- Here was Weera, the wizard.

190 YOU ARE "THE ONE WHO CHALLENGES THE POWER OF THE BLOOD RUBY," SAID WEERA.

SLOWLY WEERA SCREAMED IN RAGE "SUCH TEMERITY WILL BE REWARDED BY DEATH- TAKE MY AVENGE!"



## SHORT TAKES



A young woman, Sangeetha, hailing from Bharathiar Nagar, Salavanpet, Vellore, staged a protest on Friday morning with her child in front of the women's police station, Anna Road, Vellore seeking police support to restore her husband to her. The woman complained to the police that she married one Sathyamoorthy, a worker in a paper mill, also a local 'Surya fan club' leader in 2014. The couple lived with their two children. But at a point, Sathyamoorthy used to often visit Bengaluru in the pretext of work, and developed intimacy with another woman there. Distraught Sangeetha had last month attempted self-immolation in front of the Vellore SP office. —**K.Senthil Nathan**

## Round-the-clock three-phase power for farmers: Edappadi

**ZAKEER HUSSAIN|DC**  
SALEM, FEB. 26

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Friday announced here that three-phase power would be provided to farmers for 24 hours from April 1, on the sidelines of inaugurating the 'Sarabanga Lift Irrigation' project here at Thippampatti. The Chief Minister also laid the foundation stone for 23 projects at the cost of ₹5.36 crore and inaugurated 36 completed projects worth ₹62.63 crore.

"Based on farmers' request, this scheme was implemented in a short period," said the Chief Minister. "I made an announcement about the scheme on July 15, 2019. In two years, this scheme was implemented at the cost of ₹565 crore. Flood waters from Mettur dam will be pumped at Thippampatti main pumping station

from where water will be taken to a lake in M Kalipatti village through pipelines, and from there through Vellalapuram and Kannantheri sub-pumping stations water will be sent to 42 lakes. Likewise, from Thippampatti main pumping station, 31 lakes will be filled via Nangavalli. Totally, 4,238 acres of farm lands in 40 villages under eight panchayat unions will be irrigated and drinking water needs of 38 villages will be met. The total need of water for this project is half TMC. About 214 cuses of water is proposed to be pumped for 30 days," the chief minister added.

He also thanked former chief secretary K Shanmugam for playing a vital role in the project. "Besides solving the Cauvery water dispute, we announced the delta

region as 'Protected Special Agricultural Zone' and waived crop loans of ₹12,110 crore of 16.43 lakh farmers. Usually, political parties will mention the request of the public in their election manifesto. But we have addressed their grievances before the elections. During the drought, we gave ₹2,247 crore as drought relief. We got ₹9,257 crore under the crop insurance scheme and gave it to farmers in the past four years," he pointed out.

"Due to increase in paddy yield last year, we procured 32.41 lakh metric tonnes through government paddy procurement centres. Through the Kudimaramathu scheme, we desilted lakes and ponds all over the state and saved rain water during the monsoon. For best water management, we received a national award

for the year 2019-20. We laid the foundation stone for Cauvery-Gundar project at the cost of ₹14,400 crore in Pudukottai district," the chief minister added.

"To rehabilitate and rejuvenate Cauvery river, the project report for Nandanthal Vazhi Cauvery project at the cost of Rs. 10,711 was prepared and sent for the Centre's approval, following which it will be implemented for people to get clean drinking water and also for irrigation. Our government will construct concrete houses for farm labourers also," the chief minister declared.

Principal secretary, PWD, K. Manivasagam, Collector S.A. Raman, MP N Chandrasekaran, state cooperative bank chairman R. Elangovan, MLAs S Semmalai, Vettrivel, Raja and former minister C Ponnaiyan, participated.

## SHRC notice on preventing woman IPS officer complaining against DGP

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
CHENNAI, FEB. 26

The State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) on Friday directed the principal secretary, department of home, prohibition and excise, and the DGP to file a detailed report in connection with a senior IPS officer allegedly preventing a woman IPS officer from filing a complaint against special DGP Rajesh Das for sexu-

ally harassing her.

Based on a newspaper report, SHRC judge D Jayachandran directed the principal secretary and DGP to file a report in two weeks.

According to the report, the woman SP was allegedly sexually harassed by Rajesh Das recently. She was proceeding to Chennai in a car on the Tiruchy-Chennai highway to lodge a complaint with the home secretary against Rajesh Das. Chengalpat

superintendent of police D. Kannan allegedly prevented and intimidated her while she was going to the headquarters to file the complaint against Rajesh Das.

At Chengalpat toll plaza, Kannan intercepted her official vehicle with his strike force and directed them to remove the keys of her car. Later, he told the victim that she should not file a complaint against Rajesh Das. When she refused, Kannan

insisted her to talk to Rajesh Das on the phone before proceeding further.

When she warned Kannan that she would file a complaint against him, he handed over the vehicle key and withdrew. Prior to this Rajesh Das had also reportedly asked the superintendents of police of Kallakurichi and Villupuram districts to stop her while she was proceeding to Chennai. However, they did not obey Rajesh Das.



## National Medical Commission will bring great transparency: PM

**Chennai, Feb 26:** The government is transforming the entire medical education and healthcare sector and the National Medical Commission would bring great transparency, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Friday.

"Friends we are transforming the entire medical education and healthcare sector," he said addressing the 33rd convocation of the state-run Tamil Nadu Dr MGR Medical University through video conferencing.

The National Medical Commission would bring great transparency and also rationalise norms to set up new medical colleges, he noted. "It will also improve the quality and availability of human resources in this sector." During the last six years, MBBS seats increased by more than 30,000, which is a rise of more than 50 per cent from 2014. The number of Post Graduate seats increased by 24,000 which is a rise of around 80 per cent from 2014. In 2014, there were six AIIMS in the country. "In the last six years, we have approved 15 more AIIMS across the country," —**PTI**

## Rajini's evidence a must, not an option, rules panel

**ARULOLI M | DC**  
THOOTHUKUDI, FEB. 26

The one-man commission probing the anti-Sterlite protest police firing in May 2018, ruled out Rajinikanth's request to permit him to testify before the commission through video-conferencing.

The commission is firm in its stand to summon the superstar, who had made a statement that violence erupted due to the intrusion of anti-social elements in the anti-Sterlite rally that resulted in the police firing, which claimed 13 lives, said Commission advocate Arul Vadivel Sekar. "If Rajinikanth has any problem coming to Thoothukudi for deposition, he may be given a chance to give his witness statement before the chairman of the commission, Justice Aruna Jagadeesan at the camp office in Chennai," added advocate Arul Vadivel

Sekar.

Having registered 640 witnesses and notified a total of 1,089 documents so far in its 25 enquiry sessions, the commission is to summon 40 men accused by the CBI to have been involved in the violence, in its next session of enquiry in Thoothukudi on coming March 15. The injured policemen in the riots also would be summoned for deposition.

Higher revenue and police officers including Thoothukudi collector and district police superintendent in service on the day of the riot, would be summoned by the commission for enquiry in its final sessions, said the advocate.

Around 400 more persons have been identified to be summoned by the commission in the upcoming sessions, he added.

## Pondy LG gets two advisers

**New Delhi, Feb.26:** Outgoing CRPF chief A P Maheshwari and former DoPT secretary C Chandramouli have been appointed as advisers to the lieutenant governor (LG) of poll-bound Puducherry, an order issued by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said on Friday.

Telangana Governor Tamilsai Soundararajan was given the additional charge of Puducherry after incumbent LG Kiran Bedi was removed from her post by a presidential order last week.

The two appointments were being made with "immediate effect", the order issued by the MHA said. Maheshwari, a 1984-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer of the Uttar Pradesh cadre, will superannuate as the director general of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) on February 28. He has earlier served in the home ministry as the special secretary (internal security). Chandramouli, a 1985-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of the Tamil Nadu cadre, has earlier served as the registrar general and the census commissioner of the country. He retired as the secretary of the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) in September last year. —**PTI**

## MASI MAHAM DIP



Hundreds of people took a holy dip in the Mahamaham tank at the temple town of Kumbakonam in view of the Masi Maham festival on Friday. Masi Maham is celebrated in maha nakshatra in the Tamil month of Masi every year, and Maha Maham is celebrated once in 12 years. Principal deities of 12 Siva temples including Abhimukheswarar temple, Kasi Viswanathar temple and Gautameswarar temple assembled on the banks of the tank in the morning, and theerthavari took place. People took a holy dip from morning till evening. Car festival of Chakkarapani temple was held on Friday. The float festival of Sarangapani temple was held at 'potramarai kulam'.

—**DC**

## Lawyers

## boycott court

**Perambalur, Feb.26:**

Most of the advocates in the district court here boycotted court proceedings on Friday condemning the Tamil Nadu Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order) Rajesh Das, who was recently accused of allegedly torturing a woman police official for sexual favours.

In a release here, president, Perambalur bar association, Valuvan Nambi, said they also wanted that based on the victim's complaint, a case should be registered against Rajesh Das, and an enquiry held in a fair manner on the issue, besides ensuring safety to the women police personnel, he added. —**DC**

## LJD president nominates 7-member group for polls

**Tiruchy, Feb 26:** Sarat Yadav, president, All India Lok Tantrik Janata Dal party,

has nominated a seven-member 'Atchi Mandra Kuzhu' under the leadership of party's senior leader M Sampath of Kancheepuram to deal with all issues and also take appropriate decisions on the party's stand in the forthcoming election to the state assembly by the state unit of the Lok Tantrik Janata Dal.

Party's state president K.

Rajasekaran said in a release here on Friday that other members of the committee are the party's principal general secretary, N. Govindaraj, state treasurer A. Sivasubramanian, vice-presidents, K.C. Arumugam, of Tiruchy, S.C. Duraisamy, general secretary C.M. Rajasekaran, and party's Kanyakumari district president, Devarajan. Committee member N. Govindaraj will function as committee's coordinator, Rajasekaran added.



DMK president M.K.Stalin pays last respects to senior CPI leader D. Pandian who passed away in Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital in Chennai on Friday morning after two days of hospitalisation. —**DC**

## PIL to refrain from altering Perumpalla odai in Erode under smart city scheme

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
CHENNAI, FEB. 26

A Public Interest Litigation has been filed in the Madras high court to direct authorities to refrain from disturbing or altering the Perumpalla Odai at Kathirampatti village in Erode district in the name of smart city scheme.

A division bench comprising Justices R.Subbiah and Sathi Kumar Sukumara Kurup before whom the PIL filed by

Iyarkai Valam Matrum Perumpalla Odai Pathukappu Nala Sangam represented by its president K.Shanmugasundaram, came up for hearing, ordered notice to the state government and the Erode district collector and posted after one week, further hearing of the case.

According to the petitioner, he filed a petition to remove the encroachments made in and around Odai and obtained an interim order. The authorities also

had removed some of the encroachments. While so, the Erode district has been selected for smart city scheme and the authorities have started taking steps to acquire the Perumpalla Odai. The authorities have planned to raise walls on both sides of the Perumpalla Odai, which in turn reduces the width of the Odai. They have also planned to affix paver blocks on the sides of the Odai in order to make it as a pathway in the name of

making the Erode city beautiful, but the ulterior motive was to acquire the parts of the Perumpalla Odai and refrain from removing the encroachment already made on it, he alleged.

He said the act of the authorities was against the teeth of the interim order dated December 16, 2015, which said there shall not be any permission to make any construction in any manner on the water bodies anywhere in the entire state of Tamil Nadu. But the

authorities were going ahead and started acquiring both sides of the Perumpalla Odai. They have been taking steps to affix paver blocks and form a pathway on the same in the name of smart city scheme. If the length and width of the Odai was altered, it will create hindrance to the free flow of water and as a result, agriculture would suffer. The farmers in the nearby villages were dependent on this Odai and if both sides

of the Odai were acquired then the poor farmers will be left with either scarcity of water or over flow of water, which will in turn damage the crops. Not only the farmers but also the nearby households will be damaged as during the flow of water if both sides of the Odai were blocked then the only way for the running water was to enter the houses. Therefore, he sent representations to the authorities. But there was no response, he added.

