

# THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI FRIDAY 19 FEBRUARY 2021



## SPORT | 8

**Chris Morris becomes most expensive IPL buy, sold for ₹16.25 crores**

www.asianage.com

RNI No. 57290/94, Regd No: DL-SW-05/4189/15-17



## NATION | 3

**Congress threatens to stop Amitabh, Akshay Kumar movies, shoots**

## TABLOID | 16

**Vaani Kapoor will see three big films releasing on big screen this year**



Vol. 28 No. 4 | 16 PAGES | ₹5.00



**Jiya Rai (left), 12 year old autistic daughter of a Naval sailor Madan Rai, created history by swimming from Bandra-Worli Sea Link to Gateway of India, a distance of 36 Km in 8 hours and 40 minutes in Mumbai on Wednesday.** — PTI

## U'khand toll 60 as 2 more bodies found from Tapovan tunnel

**Tapovan:** Two more bodies were recovered on Thursday from a tunnel of the NTPC's flood-ravaged Tapovan-Vishnugad hydel project and one from Rainti as rescue operations continued for the 12th day to reach workers feared trapped inside after a flash flood in Uttarkhand's Chamoli district. The confirmed death toll in the Chamoli disaster that took place on February 7 has now mounted to 61 while 143 are still missing, police said. ■ More on Page 2

## Covid: Fresh curbs issued for Mumbai

**Mumbai:** Taking a serious note of rising coronavirus cases, the BMC has decided to implement Covid-19 regulations strictly across the city. People not wearing masks in public will be fined by the civic body, which has also decided to deploy marshals in local trains. ■ More on Page 3

## No 'external injury' on Unnao teens: Autopsy

**Unnao:** The autopsy of the two Dalit teenagers found dead in Unnao Wednesday revealed no external injury, Uttar Pradesh Director General of Police (DGP) H.C. Awasthi said Thursday evening. The two girls, Awasthi told the media, are suspected to have died of poisoning. ■ More on Page 3



I got this job because I have an extra qualification.... diploma in Cow Science!

## WEATHER

**Max:** 27°C  
**Min:** 13°C  
**RH:** 54%  
**Rain:** 10%

**Forecast:** Sunny

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Uttarayana  
**Tithi:** Magha Shuddha Saptami till 10.57 am  
**Star:** Kritika till 5.56 am (Saturday)  
**Variyam:** 4.25 pm to 6.13 pm  
**Durmuhurtam:** 9.02 am to 9.48 am; 12.53 pm to 1.39 pm  
**Rahukalam:** 10.30 am to 12 noon  
**SUNSET TODAY 6.14 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.55 AM**  
**MOONRISE TOMORROW 11.54 PM**  
**MOONSET TODAY 12.10 AM**

# Puducherry CM told to face floor test Monday

*Tamilisai takes charge as L-G; Prez rule not ruled out*

**B. VIJAYALAKSHMI and D. SEKAR with agency inputs**  
CHENNAI/PUDUCHERRY, FEB. 18

Puducherry's new lieutenant-governor Tamilisai Soundararajan directed the ruling Congress-DMK alliance on Thursday to prove its majority on the floor of the Assembly before 5 pm on February 22. The strength of the ruling and Opposition camps stand at 14 each in the 33-member UT House, including three nominated BJP legislators, which now has an effective strength of only 28. While Speaker V.P. Sivakolundhu is likely to vote in favour of the ruling Congress and save the V. Narayanasamy government, it is speculated that the BJP may want to throw its hat into the ring. DMK may not upset its ally's appeal now, it is eyeing the Puducherry CM's chair on winning the polls. While both the ruling side and the Opposition know what their numbers are on paper, the fear of cross-voting during a trust vote looms large. The Opposition, led by former chief minister N. Rangasamy, and with 13 other MLAs, submitted a



Tamilisai Soundararajan

V. Narayanasamy

letter to the L-G saying the V. Narayansamy-led government had lost its majority due to the resignation of four Congress MLAs and the disqualification of another member. As Ms Soundararajan took over additional charge as Puducherry L-G on Thursday morning, she said she will function as a "people's governor" and act according to the Constitution. Ms Tamilisai directed the chief secretary and DGP to make the necessary arrangements for a trust vote. The L-G told Mr Narayanasamy that the Assembly will meet on Monday and be confined to a single agenda – namely, whether the government of the incumbent CM continues to enjoy the confidence

■ **Turn to Page 2**

Train services were affected in several states on Thursday as the farmers gathered near the railway tracks in parts of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka for the "rail roko" protest against the three controversial agricultural laws. Around 25 trains were either cancelled, short terminated or