## Tribal farmers get soil, water conservation training

**B. RAVICHANDRAN|DC**  
OOTY, FEB. 26

Tribal farmers here are being trained on soil and water conservation measures and post-harvest and value-addition technologies.

The Indian Institute of Soil and Water Conservation, Research Centre (IISW-CRC) here, organized the training programme on 'Soil

and water conservation measures, post harvest and value addition', at Semmanarai tribal hamlet at Kottagiri under the Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) in association with Nilgiri Adivasi Welfare Association (NAWA).

At the inauguration, Dr. P. Sundarambal, principal scientist, IISW-CRC and training coordinator, explained the various activities carried

out under TSP and about the training programme. Around 32 farmers from 12 tribal villages like Kolikarai, Kollitorai, Semmanarai and

Kambayur participated in the programme. Dr. Kannan, principal scientist and head, IISW-CRC, in his presidential address briefed about the TSP activities carried out in the past. He also emphasized the

importance of conservation of soil and water resources in the hilly regions under the changing climatic scenario.

N. Chandran, assistant director, horticulture here, in his address highlighted the importance of conserving vital natural resources like soil and water through organic farming for sustainable agriculture in the hilly regions. He also reit-

erated that value addition is essential for plantations crops, fruit and vegetable crops grown in the region.

A technical session was also convened in which lectures were delivered on topics like role of cover crops in soil and water conservation, soil and water conservation measures in tea and vegetable crops, organic farming practices for soil and water conservation,

post-harvest and value addition in commercial horticulture crops and value addition in indigenous fruits and vegetable crops.

The technical session was followed by a field visit to a progressive farmer's field where participants were exposed to various soil and water conservation practices adopted in plantation and vegetable crops.

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| <p><b>AFFIDAVIT</b></p> <p>I, Service No.142634241 NK, P.RAMACHANDRAN, residing at 4/408, Thandukarampatti Village, Palayampudhur Po, Nallampalli Tk, Dharmapuri Dt, do hereby solemnly affirm and state as follows:</p> <p>I am deponent herein. In my army records my son's name was entered as P.VIKRAM KUMAR due to inadvertence error.</p> <p>My son's correct name is R.VIKRAM as per records. I am filing this affidavit to enter the correct name of my son as R.VIKRAM in my service records.</p> <p><b>P.RAMACHANDRAN</b><br/>Deponent<br/>Dharmapuri, 18-02-2021</p> | <p><b>REQUIREMENT OF REGRINDING &amp; OFFSPEC ENGINEERING PLASTICS</b></p> <p><b>-NYLON PA-6</b><br/><b>-NYLON PA66</b><br/><b>-POM Resin / Regrind - between 9 MFI to 27 MFI (all above in Natural Colour)</b><br/><b>-ABS Natural/Black</b><br/><b>Quantity upto 50-60 MT each (per month)</b></p> <p>Contact : <b>plabbi607@gmail.com</b></p> |
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**PUBLIC NOTICE**

My client M/s LIC Housing Finance Ltd., Having office at Tri Star Building, Avinasi Main Road, Coimbatore, have proposed to extend housing loan to Smt.Kanthamani W/o Palanisamy, residing at Do.No.37, "V.K.L.Avenue", Meenakshi Garden, Thudiyalur Village, Coimbatore District, Pin Code - The said Smt.Kanthamani has offered house site an extent of 1095 Sq.ft in SF.No.396, Thudiyalur village, SRO.Periyanaickenpalayam, Coimbatore District, acquired by way of Gift Settlement deed Document No.4336/2016 dated: 22.03.2016. She alleged that Original parent Doc.No.11676/2015 dated 15.09.2015 at Periyanaickenpalayam village has been misplaced / lost & untraceable. Anybody in possession of the document or having objection in M/s LIC Housing Finance Ltd., extending loan to her, may inform me within 10 days from today. Any objection after that period would not bind my client in any manner.

**B.SANJEEVI KUMAR, MA., LL.B., Advocate,**  
No.14/7, Sri Laksmi Complex, Kalapatti Road, Opp.Sub-Registrar Office,Saravanampatti, Coimbatore - 641 035, Cell:9444809622

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राष्ट्र के खाद्य सुरक्षा प्रहरी



## SHORT TAKES

## CAMPAIGNING FOR GUJ LOCAL POLLS ENDS

Ahmedabad, Feb. 26: Campaigning for polls to various local bodies of Gujarat ended on Friday evening with voting scheduled for February 28. Counting of votes for elections to 81 municipalities, 31 district panchayats and 231 taluka panchayats will take place on March 2, a release by the State Election Commission said.

While the BJP is riding high after winning all six civic corporation polls held recently, the Congress believes the hike in fuel prices and public disenchantment with the ruling party will turn the tide.

On the last day of campaigning, Gujarat BJP president C R Paatil led a road show in Navsari, while Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, Pares Dhanani, took part in a motorcycle rally in Amreli.

Aam Aadmi Party head and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal sought votes during a road show in Surat.

For the first time, the All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen has fielded candidates in minority-dominated seats in Godhra, Modasa and Bharuch municipalities, with party chief Asaduddin Owaisi holding public gatherings in Modasa and Godhra two days ago.

State Director General of Police Ashish Bhatia said over 44,000 policemen, including State Reserve Police and 12 companies of CAPF, along with 54,000 homeguards will be deployed on February 28 to ensure incident-free voting in 23,000 booths.

## ON BIKE, IRANI LEADS RALLY FOR WB POLLS

Sonarpur (WB), Feb. 26: Riding a scooter, Union minister Smriti Irani led a rally of the BJP on Friday as she campaigned for the upcoming West Bengal elections in the South 24 Parganas district.

Taking part in the BJP's state-wide 'Poriborton Yatra', Irani along with BJP MP Roopa Ganguly and Agnimitra Paul began the campaign in Gangajora near Garia on the party's 'rath' - a bus decked up with slogans and photos of the leaders.

After covering a short distance, the minister got down from the 'rath' and took to a scooter, wearing a black helmet and a mask.

"When we began the 'rath yatra' on Friday, the administration deliberately tried to delay it. We will ride two-wheelers, walk on foot because West Bengal is on the march towards change," Irani said.

Enthused by the minister's spontaneity, scores of BJP workers followed Irani on two-wheelers, chanting "Jai Shri Ram" and "Khela Hobey", meaning 'game on' - a slogan first raised by the Trinamool Congress, which has now become the catchphrase of this election season.

## EVERYONE ON POLL DUTY TO GET COVID-19 VACCINE

New Delhi, Feb. 26: Everyone on election duty for the upcoming polls for five assemblies will be vaccinated against Covid-19 before polling day, the Election Commission said on Friday.

Voting will take place for 126 seats in Assam, 234 in Tamil Nadu, 294 in West Bengal, 140 in Kerala and 30 in Puducherry.

Nearly 18.68 crore electors will be eligible to vote at 2.7 lakh polling stations for 824 seats in five assembly elections, Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora said at a press conference here.

Arrangements will be put in place for candidates to file their nominations online for the five assembly polls. Voting will be allowed for an additional hour, keeping in mind Covid-19 safety guidelines, he said.

Also, webcasting arrangements will be in place at polling stations in critical and vulnerable areas, while adequate CAPF (Central Armed Police Forces) deployment will be ensured for the assembly polls, Arora said. All critical and vulnerable areas have been identified and advance teams have been already deployed across all four states and one union territory Puducherry going to the polls, he added.

He said door-to-door campaigning will be restricted to five persons, including the candidate, while roadshows will be allowed with a maximum of five vehicles.

## Mamata questions 8-phase elections in West Bengal

Are poll dates announced as per suggestions of Modi, Shah, asks Didi

Kolkata, Feb. 26: Questioning the eight-phase assembly elections in West Bengal, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Friday that she suspects that the dates were announced as per the suggestions of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah for better management of the BJP's poll campaign.

Addressing a press conference at her residence in Kalighat, Banerjee said the Election Commission should not look at the state "through the eyes of the saffron camp" a reference to the BJP.

"With all due respect to the Election Commission, I want to say that questions are being raised on why elections will be held in so many phases in Bengal while other states will be voting in one phase. If EC doesn't provide justice to the people, where will the people go," she said.

"I request the Election Commission to consider West Bengal as their own state," the Trinamool Congress chief said.

Banerjee also raised questions on the way the phases were divided.

"They have divided our stronghold districts such as South 24 Parganas and North 24 Parganas into three parts. This is unprecedented," she said.

Banerjee said that despite "all these tricks", she will win the elections.

"I have information from my sources that the poll dates are similar to the ones BJP wanted. Have the dates been announced as per Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah's suggestions? The PM and the home minister cannot misuse their power for the state elections," she



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee addresses a press conference at Kalighat in Kolkata on Friday. She has taken exception over the EC appointing two special police observers for West Bengal.

- PTI

● **ELECTIONS FOR the West Bengal assembly will be held in eight phases, up from seven last time.**

● **AFTER HAVING a limited presence in the politically polarised state for decades, the BJP has emerged as the TMC's main rival over the last couple of years, managing to win 18 out of 42 seats in the Lok Sabha polls of 2019 and following it with inducing popular TMC MLAs and ministers into the party**

Centre against "misuse of power", Banerjee said it would prove detrimental

for the BJP. "Centre can't misuse their powers for a state election. If they do it, then it will be a big blunder and they will have to face the music. We are common people, we will fight our battle. I request the EC to stop the misuse of money. BJP has sent money to all the districts through agencies," she alleged.

Banerjee also took exception over the EC appointing two special police observers for West Bengal - Vivek Dubey and M K Das. "Vivek Dubey is the same man who was the observer for Bengal during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. We all know the role he had then played then,"

she said. Banerjee said she is the daughter of the state and knows Bengal better than the BJP, exuding confidence about her party Trinamool Congress winning the elections.

Banerjee's allegations drew sharp reactions from the BJP, which alleged that she is perplexed over the eight-phase elections as her party won't be able to intimidate the voters.

"Why is she so worried about eight-phase elections? Is she worried because TMC goons won't be able to influence the elections? We welcome the EC's decision for eight-phase elections to ensure free and fair polls," BJP leader Rahul Sinha said.

## KEJRIWAL EYES 2022 GUJARAT ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

Surat, Feb. 26: Buyoed by the Aam Aadmi Party's good performance in the recently-held Surat civic polls, party chief Arvind Kejriwal has now set his eyes on the 2022 Gujarat Assembly polls.

Kejriwal, who arrived in Surat on Friday, said that AAP would seek votes from the people of the state in the next Assembly polls based on the performance of the party's 27 newly-elected corporators in the city.

Polls to six civic bodies in Gujarat, including in Surat, were held on Sunday.

While the BJP retained power in the Surat Municipal Corporation (SMC) by winning 93 seats, the AAP bagged the remaining 27 seats. The Congress failed to win even a single seat.

During his address to the party corporators here, Kejriwal said, "The people of Gujarat are watching you with great hope. In our first attempt, AAP won 28 Assembly seats in Delhi and came to power. People trusted us because they knew that we are true patriots, as we were associated with Anna Hazare's agitation."

"In the 49 days of our rule, we did a lot of pro-people work. As a result, the people of Delhi gave us 67 seats in the second election. Now, six crore people of Gujarat will observe the work of 27 AAP corporators. If you perform well, I am sure there will be a huge revolution in 2022," the Delhi chief minister added.