## TRAINS HIT AS FARMERS BLOCK TRACKS



Members of various farmer organisations block a railway track during a four-hour 'rail roko' demonstration across the country, called by Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), as part of their agitation against Centre's farm reform laws in Sonapat district on Thursday. — PTI

**SANJAY KAW**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 18

rerouted as farmers held their protest. Saying they won't return home till the three laws were repealed, BKU leader Rakesh Tikait said the farmers should be ready to sacrifice their standing crops. He said the government should not think the movement against the laws will end as the farmers will go back to harvest their crop. "Even if you have to set your standing crops on

■ **Turn to Page 2**

## 'Metro Man' Sreedharan to join BJP, contest polls

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB. 18

The BJP in Kerala received a shot in the arm ahead of crucial Assembly polls with "Metro Man" E. Sreedharan announcing his decision to join the party. The 88-year-old legendary engineer is set to join the BJP during the party's "Vijay Yatra" which will be flagged off by Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath in Kasargod on Sunday. "I am joining the BJP with the belief that I will be able to do something for the state. I am not interested in becoming governor. "The LDF and UDF are not able to do anything for the development of the state. They are only going for confrontation with the Centre. Kerala lacks an investor-friendly environment," he told media persons. ■ More on Page 3



E. Sreedharan

## Setback for Chirag: 208 members quit LJP to join JD(U)

**NAYEAR AZAD**  
PATNA, FEB. 18

Chirag Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) suffered a jolt in Bihar as 208 of its members joined the ruling JD(U) on Thursday. Sources said that those who left the LJP were upset over the party's poor performance in the 2020 Assembly elections. The political crisis in the LJP comes at a time when Chirag Paswan has been trying to expand his party's base in Bihar. Many of those who joined the JD(U) were senior functionaries of the party, including several district heads. LJP leaders who joined the JD(U) on Thursday were led by senior leader Keshav Singh who was expelled from the LJP for revolting against Mr Paswan after the party's debacle in the Assembly elections. "Before Assembly elections, the party came out with a slogan, 'Bihar first, Bihar first', but after the demise of veteran leader Ram Vilas Paswan the focus shifted to 'Chirag first, Family first', Mr



Chirag Paswan

■ **THE POLITICAL** crisis in the LJP comes at a time when Chirag Paswan has been trying to expand his party's base in Bihar. Many of those who joined the JD(U) were senior functionaries of the party, including several district heads

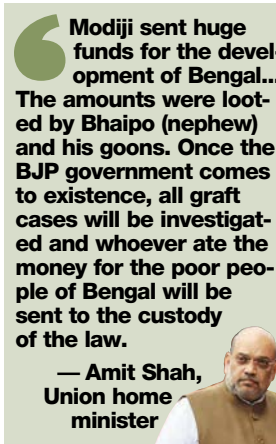
Keshav Singh said after joining JD(U) on Thursday. JD(U) president R.C.P. Singh who was also present at the occasion said, "All those who joined the JD(U) were top functionaries in LJP. Our party will benefit from their political experience". Meanwhile, Rameshwar Chaurasia, who left the BJP before 2020 Assembly elections and contested on

■ **Turn to Page 2**

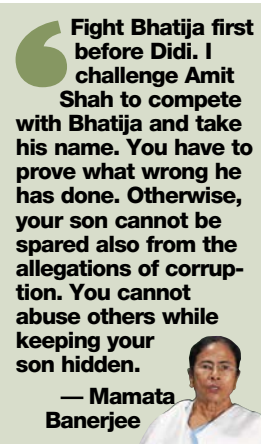
## Shah, Didi target 'nephew' and 'son' at Bengal rallies

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI**  
KOLKATA, FEB. 18

Union home minister Amit Shah and West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee were locked in a war of words while addressing two separate rallies in South 24 Parganas district on Thursday over the issue of the former's son and the latter's nephew. Mr Shah accused Ms Banerjee's nephew Abhishek Banerjee, who is an MP, of siphoning off the Central government's grant meant for the people saying that after the BJP comes to power in the state, it will put all culprits behind the bars. The chief minister hit back saying that his son will also not be spared for earning crores. Addressing a rally at Namkhana in South 24 Parganas, Mr Shah said, "When Prime Minister Narendra Modi sent relief for those affected by Cyclone Amphan, the TMC goons looted it. It was around Rs 3,500 crore which he had disbursed. Still nothing happened here. As soon as the BJP forms its government here, we will carry out a high-level probe into the Amphan fund misappropriation and send those, who ate away your pie, to jail." Training his guns on the chief minister and her nephew Abhishek Banerjee, Mr Shah claimed, "Modiji also sent huge funds for the development of Bengal. But the amounts went to the syndicates of Didi. The Congress, when in power at the Centre, had released Rs 1.32 lakh crore to the state over five years. But the Narendra Modi government sent here Rs 3.59 lakh crore in five years. The amounts were looted by Bhaipo (nephew) and his goons. Once the BJP government



Amit Shah, Union home minister



Mamata Banerjee

comes to existence, all graft cases will be investigated and whoever ate the money for the poor people of Bengal will be sent to the custody of the law." Warning the goons of the TMC at the launch of the fifth and final Rath Yatra of the BJP, he said, "I ask the goons, patronised by Mamata, go into hiding wherever you want to. You will be found out in patal and put you behind bars." Ms Banerjee hit back and targeted Mr Shah's son, Jay Shah. "Every day you (Shah) raise 'nephew' issue. Your son is earning crores of money. How?