Fearing a "poaching attempt", Kejriwal warned the elected representatives to inform the party leaders if "anyone from the BJP" contacts them over phone and gives an offer to switch sides.

- PTI

## Godse supporter's entry kicks up storm in Cong.

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, FEB. 26

The recent induction of a 'staunch follower' of Mahatma Gandhi's assassin Natarum Godse in Congress has kicked up a storm in the party with former PCC president Arun Yadav on Friday threatening to stage a revolt against the state leadership over the issue.

Yadav on Friday released a video in which he made a scathing attack on the decision by Madhya Pradesh Congress chief Kamal Nath for welcoming Babulal Chaurasia, a former leader of Hindu Mahasabha who was caught on camera worshipping Godse in Gwalior in 2016, in the Congress a couple of days ago.

He described the move as unacceptable to him and

● **FORMER PCC president Arun Yadav released a video in which he made a scathing attack on the decision by Madhya Pradesh Congress chief Kamal Nath for welcoming Babulal Chaurasia.**

many other Congressmen and threatened to hit the street to oppose Chaurasia's induction in the party.

"I am ready to make any political sacrifice for opposing such a move (by the state party leadership). I will take the battle to the streets on the issue", he warned in a separate statement issued here on Friday.

The former union minister also took a dig at Congress leaders who supported the decision to admit Chaurasia into the party.

Gwalior South Congress MLA Praveen Pathak who

was said to be the brain behind the move has earlier justified Chaurasia's induction in Congress saying that the latter has repaid faith in Gandhian ideology.

"A man who worships Godse cannot relate to Gandhian ideology", Yadav, who is said to belong to the camp of former chief minister and powerful factional leader in MP Congress Digvijay Singh, observed.

MP PCC vice-president and former minister Raja Pateria also echoed Yadav's sentiments saying that antecedents of leaders should be thoroughly scrutinised before admitting them in Congress.

"Congress leadership should be careful in admitting leaders in the party. Otherwise, fascists and followers of Godse will one day hijack the party", he warned.



Mukesh Ambani

## POLICE MAKE PUBLIC 'THREAT LETTER' TO MUKESH AMBANI

SHAHAAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, FEB. 26

The Mumbai police on Friday made public contents of the letter found inside explosives laden car parked near billionaire Mukesh Ambani's residence and said that it was a threat letter terming the incident as trailer and warning of returning with more preparation next time to target the family.

According to the police, it is a handwritten letter in a broken English, addressed to Mukesh Ambani and his wife Neeta Ambani. The police has stated that there are grammar mistakes in the letter and the writer is either not much educated or is pretending to be so.

The letter was found on next to driver's seat. Scanning of the CCTV has also revealed that even though the said SUV was parked on the Carmichael Road near Ambani's residence Antilia at around 1am however, the driver of the car sat in the car post 3am. The driver came out of the car from the rear door of the car but could not be identified, as he was wearing a mask as well as a hoodie. The police is scanning CCTVs of nearby areas to locate the driver. The police will enhance the quality of the CCTV footage to identify the suspect.

## India out of recession as GDP grows 0.4% in Q3

FROM PAGE 1

"The GDP at constant (2011-12) prices in Q3 of 2020-21 is estimated at Rs 36.22 lakh crore, as against Rs 36.08 lakh crore in Q3 of 2019-20, showing a growth of 0.4 per cent," data released by the ministry of statistics and programme implementation showed on Friday. The Indian economy had grown at the rate of 4.7 per cent in the same quarter last year.

According to the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO), the farm sector recorded a growth of 3.9 per cent, and the manufacturing sector output grew by 1.6 per cent. The construction sector advanced by 6.2 per cent, while electricity, gas, water supply and other utility services clocked a 7.3 per cent growth.

Trade, hotels, transport, communications and services related to broadcasting continued to bore the brunt



of post-Covid consumer behaviour. These segments posted a 7.7 per cent contraction in the third quarter.

Economists and rating firms had widely expected India's GDP to grow in the third quarter on the back of higher economic activity and the falling number of coronavirus cases in the country. They are also hopeful that India's economic growth in the fourth quarter will improve further due to the mass vaccination drive that started in the country in January.

While the third-quarter data suggested buoyancy in the economy, the NSO revised its growth projection for the fiscal 2020-21

marginally downwards by 30 basis points or 0.30 per cent.

Compared to the projection of 7.7 per cent of degrowth in January, the government expects the economy to degrow by eight per cent, signalling a weaker than expected rebound in the March quarter.

The NSO, however, added a disclaimer stating that the measures taken by the government to contain the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic have impacted the economic activities as well as the data collection mechanisms. "Estimates, therefore, are likely to undergo sharp revisions for the aforesaid causes in due course," it said.



## SHORT TAKES

**7 DEAD, 1 HURT  
AFTER PRISON  
OUTBREAK**

**Croix-Des-Bouquets:** At least seven people were killed and one injured on Thursday after several inmates tried to escape from a prison in Haiti's capital, witnesses said. The incident occurred in northeast Port-au-Prince at the Croix-Des-Bouquets Civil Prison, which is known for a 2014 breakout in which more than 300 inmates escaped. Residents in the area who declined to be identified out of concern for their safety said that they observed a group of heavily armed men start shooting at prison guards before the inmates began to flee.

**ISRAELI SHIP  
EXPLODES IN  
TENSE MIDEAST**

**Dubai:** An explosion struck an Israeli-owned cargo ship sailing out of the Middle East on Friday, an unexplained blast renewing concerns about ship security amid escalating tensions between the U.S. and Iran. The crew and vessel were safe, according to the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, which is run by the British navy. The explosion forced the vessel to head to the nearest port. The site of the blast, the Gulf of Oman, saw a series of explosions in 2019 that the U.S. Navy blamed on Iran against the backdrop of steeply rising threats between former President Donald Trump and Iranian leaders. Tehran denied the accusations, which came after Trump abandoned Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers and reimposed harsh sanctions on the country. In recent weeks, as the administration of Joe Biden looks to re-engage with Iran, Tehran has escalated its breaches of the nuclear accord to create leverage over Washington. The deal saw Tehran agree to limit its enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of crippling sanctions.

**HEAVY FIGHTING  
KILLS 27 IN  
CENTRAL YEMEN**

**Sanaa (Yemen):** Heavy fighting between rebels and government forces in Yemen's oil-rich Marib has killed at least 27 people, tribal leaders and security officials said on Friday, amid a resurgence of violence in the area. The Iranian-backed Houthis rebels earlier this month renewed their attack on Marib, a stronghold for Yemeni forces allied with the internationally recognized government. The rebel offensive has faced stiff resistance and made little progress so far. The officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity as they were not authorised to talk to the media, said the uptick in violence came over the past twenty-four hours, adding that most of the dead were rebel fighters. Yemen's stalemated civil war began in 2014, when the rebels seized the capital of Sanaa and much of the country's north. A Saudi-led coalition — with US backing — intervened months later to restore the internationally recognised government's authority.

**4 DIE IN SWEDEN  
AFTER FALLING  
ON ICEY LAKE**

**Stockholm:** Four people were killed when they fell through the ice on a lake in southern Sweden on Thursday, police said, as the country experiences a spell of unseasonably mild weather. Four men aged between 65 and 75 were found in a hole in the ice on Savsjo lake, south of the town of Jonkoping, and could not be resuscitated after being pulled out of the water, a local police spokesperson said. The exact circumstances of the incident were yet to be determined, she said. Accidents caused by people walking across unstable ice are common in Sweden, but it is rare for the death toll to be so high. After several weeks of intense cold throughout most of the country, which drew walkers to frozen lakes and estuaries, parts of Sweden have seen a rapid hike in temperature over the past few days. A national heat record for February was set on Thursday, according to the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute. A temperature of 16.8 degrees Celsius (62.2 degrees Fahrenheit) was registered in Kalmar, in the southeast of the country.

# US strikes Iran militia in Syria

22 killed in first military action against Iran-linked groups since Joe Biden became US Prez

**Beirut, Feb. 26:** The US military has struck Iran-backed militias in eastern Syria, killing at least 22 fighters according to a war monitor, in what the Pentagon said was a message from the new administration after recent rocket attacks targeting US troops in Iraq. In its first military action against Iran-linked groups since Joe Biden became president five weeks ago, the Pentagon said it had carried out air strikes on Thursday at a Syria-Iraq border control point used by Iran-backed groups, destroying "multiple facilities". "At President Biden's direction", the US raids targeted "infrastructure

utilised by Iranian-backed militant groups in eastern Syria", spokesman John Kirby said in a statement. "These strikes were authorised in response to recent attacks against American and coalition personnel in Iraq, and to ongoing threats to those personnel," he said. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least 22 fighters were killed when the strike hit three trucks loaded with munitions coming from Iraq near the Syrian border town of Albu Kamal. Militia border posts were also destroyed, the war monitor said. It said all the dead were from Iraq's state-sponsored Hashed al-Shaabi

paramilitary force, an umbrella group that includes many small militias with ties to Iran. Kirby said the location was used by Kataeb Hezbollah and Kataeb Sayyid al-Shuhada, two Iraqi pro-Iran groups operating under the Hashed umbrella. Kataeb Hezbollah has yet to formally comment but an official with the group said one of its fighters was killed. "One of our fighters was killed and a small number wounded by two missiles targeting one of our points along the Syrian-Iraqi border," he said on condition of anonymity. Syrian state television condemned the "American

aggression" against the Iraqi fighters, who are allied with the Damascus government. The US action followed three rocket attacks on facilities in Iraq used by US and coalition forces fighting the Islamic State group. One of those strikes, on a military complex in the Kurdish regional capital Arbil on February 15, killed a civilian and a foreign contractor working with coalition forces, and wounded several US contractors and a soldier. The attacks in Iraq laid down a challenge to the new Biden administration just as it opened a door to resumed negotiations with Tehran over its nuclear

programme. Last week, the administration offered talks with Iran led by European allies as it seeks to salvage a 2015 nuclear deal, left on the brink of collapse after Biden's predecessor Donald Trump withdrew from it. But the administration has also made clear it will not brook "malign activities" in the region by Iran. Although Kataeb Hezbollah did not claim responsibility for the attacks, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said that the powerful pro-Iranian group was behind them. "We're confident in the target we went after. We know what we hit," he told reporters on the plane back to Washington after a

tour of the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz off the California coast. "We are confident that the target was being used by the same Shia militia that conducted the strikes" against US interests in Iraq, he said. Iran is believed to be searching for an opportunity to avenge the US assassination of top general Qasem Soleimani one year ago. Soleimani, a senior Revolutionary Guards commander, was Iran's key liaison to its allies in Iraq and Syria, and elsewhere in the region. He was killed in a US drone strike just as he arrived in Baghdad for meetings with top Iraqi officials. — *AFP*

**US, EU AFFIRM  
VAX ROLLOUT  
IS ON TRACK**

**Washington, Feb. 26:** The United States hailed progress in turning around its troubled Covid-19 vaccine rollout, as the European Union said it was on track to meet jab targets and Asia's inoculation drive gained pace on Friday. Brazil hit 2,50,000 fatalities — the second-highest national death toll after the United States — while the worldwide vaccine campaign received the endorsement of Queen Elizabeth II, 94, who urged people not to be wary of the shot. President Joe Biden declared the US rollout is now "weeks ahead of schedule" as he celebrated 50 million doses administered since he took office on January 20, but he warned Americans to keep masking up. "We're moving in the right direction despite the mess we inherited," Biden said, referring to the program under his predecessor Donald Trump. The United States is the world's hardest-hit country, with coronavirus deaths crossing the 5,00,000 mark earlier this week. Rollouts in Asia also gathered momentum as Hong Kong and South Korea began their mass vaccination programs on Friday.

## US intel report to name MBS for Khashoggi killing

**Washington, Feb. 26:** The US director of national intelligence is expected to release a damning report on Friday that fingers Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for the brutal murder and dismemberment of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018.

The classified report is believed to say that, based on intelligence collected by the CIA and other spy bodies, the kingdom's de facto leader directed the assassination of the respected US-based writer in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

The prince has steadfastly denied a part in the murder, even as some of his closest advisors have been shown to be deeply involved. Intent on strengthening relations with Riyadh, previous US president Donald Trump's administration avoided making the report public or naming Prince Mohammed in the case. Its declassification and release comes just as President Joe Biden endeavors to reset US relations in the Middle East and return principles of human rights to a prominent position in US policy. Ahead of the release, Biden spoke on the telephone Thursday with Saudi King Salman, Prince Mohammed's father, in their first discussion since he became president five weeks ago. A White House state-

ment on the call did not mention the Khashoggi report, but Biden said Wednesday that he had read it. A respected veteran Saudi journalist and editor, Khashoggi was in self-exile and residing in the United States, writing articles critical of the crown prince when he was assassinated on October 2, 2018.

The 59-year-old writer had been told by Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the United States to go to the Saudi consulate in Istanbul if he wanted to obtain documents for his forthcoming marriage to a Turkish woman, Hatice Cengiz. There, he was killed and his body dismembered by a team sent from Riyadh under the direction of a top aide to Prince Mohammed, Saud al-Qahtani. Just one month after the murder, the US Central Intelligence Agency concluded with high confidence that Prince Mohammed had ordered the assassination, according to *The Washington Post*. — *AFP*



Shamima Begum's sister holds her picture. — *AFP*

## IS bride loses bid to return to UK for citizenship

**London, Feb. 26:** The UK government on Friday won a major legal battle as the Supreme Court ruled against allowing a London-born 21-year-old woman of Bangladeshi descent, who ran away to Syria as a teenager to join the Islamic State (ISIS) terror group, to return and fight her citizenship case. The unanimous decision — with all five top court justices in agreement — comes six years after the then 15-year-old schoolgirl, Shamima Begum, ran away with two other friends to join the Islamic State (ISIS) group in February 2015. Begum had her British citizenship revoked on national security grounds shortly after she was found in a Syrian refugee camp in February 2019. "The Supreme Court unanimously allows all of the Home Secretary's appeals and dismiss-

es Ms Begum's cross-appeal," said Lord Robert Reed, the President of the Supreme Court. "The right to a fair hearing does not trump all other considerations, such as the safety of the public," he said. Begum was born in the UK to parents of Bangladeshi heritage. Begum, dubbed an ISIS bride in reference to her marriage to Dutch ISIS fighter Yago Riedijk, was one of three schoolgirls from Bethnal Green in east London who travelled via Turkey to ISIS headquarters in Raqqa. — *PTI*

## Russian B-777 lands in emergency

**Moscow, Feb. 26:** Russian media report said that a Boeing 777 plane made an emergency landing in Moscow in the early hours of Friday after the pilot reported a problem with the engine. The Interfax news agency cited an anonymous source saying that the pilot on the flight from Hong Kong to Madrid reported a failure of one of the left engine control channels and requested an

emergency landing at the Moscow Sheremetyevo airport. The plane landed safely and no one was injured, the report said. It was carrying out a "cargo-passenger" flight, Interfax said. The flight tracking website Flightradar24 confirms that the plane operated by Russia's state-funded Rossiya airline landed early Friday at the Moscow airport. Earlier this month, a

Boeing 777 operated by United Airlines had to make an emergency landing in Denver after one of its engines blew apart, spewing huge chunks of wreckage that landed in neighbourhoods and sports fields. The investigation is focusing on a fan blade that appeared to be weakened by wear and tear, a development reminiscent of a fatal failure on board another plane in 2018.

The event caused authorities to ground Boeing 777 models that use that engine, the Pratt & Whitney 4000-112. Flightradar24 identified the plane that landed in Sheremetyevo on Friday as a Boeing 777-31H model, which does not use the Pratt & Whitney engines. Instead, that model uses the General Electric GE90-115B engines, according to fleet tracking site Airfleets.net. — *AP*

## Nigeria gunmen kidnap 300+ girl students

**Lagos, Feb. 26:** Hundreds of girls are missing after a large group of gunmen raided a school in northern Nigeria early Friday morning, residents say. The Government Secondary Jangebe School in Zamfara state was the scene of the latest mass abduction of school children in northern Nigeria. Nasiru Abdullahi said that school records show

300 girls are missing. His daughters, aged 10 and 13, are among them. Resident Musa Mustapha said the gunmen also attacked a nearby military camp and checkpoint, preventing soldiers from interfering while the gunmen spent several hours at the school. It was not immediately clear if there were any casualties. Several large groups of

armed men operate in Zamfara state, described by the government as bandits, and are known to kidnap for money and for the release of their members from jail.

He called for their immediate release. The West African nation has seen several such attacks and kidnappings over the years, notably the mass abduction in April 2014 by jihadist group Boko Haram of 276 girls from the secondary school in Chibok in Borno state. More than a hundred of the girls are still missing. — *AP*

## FB SIGNS PAY DEALS WITH 3 OZ PUBLISHERS

**Canberra, Feb. 26:** Facebook announced on Friday preliminary agreements with three Australian publishers, a day after the Parliament passed a law that would make the digital giants pay for news. Facebook said letters of intent had been signed with independent news organisations *Private Media*, *Schwartz Media* and *Solstice Media*. The commercial agreements are subject to the signing of full agreements within the next 60 days, a Facebook statement said. "These agreements will bring a new slate of premium journalism, including some previously paywalled content, to Facebook," the statement said. Schwartz Media chief executive Rebecca Costello said the deal would help her company continue to produce independent journalism. "It's never been more important than it is now to have a plurality of voices in the Australian press," Costello said in the Facebook statement. *Private Media* chief executive Will Hayward said the new deal built on an existing Facebook partnership. Australia's Parliament on Thursday had passed the final amendments to the so-called News Media Bargaining Code. — *AP*

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## DECCAN Chronicle

27 FEBRUARY 2021

### A welcome first sign of an India-Pak thaw

The joint statement released by the militaries of India and Pakistan on Thursday, February 25, on observing the ceasefire at the Line of Control and in all other border areas, and respecting previous agreements in this regard, is a positive development that deserves to be built upon.

It marks the first sign of thaw in India-Pakistan relations since January 2, 2016, when Pakistan-based terrorists struck the Indian Air Force base in Pathankot a mere eight days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's surprise visit to Lahore on Christmas Day to celebrate the birthday of then Pakistan PM Nawaz Sharif.

Understandably, this was taken as a sign that the Pakistan Army, which calls all the shots in that country, was not comfortable with the potential of an evolving entente between the two countries.

Since then it has been a roller-coaster ride of negativity in bilateral ties, as the Uri terror attack of September 2016, India's "surgical strike" days later, the subsequent Pulwama terrorist attack in early 2019 that killed 40 CRPF personnel, India's retaliatory airstrike across the LoC, and the immediate response of a Pakistani fighter jet crossing the LoC, showed.

Through this sorry saga, in response to overtures by Pakistan PM Imran Khan, New Delhi maintained that "talks and terror cannot go together". Clearly, this left room for the idea that dialogue leading to mutually favourable long-term bilateral outcomes — which will benefit the region as a whole — is indeed possible if terrorism is taken off the menu.

After five years of a hostile stasis in the relationship, Pakistan Army chief Gen. Qamar Javed Bajaj, in a February 3 address, attempted to mark a change of course in ties with India. He said: "We stand firmly committed to the ideal of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence. It is time to extend the hand of peace in all directions. Pakistan and India must also resolve the longstanding issue of Jammu and Kashmir in a dignified and peaceful manner."

The joint defence statement suggests that India was not unresponsive, and both sides got on to practicalities. Across governments, India has held that it is the Pakistan Army that is the fly in the ointment, and that a turn in a beneficial direction is contingent on the Pakistan Army desiring it. Evidently, Gen. Bajwa's remark has emerged as a possible catalyst.

How the thaw unfolds lies in the future. Over the decades, Pakistan Army has tied itself into knots by cultivating terrorist outfits as its surrogates operating in Kashmir, in other parts of India, and in Afghanistan with which India seeks to deepen its friendship.

If the Pakistan Army chief's initiative has to survive, he must ensure that J&K is out of bounds for terrorism. And this means the message must go down to the homegrown Kashmir outfits as well. Further, terrorist actions against all Indian entities in Afghanistan must also cease.

The joint statement is a military statement. At some point, if things go well, it needs to acquire a political dimension at the level of the two governments. The statement notes that it was "agreed to address each other's core issues and concerns which have (the) propensity to disturb peace and lead to violence". Such a formulation covers terrorism as well as Kashmir. India should not fight shy of taking the "K" word on board in all its dealings with Pakistan.

### Diamonds aren't forever

The decks have been cleared for the extradition from Britain of the diamond merchant Nirav Modi. It is up to India to use its heft in pursuing the matter to a conclusion by convincing the UK home secretary Priti Patel to sign off on the court ruling and allow the repatriation of a jewel thief who masterminded one of the great heists of the time in defrauding the Punjab National Bank. The booty to the tune of Rs 14,000 crore (nearly US \$2 billion) is nearly the equivalent of what thieves took from the 1963 Great Train Robbery in the UK.

The Indian people, whose money it is that was swindled from the bank by the illegal use of Letters of Undertaking (LoUs) in connivance with bank officials, would be hoping that the justice system here would ultimately hand down an apt sentence commensurate with the crime. Mr Modi has also added to his repertoire such crimes as intimidation of witnesses in the form of death threats and tampering with the evidence. A jail in India may not, however, be to the liking of the notorious diamantaire as it may not quite match the decorated cell in Her Majesty's Prison in Wandsworth which boasts of flat screen TV, high ceiling fans and a large clean bathroom.

Indian officials have done exceptionally well in pursuing the case with all the documentation necessary for the judge to deliver such a stinging indictment of Nirav Modi's modus operandi. But, in its inability to ferret out a fraud amounting to robbery, the banking industry may not have acquitted itself as professionally. And this is not a case of straightforward business loss like many that have blighted banking to the tune of several lakh crores that have become NPAs in just the last two decades. There could not possibly any grounds on which such a character can claim asylum in Britain either, which means that at least one big fraudster who took India for a ride gets his comeuppance.

**KAUSHIK MITTER**  
Editor

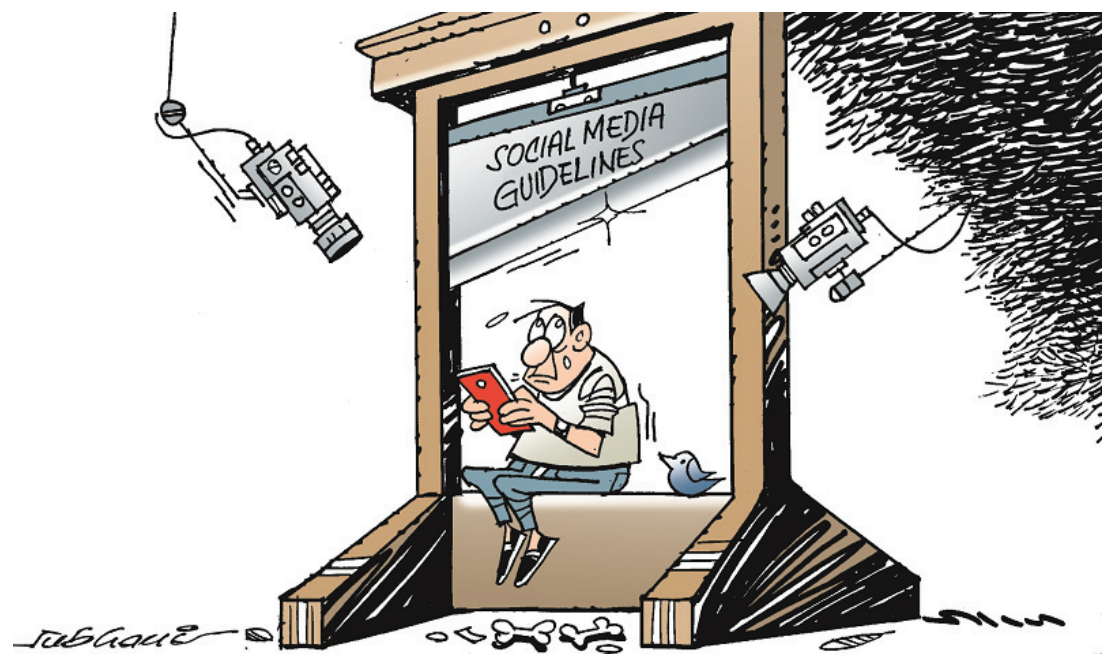
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Subhani



## Judges need to protect right to dissent, protest



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

At a time when the people's faith in key institutions is plummeting, judicial verdicts that seek to restore the citizens' faith in justice and fair play are hugely welcome. In recent days, two court orders in particular have buoyed spirits because they emit a powerful signal — that the attempts to invoke the law to muzzle freedom of thought and expression and quieten disquiet will not always work.

A Delhi court has granted bail to 22-year-old climate activist Disha Ravi, arrested by the Delhi police on February 13 from her Bengaluru home in the by-now famous "toolkit" case, saying there was just not enough evidence to keep the young woman in custody. Additional sessions judge Dharmender Rana's order set Disha free on bail on the condition of her furnishing two sureties of ₹1 lakh each and with the directive that she cooperate with the investigation into the FIR and not leave the country.

A few days earlier, there was another welcome verdict. The Nagpur bench of the Bombay high court granted interim bail on medical grounds to ailing 82-year-old poet-activist Varavara Rao.

These verdicts are good news; but the questions they raise and the momentum they have generated need to be sustained and leveraged to trigger a public debate on judicial reforms.

As citizens, reading both the verdicts is instructive.

While granting conditional bail on medical grounds to Varavara Rao, an accused in the Elgar Parishad-Bhima Koregaon case, the Bombay high court pointed out that the National Investigation Agency (NIA) had kept him in custody for a long period without framing charges.

Senior advocates Indira Jaising and Anand Grover, who argued on behalf of Mr Rao, pointed out that considering his age, medical history, and multiple health complications, the prison atmosphere was absolutely not conducive to his mental and physical well-being. Such well-being is a fundamental right of every prisoner, points out *Leaflet*, a legal website.

The NIA had opposed the bail plea citing a bar under Section 43-D (4) and (5) of the UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act), which says bail cannot be granted to an accused under the anti-terror statute if the prosecution makes out a prima facie case against the accused. Ms Jaising argued that the fundamental right to health of a prisoner could never be ousted by Section 43(D)(5) of the UAPA.

The high court observed that it was a "genuine and fit" case for granting relief in view of the advanced age of Mr Rao and inadequate facilities at the Talaja jail hospital; it argued that if it denied relief to Mr Rao, it would be abdicating its constitutional duties as a protector of human rights and right to health covered under Article 21 of the Constitution.

The arguments undergirding the verdict related to Disha Ravi, arrested on the charge of sedition, are equally important. The court punctured most of the arguments of the Delhi police against Ms Ravi, including her alleged engagement with groups with "dubious" credentials, her links with banned organisations, her alleged role in incitement as well as the destruction of "evidence" and gave detailed reasons for doing so.

While taking the decision to grant bail to Ms Ravi, the court noted that "mere engagement with persons of dubious credentials is not indictable". A key argu-

ment of the prosecution hinged on the charge that a group called "Poetic Justice Foundation" (PJF), which was allegedly pro-Khalistani and secessionist, and people associated with it, was involved in creating the "toolkit" document. The police alleged that two of Ms Ravi's associates, Nikita Jacob and Shantanu Muluk, attended a Zoom meeting in which activists of the PJF had participated along with many others and this somehow made Ms Ravi also culpable.

The court said that no real evidence had been put on record to establish a direct link between Ms Ravi and the PJF activists mentioned. "In my considered opinion, it is not mere engagement with persons of dubious credentials which is indictable, rather it is the purpose of engagement which is relevant for the purpose of deciding culpability," the judge said.

The prosecution had sought to connect Ms Ravi with the violence that rocked Delhi on January 26. The court pointed out that there was no evidence of this. The judge noted that merely sharing a platform with people who oppose a law is not secessionist.

"In the absence of any evidence to the effect that the applicant/accused agreed or shared a common purpose to cause violence on January 26 with the founders of the PJF, it cannot be presumed by resorting to surmises or conjectures that she also supported the secessionist tendencies or the violence caused on January 26, simply because she shared a platform with people who have gathered to oppose the legislation," the order said.

**While granting bail to Varavara Rao, the Bombay high court pointed out that the National Investigation Agency had kept him in custody for a long period without framing charges**

The crux of the matter, as the court pointed out, is whether Disha Ravi was merely involved in peaceful protest and dissent against the farm laws or if she was actually involved in seditious activities under the guise of protesting against these laws.

The court's view, as articulated in the order, is that citizens cannot be tossed behind bars simply because they disagree with the government of the day.

"Difference of opinion, disagreement, dissent, or for that matter, even disapprobation, are recognised legitimate tools to infuse objectivity in state policies... The offence of sedition cannot be invoked to minister to the wounded vanity of governments," the court said, citing a 1942 ruling.

Another critical observation by the court in the Disha Ravi case pivots around the right to dissent being firmly enshrined in Article 19 and that freedom of speech includes the right to seek a global audience.

These observations are welcome and will have far-reaching implications.

Young Indians, mostly women in their early 20s, have been arrested over the past few years merely for exercising their fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression, by engaging in democratic protests with no intentions of perpetrating violence and with no intention of inciting violence, members of the Delhi High Court Women Lawyers Forum have pointed out in a public letter to the Chief Justice of India and other Supreme Court judges. The letter notes that Disha was brought from Bengaluru to the national capital by the Delhi police without following the prescribed legal procedures.

"We feel that the Bar and Bench cannot watch silently as young people are forced into long incarceration," the letter said.

The judiciary must take heed.

*The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com.*

### LETTERS

#### RECHRISTENING OF STADIUM

The rechristening of Sardar Patel Stadium as Narendra Modi Stadium just before the start of the India-England Test at Ahmedabad only explains the growing amour-propre of our Prime Minister. In fact, Modi once said, "I am from the BJP and Patel was from Congress, but I still follow his ideology and beliefs." But, is this the way Modi respects the Iron Man of India if he is a true follower of his doctrines and philosophies? (*An act of sycophancy*, Feb. 26). To lift Patel's image in contemporary Indian life, Modi had built the world's tallest "The Statue of Unity" for him. And naturally, it seemed only fitting that the renovated Motera stadium also be named after Sardar Patel. Only last month the sports ministry said that it had decided to name all the upcoming and upgraded facilities of the Sports Authority of India after eminent athletes who have made the country proud. It naturally raises a question why this policy did not apply to Motera cricket stadium.

R. Sivakumar, Chennai

#### CANCELLATION OF EXAMS

THE DECISION of the Tamil Nadu government to declare all students in classes 9, 10 and 11 for the second consecutive year as passed is nothing but unfortunate, unwise and improper. The announcement has been made keeping only forthcoming elections in view without looking at its impact on the future of students as they are likely to become complacent. Already students of the state board are considered poorer cousins when compared to CBSE students and this decision of state government will widen the gap. The excellence of education lies in classroom teaching and examinations and having compromised already on the former the examinations should be conducted properly in a staggered manner.

M. Raghuraman, Chennai

#### ASHWIN'S FEAT

IT IS most heartening that India's ace spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has become the second quickest to take 400 Test wickets in his 77th outing in the Ahmedabad Test next only to Sri Lanka's Muttiah Muralitharan who achieved this landmark in his 72nd Test. Muralitharan has already stated that amongst all bowlers only Ashwin has bright chances of beating his world record of 800 Test wickets. Let us hope he reaches this milestone in record time.

S. Vaithianathan, Madurai

Farrukh Dhondy  
Cabbages & Kings



*"They say all property is theft  
Hence, I own nothing and am  
left bereft  
My ancestors were never Earls  
or thieves  
And depending, then, on what one  
believes  
About making it rich through toil  
and sweat  
It's just not true — so I'll place  
my bet  
On Proudhon who formulated the  
phrase  
With which Marx disagreed — All  
praise, all praise!"*

— From Dil Deyker Dildo by Bachchoo

person is a self-obsessed habitual liar, misogynist, racist, fraudster, rabble-rousing insurrectionist, anti-democrat and fantasist, they still want to make him President. Not very high on the irony scale, then.

But one must admit that Americans are good on the onomatopoeic front. It was their popular and renowned form of literature, the comic, which gave us words for violence. I suppose "bang bang" may have preceded Amerigo Vespucci's discovery of Trumpistan and may have been imported, perhaps from Ireland, but adding "Chitty Chitty" to it was a stroke of genius attributed to the USA. But I digress.

What I meant was that the comics gave us words for fisticuffs such as "sock" and "pow". Who can't see in their mind's eye the spiked splatter of a powerful punch from Superman or Batperson landing on the villain's skull as this nasty individual tilts away from the vertical? The words inside the spiked bubbles or splashes, giving visual form to the impact of fists, aren't exactly onomatopoeic, as a punch sounds more like "phut" — but "pow" packs

imaginative power.

So, gentle reader, Zoom, as the name of a device by which you connect to anyone (who has an appropriate electronic device, of course) anywhere in the world, may be a word that is supposed to and successfully conveys the speed of contact between stationary persons — two or a full screen of them.

If Indians had invented the ethereal conversation device and needed an onomatopoeic name for it, they would probably have called it "Dhishoom", because as far as I know it's the only sound word that we have invented. It is of course Bollywood for the sound of a gun going off, and there are always two shots fired so it becomes "Dhishoom! Dhishoom!" The precedent is the Western "bang bang" — because if it's just the one word, it could merely stand for the slamming of a door. I venture to speculate that we would have called our communication device "Dhishoom" because having invented the word, we use it as the name of a chain of very good British restaurants. That's not supposed to represent the explosion of your stomach when you eat there.

My constant, even daily, use of Zoom has given me several useless insights into human behaviour; perhaps not new ones, but ones that confirm what we do and are. It has also reinforced my self-consciousness in a not terribly positive way.

You see, Zoom forces you to see yourself as you speak to others and, depending on the strength of echo in your device, you can even hear yourself speak and, like me, be rather surprised at your lamentable accent, the slight lisp you hadn't noticed before and the stupid fumbles and pauses you thought others made but which your fluency was free of.

And then there's appearances, of course. Before a Zoom call, I check my hair and brush it this way and that. My creeping baldness (a family inheritance which, as they say, looking on the bright side, allows more space for rude tattoos) and the fact that I haven't had a haircut since the lockdown began does funny things, in my self-conscious perception, to my appearance. The hair in the centre of my head insists on standing upright, as though I was auditioning for the role of TinTin from the French comics.

I used to despise the self-deceivers who brushed their hair forwards to hide their baldness, but now find myself wondering, comb in hand at the mirror, whether it's a good strategy. It's not.

Gentle reader, in my job as a teacher, and then in my short and happy life as an agitator and pamphleteer, I have addressed countless classes, assemblies and audiences. I never began with the old opening: "unaccustomed as I am to public speaking", but perhaps should have. Zoom has demonstrated to me that any conceit I cultivate about my ability to present an argument is precisely that. I have now taken a vow during the Christian Lent to begin speaking on Zoom with that precise and modest caveat. Watch that screen!

Zoom gives one an insight into the rooms that your "zoomists" work or speak from. The convention is to have a bookshelf or some dignified piece of art behind you, but that may only be true of the people I associate with or speak to or watch on a televised Zoom. I wonder if others have dirty pictures or washing hanging up behind them as they interloque.

Life on Zoom:  
You learn a lot  
about yourself,  
and others too



## quick BITES

| INDICATORS             | %               |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| Sensex                 | 49,099.99 -3.80 |
| Nifty 50               | 14,529.20 -3.76 |
| S&P 500*               | 3,853.11 0.62   |
| Dollar (₹)             | 73.47 -1.42     |
| Pound Sterling (₹)     | 101.83 0.80     |
| Euro (₹)               | 88.76 -0.29     |
| Gold (10gm)* (₹)       | 45,599.342 0.75 |
| Brent crude (\$/bbl)*  | 66.13 -1.12     |
| IN 10-Yr bond yield    | 6.229 0.00      |
| US 10-Yr T-bill yield* | 1.491 -0.024    |

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

## Inflation band okay for next 5 years: RBI report

With the next review of the flexible inflation target (FIT) framework coming up soon, the RBI said the current inflation target of 4 per cent with a +/-2 per cent tolerance band is appropriate for the next five years. India adopted the FIT framework in 2016, and the next review of the inflation target is due by March 31. "The current numerical framework for defining price stability...is appropriate for the next five years," it said.

## PFC board okays ₹1 L cr borrowing plan for FY22



Power Finance Corporation said its board has approved a plan to borrow Rs 1 lakh crore under different debt segments. The borrowing will be made in one or more tranches in FY21-22, PFC said. The NBFC plans to raise a maximum of Rs 60,000 crore from long-term borrowing, Rs 20,000 crore from long-term foreign currency borrowing, Rs 5,000 crore from short-term borrowing and Rs 15,000 crore from commercial papers.

## Volkswagen weathers Covid with \$11 bn profit

Volkswagen said it made better than expected profit of 8.8 billion euros (\$10.7 bn) after tax in 2020 despite the pandemic. The world's No. 2 automaker said the rapid recovery of China, its largest single market, and resilient sales of luxury vehicles helped the bottom line. VW gave an upbeat outlook for this year, saying it would carry momentum from the stronger second half of the year over into earnings going forward.

## RailTel Corp makes strong market debut

Telecom infrastructure provider RailTel Corporation of India Ltd made a strong debut with its shares zooming over 29 per cent on closing compared with the issue price. On the BSE, the scrip opened on a strong note of Rs 104.6 apiece against the IPO price of Rs 94. In intra-day trade, the stock touched a high of Rs 125.5 before settling at Rs 121.4, higher by 29.15 per cent. The RailTel IPO was subscribed 42.39 times.



## ■ Sensex sheds more than 1900 points US bombing, bond yields spook mkt

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD  
MUMBAI, FEB 26

Investors suffered notional loss of over Rs 6 lakh crore as the domestic stock market experienced its worst fall in the last 10 months after the US bombing in Syria and sharp overnight rise in bond yields in the US market.

Rising Covid cases in India also added to negative sentiments in the market, said analysts.

The Sensex fell 3.8 per cent, or 1939 points, closing at 49099 while the Nifty-50 fell 3.7 per cent, or 568 points, to close at 14529.

Intra-day the Sensex fell over 2000 points to a low of 48890.48. All the Sensex and Nifty constituents closed in the red.

Overnight US bond yield rose to a high of 1.61 and finally closed at 1.51 per cent, scaring the global investors. US benchmark indices Dow Jones fell 1.75 per cent and Nasdaq 100 fell 3.56 per cent, setting off negative opening for the Asian markets.

India's 10-year government bond yield also rose sharply intraday to 6.242 per cent and closed at 6.229. As per provisional data, foreign portfolio investors were net sellers of equities worth Rs 8,295.17 crore.

Financials suffered the most among sectoral indices after the recent rally, with the Nifty Bank Index closing down 4.78 per cent. Other big losers were Nifty Auto (-3.12 per cent) and Nifty Metal (-2.70 per cent). NSE's volatility index



## RUPEE DIVES 104 PAISE AGAINST \$

Mumbai, Feb. 26: The rupee on Friday posted its biggest single-day fall in nearly 19 months, tumbling 104 paise to close at 73.47 against the US dollar, as a rout in global bond markets weighed on investor sentiments. Besides, rising geopolitical tensions between the US and Syria also led to weaker appetite among investors in domestic forex markets, analysts said. At the interbank forex market, the rupee opened at 72.43 against the dollar, then lost further ground. It finally ended at 73.47. —PTI

India VIX shot up 22.93 per cent to 28.14, indicating a volatile market ahead.

The GDP data expected after the market hours also weighed on the market sentiments. "The Q3 GDP growth number at 0.4 per cent is lower than our esti-

mates of 0.8 per cent but quite short of some other estimates which were in the range of 1.4-2 per cent. The equity markets may be a tad disappointed with these data points," said Dhiraj Relli, MD & CEO, HDFC Securities.

## EMERGING MARKETS BRACE FOR CAPITAL FLIGHT

LIVIA YAP &  
LILIAN KARUNUNGAN  
FEB. 26

Emerging markets are bracing for an exodus of funds as a surge in US treasury yields evokes memories of the taper tantrum of 2013.

After rallying at the start of 2021, developing-nation assets have slumped during the past two days as US treasury yields jumped to the highest level in more than a year, sounding a warning about the outlook for interest rates and inflation. The MSCI Emerging Market Index of shares tumbled as much as 2.8 per cent on Friday.

Emerging-market assets are falling out of favour as expectations for tighter global monetary policy and a revival of inflation reduce the relative appeal of risk assets. This week's surge in US yields is reminding many of the taper tantrum, when the Federal Reserve's announcement that it would start winding back its quantitative-easing policy led to a spike in bond yields around the world.

"It appears the market is pricing in a taper tantrum whatever the Fed says," said Alvin T. Tan, head of Asia foreign-exchange strategy at RBC Capital Markets in Hong Kong. "Like in 2013, it is generally negative for EM FX," he said. —Bloomberg

## Soon, get discount on life premium paid in advance

SANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, FEB. 26

Life insurance policy-holders will soon be able to receive a discount if they pay the policy premium in advance. Also, from April onwards, those buying a personal accident cover would have the option to take a standardised cover, named Saral Suraksha Bima, from all general and health insurers.

Acting on representations from the industry, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai) has decided to permit life insurers to offer discounts on regular premiums paid in advance.

As per the draft guidelines issued by the regulator, the discount rate shall be equal to interest rates on savings bank accounts of State Bank of India as on April 1 of each financial year. Further, an addition of at least 100 bps shall be applicable for advance premiums received during the entire financial year.

"The industry has been undertaking several measures to ensure that renewal premiums are paid on time, as persistency is a key metric. By paying premiums in advance of three months or more, the policyholder can get a discount on premium that is higher than the interest rate on a savings account. While the customer will get a discount, we will have the renewal premiums already in the books. We will have to deploy our resources for reminding



**Irdai has asked general and health insurers to offer a standard personal accident insurance product with common coverage and policy wordings across the industry from April 1**

only those people who have not made advance payment," said Atri Chakraborty, chief operating officer, IndiaFirst Life Insurance. According to him, the discount will be calculated for the number of months the premium is paid ahead of the renewal date. Currently, around 10 to 12 per cent of the policyholders pay their renewal premiums ahead of the due date.

The regulator has, meanwhile, asked general and health insurers to offer a standard personal accident insurance product with common coverage and policy wordings across the industry from April 1, 2021. This product, Saral Suraksha Bima, will have the basic mandatory covers as

specified in Irdai guidelines and will be uniform across the market.

The insurer can determine the price according to the covers offered. The policy tenure of the standard product shall be one year. This policy would also be offered as a group product. Minimum entry age will be 18 years and maximum age shall be at least 70.

The base cover will have to provide a death benefit up to 100 per cent of the sum insured to the policyholder if the death occurs due to injury in an accident, or the person dies within 12 months from the date of accident. The insured will also get 100 per cent of the sum insured for permanent total disablement and 50 per cent for permanent partial disablement.

Hospitalisation expenses arising due to accident shall be indemnified up to 10 per cent of base sum insured. On death or permanent total disability of the insured person, a one-time educational grant of 10 per cent of the base sum insured, per child, should be paid to all dependent children.

## RBI report suggests issuing debt to mop up hot money

SUBHADIP SIRCAR &  
ASHUTOSH JOSHI  
FEB. 26

The Reserve Bank of India may consider issuing its own bonds to help soak up a deluge of foreign money into stocks that threatens financial stability, according to a report published by its researchers.

Current laws forbid the RBI from selling its own paper, and budgetary constraints could prevent the government from issuing so-called market stabilisation

scheme, or MSS, bonds that authorities have used in the past. That's made it harder for the central bank to navigate what's known as the Impossible Trinity, i.e. maintaining an independent monetary policy while also allowing free flows of capital and ensuring a stable currency.

"Sterilised intervention is an effective solution to managing the trilemma in India," the central bank said in its annual Report on Currency and Finance, published on

Friday.

"Enhancement of sterilisation capacity may be necessary to deal with possible surges in capital flows in the future," the report pointed out.

The RBI report recommended further strengthening foreign-exchange reserves, citing the swings in the rupee around the time of the global taper tantrum in 2013. India's stockpile is already close to \$600 billion and exceeds most standard metric requirements. —Bloomberg

## SBI readies MF arm for IPO

BAIJU KALESH &  
SUVASHREE GHOSH  
FEB. 26

State Bank of India, the country's largest lender, is preparing for its mutual fund joint venture for an initial public offering, according to people familiar with the matter.

SBI plans to ask investment banks for proposals after discussions with its board and shareholder Amundi Asset Management and kick off the process in the next few months, the people said. The lender could raise about \$1 billion from the offering, one of the people said, who asked not to be identified, as the informa-

tion is private.

SBI's mutual fund is now valued at about \$7 billion, another person said.

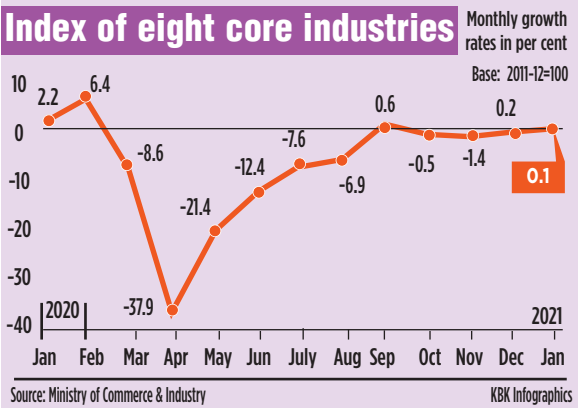
At \$1 billion, the first-time share sale could be India's biggest since the \$1.4 billion listing by SBI Cards & Payment Services Ltd in March, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. The SBI mutual fund business would also be the third such listing of its kind in the country, joining rivals UTI Asset Management Co and HDFC Asset Management Co.

SBI's plan to list the mutual fund arm is part of its strategy to extract more value from its units after divesting some of its stakes in its life insurance

and cards businesses last year.

SBI's mutual fund is the largest in India with Rs 5 lakh crore (\$68.4 billion) of assets under management, according to its website. The fund house posted a net income of Rs 498 crore for the April-December period, according to an investor presentation. SBI holds a 63 per cent stake in the mutual fund business, while Paris-based Amundi owns the rest.

Deliberations are at an early stage and details of the share sale could still change, the people said. A representative for SBI didn't immediately respond to requests for comment. —Bloomberg



## Sony to open PS 5 for storage upgrades

TAKASHI MOCHIZUKI  
FEB. 26

Sony Corp. is preparing to open up its PlayStation 5 for internal storage upgrades this summer, lifting a bottleneck that prevents gamers from having more than a few marquee games on their console at one time, people briefed on the plan said.

Adding support for additional drives will be enabled with a firmware update that also unlocks higher cooling-fan speeds to ensure the console doesn't overheat, the people said, asking not to be named because the plans are not yet public. The PlayStation 5 comes with a custom solid-state drive with around 667GB available for storing games,

apps and media—at a time when the latest Call of Duty game needs 133GB of installation space and most major titles take up at least 40GB each.

Sony's latest console has a customised architecture that accelerates loading and processing times, but makes it impractical to plug in an external hard drive, the typical way gamers add storage. Such a drive can only be used for older PS4 games. After the planned firmware upgrade, players need only take a plastic cover off the PS5 and attach a new storage unit to add space.

"We are working to enable M.2 SSD storage expansion for PlayStation 5. The timing has not been announced," a Sony spokesman said. —Bloomberg

## HUL aims to achieve 100% plastic waste collection in 2021

New Delhi, Feb. 26: Hindu-stan Unilever on Friday said it will achieve 100 per cent plastic waste collection from 2021 onwards as it will collect and process more plastic packaging waste than the plastic in packaging used by it.

The company will enable processing of over one lakh tonnes of post-consumer plastic waste

through collection from more than 100 towns across India, said HUL in a statement.

HUL has partnered with various organisations for the collection of plastic waste, including Saahas, Carpe, Recykal, Planet Savers, RaddiConnect, Geoycle and Ramky Enviro.

Through its partners and with support from municipal corporations, the com-



Sanjiv Mehta

pany has reached out to housing societies and commercial establishments to improve the collection of plastic waste.

The company is also working in partnership with the United Nations

Development Programme and the international organisation Xynteo.

Commenting on the development, HUL chairman and managing director Sanjiv Mehta said: "We believe that this is a collective responsibility, and each stakeholder needs to play an active role in managing plastic waste to fulfil the vision of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan." —PTI

## MOBILE | TO MOBILITY

## Firm in talks with carmakers to use their plants

## Battered Huawei plans foray into EVs

JULIE ZHU, YILEI SUN  
HONG KONG/BEIJING,  
FEB. 26

China's Huawei plans to make electric vehicles under its own brand and could launch some models this year, four sources said, as the world's largest telecommunications equipment maker, battered by US sanctions, explores a strategic shift.

Huawei Technologies Co Ltd is in talks with state-owned Changan Automobile and other automakers to use their car plants to make its electric vehicles (EVs), according to two of the people familiar with the matter.

Huawei is also in discus-

sions with Beijing-backed BAIC Group's BluePark New Energy Technology to manufacture its EVs, said a separate person with direct knowledge of the matter.

The plan heralds a potentially major shift in direction for Huawei after nearly two years of US sanctions that have cut its access to key supply chains, forcing it to sell a part of its smartphone business to keep the brand alive.

Huawei was placed on a trade blacklist by the Trump administration over national security concerns. Many industry executives see little chance that blocks on the sale of billions of dollars



of US technology and chips to the Chinese company, which has denied wrongdoing, will be reversed by his successor. A Huawei spokesman denied the company plans to design EVs or produce Huawei branded vehicles. "Huawei is not a car manufacturer. However through ICT (information and communications technology), we aim to be a digital car-oriented and new-added components

provider, enabling car OEMs (original equipment manufacturers) to build better vehicles."

Huawei has started internally designing the EVs and approaching suppliers at home, with the aim of officially launching the project as early as this year, the sources said. Richard Yu, head of Huawei's consumer business group who led the company to become one of the world's largest smartphone makers, will shift his focus to EVs, said one source. The EVs will target a mass-market segment, another source said.

All the sources declined to be named as the discussions are private. —Reuters

## INSTITUTIONAL INVESTMENTS IN REALTY SEEN RISING BY 14.6%

MICHAEL GONSALVES  
PUNE, FEB. 26

Investments in Indian real estate is expected to grow by 14.6 per cent to Rs 39,600 crore in 2021 from Rs 34,600 crore in 2020, as institutional investors continue to be bullish on domestic real estate asset classes such as offices, data centres and warehouses and are looking to deploy their existing dry powder, Colliers has said in its report.

In 2020, investments had dropped 23 per cent from 2019.

Between 2018 and 2020, an average annual supply of over 35 million square feet entered the top six Indian cities such as Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi NCR, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Pune, with the majority being snapped up by institutional investors.

Even though a similar level of supply is set to enter the market, some investment firms are increasingly looking towards developing their own greenfield office assets, the report said.

Investors remain bullish on the long-term prospects even as they target an internal rate of return of about 17-18 per cent.

"The investment climate in India is very buoyant with global investors' interest in real assets getting stronger," Piyush Gupta, managing director, Capital Markets & Investment Services (India) at Colliers, said.

Moreover, the resilience of the Indian market is also evident from continued good housing sales across various markets, the large institutional investments in commercial office and industrial parks, and the listing of two REITs in the past six months, he pointed out.



## SHORT TAKES

## Hima inducted as DSP in Assam

**Guwahati:** Star sprinter Hima Das was on Friday inducted as Deputy Superintendent of Assam Police in the presence of chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal and described the moment as a childhood dream coming true. Hima was handed the appointment letter by Sonowal, also a former Union Sports Minister, at a ceremony attended by the top functionaries of the state government as well as from the police department, including the Director General of police. "People here know and I am not going to say anything different. Since my early school days, I harboured a wish to become a police officer one day and my mother also wished that," Hima said. "I got everything due to sports, I will try to work for betterment of sports in the state and try to make Assam one of the best performing states in the country, like Haryana," Hima further added. — PTI

## Deepak stuns world champion

**New Delhi:** Asian silver-winner Deepak Kumar (52kg) on Friday stunned Olympic and world champion Shakhobiddin Zoirov of Uzbekistan to storm into the finals of the 72nd Strandja Memorial Boxing Tournament in Sofia, Bulgaria. Deepak clinched one of the most memorable wins of his career with a 4-1 win over more fancied Zoirov, who had claimed the 2019 world championship title beating India's Amit Panghal.

In the quarterfinals on Thursday, Deepak defeated Bulgaria's Darislav Vasilev 5-0. However, former youth world champion Jyoti Gulia (51kg) and Bhagyabati Kachari (75kg) bowed out of the women's competition. With their loss, India's challenge in the women's draw has come to an end without anyone managing to secure a medal. — PTI

## Charlotte to lead cricketers union

**London:** England great Charlotte Edwards has become the first female president of the Professional Cricketers' Association. An outstanding top-order batsman, Edwards scored over 10,000 runs in more than 300 matches during an international career that lasted from 1996 to 2016. Edwards, who succeeds Graham Gooch, another former England captain, was elected for an initial two-year term at Thursday's annual general meeting of the PCA, which represents all professional cricketers playing in England. "I'm hugely honoured to be given such a prestigious title in being the president of the PCA," said Edwards. Edwards was England captain when they won both limited-overs World Cups in 2009, while she remains the country's leading run-scorer in both women's one-day internationals and Twenty20s. — AFP

## Live on TV

## FOOTBALL

**English Premier League:** Manchester City vs West Ham United from 6 pm; West Brom vs Brighton from 8.30 pm; Leeds United vs Aston Villa from 11 pm; Newcastle United vs Wolverhampton Wanderers from 1.30 am (Sunday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

**Indian Super League:** Odisha vs East Bengal from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

**Italian League:** Spezia vs Parma from 7.30 pm; Bologna vs Lazio from 10.30 pm; Verona vs Juventus from 1.15 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2

## UFC

**Fight Night:** Dominick Reyes vs Jiri Prochazka from 6.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

Regd. No.  
TNENG/2010/35692

Printed & Published by  
**K. Sudhakar** on behalf of  
Deccan Chronicle Holdings  
Limited and Printed at  
Deccan Chronicle Press situated at  
No 2/22, Sengalipalayam Road,  
N.G.G.O Colony Post,  
Kurudampalayam Village,  
Coimbatore - 641 022. RNI  
Registration No: TNENG/2010/35692  
Ph No : 2231252, 253, 255, 257 & 358  
Editor: **KAUSHIK MITTER**

## SURESHOT SPINNER

## Match-winner Axar says confidence did trick

**Ahmedabad, Feb. 26:** It was a long wait for Axar Patel and it didn't help that everyone around him had just one question for the past three years — "Why aren't you in the Indian team?"

But Patel was unfazed as he knew, his time would come.

"I think it's all about confidence," said the 27-year-old spinner from Anand in Gujarat.

With his record 11 wickets in the day-night third Test against England, the left-arm spinner finally found his big moment in international cricket, seven years after he made his India debut in an ODI against Bangladesh.

Since that day, he has been in and out of the team with the spin all-rounder's spot firmly with Ravindra Jadeja.

In this series too, he made it because Jadeja was out injured. He hadn't been in the national team since 2018 and made his Test debut in the second game against England last week in Chennai.

"I have been out of the team for three years and at that time, I used to think about the areas of my game which need to be worked upon. So, I was working on my bowling and batting," he told Hardik Pandya in a *bcci.tv* interview, thoroughly enjoying his good time.

"When you are out of the team, many people, friends keep asking you 'why aren't you in the team despite doing well?' These things keep coming in the mind," he said.

"So, I told myself 'just wait for the right time and whenever I get an opportunity I will give my 100 per cent'," he added.

Captain Virat Kohli said England may have been "relieved" when Jadeja was injured.

"But then this guy comes in. Bowls it quicker and from a bigger height as well."

It is a tribute to his hard work, his accuracy," said Kohli.

"It is impossible to sweep him, impossible to defend him all day. If the wicket gives him anything he is just a lethal bowler," Virat added. — PTI



India's star spinner Axar Patel appeals for a wicket during the third Test in Ahmedabad.

## Rohit bats for batting intent

**Ahmedabad, Feb. 26:** Intent to score and not just survive was the key to flourish on the Motera pitch, asserted India opener Rohit Sharma who batted effortlessly on the "interesting but normal" pitch that was declared difficult and challenging by visiting England batsmen.

Rohit attributed his sublime first innings half-century to the positive intent that he displayed during the day-night third Test in which England got thrashed by 10 wickets inside two days on the spin-friendly pitch.

"When you are playing on a pitch like that, you need to have an intent and look to score runs as well. You can't just keep blocking," Rohit said during the virtual conference after the match on Thursday.

**When you are playing on a pitch like that, you need to have an intent and look to score runs as well. You can't just keep blocking. You just need to be slightly ahead at times and try and find ways to score runs.**

— **ROHIT SHARMA**  
India star batsman



England captain Joe Root and Zak Crawley had earlier described the track as challenging.

The senior opener scored India's only half-century of the game with the home side spinners accounting for 19 wickets. England batsmen were deceived by left-arm Axar Patel's straighter deliveries that skidded straight instead of turning. Rohit felt that during

his innings of 66, he was a step or two ahead of England bowlers.

"You just need to be slightly ahead at times and try and find ways to score runs. My intent was not just to survive but try and score runs as well, while respecting the good balls. That's all I tried to do."

"The pitch was an interesting one and odd ball was just coming in and

some were taking turns. On a track like this, you need to have a clear mindset, which I think I did until I played that sweep shot," Rohit added.

He felt that Patel's strategy of attacking the stumps paid off well. The spinner ended the game with 11 wickets in his kitty.

"Axar was simply brilliant," Rohit said, lauding the bowler who had big shoes to fill.

"Coming out from nowhere and performing is never easy. He was out injured, slightly down, came back and bowled very well in Chennai. He understands conditions well and how to vary the pace and what lines to bowl," Rohit added.

Coming wider off the crease was also another effective ploy used by Patel. — PTI

## YUSUF ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT FROM ALL FORMS OF CRICKET

**New Delhi, Feb. 26:** Out-of-favour India all-rounder Yusuf Pathan on Friday announced retirement from all forms of cricket, saying time has come "to put a full stop to this innings of my life."

The 38-year-old Pathan was part of the inaugural T20 World Cup-winning side in 2007 and also the one that triumphed in the 2011 ODI World Cup at home.

"The time has come today for me to put a full stop to this innings of my life. I officially announce retirement from all forms of the game," he said in a statement posted on *Twitter*.

"I thank my family, friends, fans, teams, coaches and the whole country wholeheartedly for all the support and love," he wrote.

Pathan, elder brother of former India seamer Irfan, played 57 ODIs and scored 810 runs at a strike-rate of 113.60 with two hundreds and three fifties. He also featured in 22 T20Is where he made 236 at a strike-rate of 146.58 and was also a part of Kolkata Knight Riders' triumphs in the IPL. "I still remember the day when I wore the India jersey for the first time. I didn't only wear



Yusuf Pathan

the jersey that day, but I took upon my family's, coach's, friends the whole country's and my own expectations on my shoulders as well," Pathan recalled.

Meanwhile, veteran Karnataka medium pacer R. Vinay Kumar, who also represented India and led his state team to successive Ranji Trophy titles, also announced his retirement from international and first-class cricket.

The 37-year-old Kumar played one Test, 31 ODIs and nine T20 Internationals for India, taking 49 wickets across the three formats.

— PTI

## Coach kills self after sex slur

**Lansing (USA), Feb. 26:** A former U.S. Olympics gymnastics coach with ties to disgraced sports doctor Larry Nassar killed himself, hours after being charged with turning his Michigan gym into a hub of human trafficking by coercing girls to train and then abusing them.

John Geddert faced 24 charges that could have carried years in prison had he been convicted. He was supposed to appear in an Eaton County court, near Lansing, but his body was found at a rest area along Interstate 96, according to state police.

"This is a tragic end to a tragic story for everyone involved," Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel said.

Nessel earlier announced that Geddert was charged with a bushel of crimes, including sexual assault, human trafficking and running a criminal enterprise. The charges were the latest fallout from the sexual abuse scandal involving Nassar, a former Michigan State University sports doctor now in prison.

Geddert, 63, wasn't arrested and transported to court. Rather, Nessel's office allowed him to show up on his own.

"We had no indication that Geddert intended to flee or hurt himself or others. We had been in contact with his attorney and were assured of his cooperation," Nessel spokeswoman Kelly Rossman-McKinney

**● US Olympics coach John Geddert faced 24 charges that could have carried years in prison had he been convicted. He was supposed to appear in an Eaton County court, near Lansing, but his body was found at a rest area along Interstate 96.**

said.

Calls seeking comment from attorney Chris Bergstrom weren't immediately returned.

Geddert was head coach of the 2012 U.S. women's Olympic gymnastics team, which won a gold medal. He was long associated with Nassar, who was the Olympic team's doctor and also treated injured gymnasts at Twistars, Geddert's Lansing-area gym. Among the charges, Geddert was accused of lying to investigators in 2016 when he denied ever hearing complaints about Nassar. But the bulk of the case against him involved his gym in Dimondale and how he treated the young athletes whose families paid to have them train under him.

The charges against Geddert had "very little to do" with Nassar, said Assistant Attorney General Danielle Hagaman-Clark. — AP



Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang of Arsenal celebrates after scoring his side's third goal against Benfica during their Europa League Round of 32 match at Georgios Karaiskakis stadium in Piraeus port near Athens on Thursday. Arsenal won the match 3-2. — AP

## Auba nets brace to beat Benfica

**Paris, Feb. 26:** Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang scored twice including a late winner as Arsenal qualified for the last 16 of the Europa League on Thursday with a 3-2 victory over Benfica in Greece, while Manchester United and Rangers cruised through to the next round.

The Gabon striker put Arsenal ahead at the Karaiskakis stadium in Piraeus in their home leg of a tie relocated due to Covid-19 travel restrictions between Portugal and the United Kingdom.

Diogo Goncalves levelled the contest with a magnificent free-kick and Rafa Silva gave Benfica a 2-1 lead on the night when he took advantage of an error from Dani Ceballos on the hour.

Kieran Tierney rifled in an equaliser and Aubameyang headed in the decisive goal from Bukayo Saka's cross on 87 minutes, earning the Gunners a 4-3 aggregate victory and saving them from an unusual away goals exit following a 1-1 draw in the first leg in Rome.

Leicester City, who are behind second-placed United in the Premier League only on goal difference, were knocked out after sliding to a 2-0 loss at

## THE RESULTS

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>Arsenal</b><br>(Aubameyang 21, 87, Tierney 67) | <b>3</b> |
| <b>Benfica</b><br>(Goncalves 43, Silva 61)        | <b>2</b> |
| <b>Manchester United</b><br>Real Sociedad         | <b>0</b> |
| <b>AC Milan</b><br>(Kessie 9-pen)                 | <b>1</b> |
| <b>Red Star Belgrade</b><br>(Ben Nabouhane 24)    | <b>1</b> |
| <b>Napoli</b><br>(Zielinski 3, Fabian Ruiz 59)    | <b>2</b> |
| <b>Granada</b><br>(Montoro 25)                    | <b>1</b> |
| <b>Slavia Prague</b><br>(L. Provod 49, Sima 79)   | <b>2</b> |
| <b>Leicester City</b>                             | <b>0</b> |

home to Czech champions Slavia Prague.

Lukas Provod fired Slavia in front just after half-time following a goalless draw in the first leg, and Senegalese teenager Abdallah Sima ensured the visitors extended their run in the competition.

Steven Gerrard's Rangers progressed following their 5-2 win over Belgian side Antwerp at Ibrox, with five different players on target for the Scottish league leaders. — AFP

## Navaneeth to meet Velavan in title clash

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
CHENNAI, FEB. 26

ISA trainee Navaneeth Prabhu who had ousted top seed Guhan Senthilkumar will take on Velavan Senthilkumar in the men's final of the state closed squash championship at the ISA courts on Saturday. In the women's final, No.1 seed Sunayna Kuruvilla will meet Aprajitha Balamurukan.

Navaneeth will also feature in the U-19 boys' summit clash where he will face Shreemann Raghavan. Navaneeth's sister Yaavnaa Saravanakumar has stormed into the U-13 final by beating Sahana Kalaivanan in straight games.

## RESULTS

(all semifinals)

**Men:** Navaneeth Prabhu bt R Kishore Arvind 11-5 11-8 11-8. Velavan Senthilkumar bt Vaarish Sawlani 11-2 11-1 11-2.

**Boys U-11:** Shrinith Subramanian Arun Subhas bt Jasper Franklin 11-13 11-3 11-3. Aryaan Prabhu bt Udhay 11-6 11-2 11-2.

**U-13:** Darshil Parasrampuriah bt Lakshmana Harri 11-4 11-7 9-11 11-6. S. Lokesh bt Shrinith Subramanian Arun Subhas 11-5 11-7 11-3.

**U-15:** KS Arihant bt Darshil

Parasrampuriah 11-2 11-1 11-4. Sandhesh Pr bt Aakash Kannan 11-6 12-10 7-11 11-3.

**U-17:** R. Sreekartikayan bt PR Sandhesh 11-1 6-11 12-10 11-9. Ashvin Ganesh bt Parthiv Yagnesh Natarajan 11-7 11-7 11-7.

**U-19:** Navaneeth Prabhu bt Adhil Mohammed Syed 11-8 11-3 11-3. Shreemann Raghavan bt Arihant KS 11-5 12-10 11-9.

**Women:** Sunayna Kuruvilla bt Abhisheka Shannon 11-7 11-2 11-5. Aparajitha Balamurukan bt Rathika Suthanthira Seelan 11-6 11-2 14-12.

**Girls U-11:** R. Priyal bt Nitiyasree Desappan 12-10 11-5 11-9. Diva Parasrampuriah bt Krsejal Mirra 15-13 11-6 5-11 11-4.

**U-13:** Ananya Narayanan bt Priya Dhrashini 8-11 11-4 11-4 11-3.

Yaavnaa Saravanakumar bt Sahana Kalaivanan 11-8 13-11 11-6.

**U-15:** Khushboo bt Yaavnaa Saravanakumar 11-3 11-4 11-3. Ananya Narayanan bt Riya Balaji 10-12 11-6 11-9 11-8.

**U-17:** Pooja Arthi bt Gitanjali Vasudevan 11-3 11-3 11-6. S Akshaya Sri bt Shameena Riaz 11-6 12-10 11-6.

**U-19:** Abhisheka Shannon bt Trina Iris 12-10 11-7 11-3. Pooja Arthi R bt Shameena Riaz 11-7 11-9 11-8.

## Aparajith, Kousik star in TN's win

**Indore, Feb. 26:** Tamil Nadu on Friday ended Jharkhand's three-match winning streak with a convincing 67-run win in a Group B match of the Vijay Hazare Trophy here. In other matches, Punjab chased down a target of 291 against Vidarbha for a four-wicket win, while Madhya Pradesh handed Andhra a 98-run defeat.

Jharkhand is on top of the standings with 12 points, followed by Punjab, Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Madhya

Pradesh with eight points. Vidarbha lies in last place with 4 points.

After winning the toss, Tamil Nadu posted a competitive 266 for 7, thanks to half-centuries from opener B Aparajith (57), J Kousik (55) and Shahrukh Khan (51) and some lusty hitting by R Sai Kishore (29 not out, 20 balls, 3X6) and M Mohammed (20, 9 balls, 3X6).

Tamil Nadu appeared to have squandered a good start provided by Aparajith and N Jagadeesan (30) and were

in a spot of bother at 131 for 5 in 34.4 overs.

However, Shahrukh (51, 47 balls, 3X4, 3X6) and Kousik (55, 40 balls, 7X4, 2X6) came to Tamil Nadu's rescue with a 50-run partnership for the sixth wicket.

Kousik then added 55 runs with Sai Kishore for the seventh wicket.

A quickfire partnership between Sai Kishore and Mohammed, who smacked three sixes propelled Tamil Nadu to a competitive score. In reply, Jharkhand suf-

fered an early blow when skipper Ishan Kishan (0) was dismissed off the first ball of the innings by Aparajith.

Despite handy knocks by Virat Singh (49) and Sumit Kumar (40), Jharkhand lost wickets at regular intervals to slip to 145 for 9 as the TN bowlers kept a leash on the scoring.

No.11 Rahul Shukla (42 not out, 25 balls, 3X4, 3X6) and Varun Aaron (18 not out) delayed the inevitable and made sure the team wasn't all out.

At Holkar Cricket Stadium, Prabhsimran Singh hammered 167 (140 balls, 13 fours, 9 sixes) to power Punjab to a four-wicket win over Vidarbha. — PTI

## BRIEF SCORES

**Tamil Nadu 266 for 7 in 50 overs (B Aparajith 57, J Kousik 55, Shahrukh Khan 51, Anukul Roy 3/41) beat Jharkhand 199 for 9 in 50 overs (Virat Singh 49, Rahul Shukla 42 not out, M Siddharth 3/33) by 67 runs.**