■ **Turn to Page 2**

## 'Police leaked private WhatsApp chat': Activist Disha tells court

**BHASKAR HARI SHARMA with agency inputs**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 18



Disha Ravi

Climate activist Disha Ravi on Thursday petitioned the Delhi high court to stop the police from leaking "any investigation material" accessed as part of the probe to the media, asserting that the police had pre-judged her guilt and had been putting out a "biased and defamatory narrative" about her. Solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for Delhi Police, told Justice Prathiba M. Singh that it has not leaked any material to the media in relation to its probe against the 21-year-old for her alleged involvement in the ongoing farmers'

protest on the basis of a "toolkit". The court was hearing Ms Ravi's plea to restrain police from leaking to the media alleged contents of her chats. She has also sought action against television channels News 18, India Today and Times Now for publishing contents of her alleged private chats with third parties, thereby violating Cable TV Network rules, and directions to restrain all private satellite TV channels from further disseminating any alleged private WhatsApp messages or conversations till the trial ends. The court issued notices to the News Broadcasting Standards Authority and a few media houses. She has claimed her arrest in Bengaluru on February 13 by a Cyber Cell team of Delhi Police was "wholly unlawful and without basis". "Surprisingly, there was significant media coverage of the petitioner's remand hearing and the media seemed to have more knowledge about the time and venue of the petitioner's production than her lawyers," her petition said. ■ **More on Page 2**

## 'It will only confirm concerns about behaviour of tech giants' FB's news blackout arrogant: Oz PM

**Sydney, Feb. 18:** Australians woke to empty Facebook news feeds on Thursday, after the social media giant blocked all media content in a surprise escalation of a dispute with the government, which could be a test for the future of online publishing worldwide. The move was swiftly criticised by news producers, politicians and human rights advocates, particularly as it became clear that official health pages, emergency safety warnings and welfare networks had all been scrubbed from the site along with news. "Facebook's actions to unfriend Australia today, cutting off essential information services on health and emergency services, were as arrogant as they were disappointing," Prime Minister Scott Morrison wrote on his own Facebook page, using the vernacular for cutting ties with another person on the site. "These actions will only confirm the concerns that an increasing number of countries are expressing about the behaviour of Big Tech



Toni Morrison

companies who think they are bigger than governments and that the rules should not apply to them." A planned Australian law would require Facebook and Google to reach commercial deals with news outlets whose links drive traffic to their platforms, or be subjected to forced arbitration to agree a price. Facebook said it had blocked media content in Australia because the draft law did not provide clear guidance on the definition of news content. Although Australia is a small market, the law is being closely watched around the world by regulators, and could be a test case for bigger global push to force internet giants to share some of their revenue with content providers. Publishers say platforms such as Google and Facebook have been hoarding the vast bulk of new revenue as media shift online, even as newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations and websites are forced to shut newsrooms around the world. — Reuters ■ **More on Page 6**



## IN BRIEF

**Delhi records 130 fresh Covid cases**

**New Delhi:** With 130 fresh cases, Delhi's Covid tally climbed to 6,37,445 on Thursday, even as the positivity rate stood at 0.22 per cent, according to authorities. Two fatalities were registered on Thursday, taking the death toll due to the viral disease to 10,896 in the city, according to the latest health bulletin issued by the Delhi government. No death due to Covid was recorded in the national capital on Wednesday, the third time the single-day fatality count was nil in February, while 134 cases were registered. On February 9, no fatality from Covid was registered in Delhi, the first time this month and after a gap of nearly nine months. No Covid death was recorded on Saturday as well, the second time in February when the single-day fatality count was nil.

**Jaishankar to visit Maldives, Mauritius**

**New Delhi:** External affairs minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar will undertake a visit to tiny south-western maritime neighbour the Maldives on February 20-21 and the small Indian Ocean nation of Mauritius on 22-23 February, New Delhi said on Thursday. In a statement, the MEA said, "During his visit to the Maldives, EAM will call-on H.E. President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih and have substantive discussions with the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Defence, Finance, Economic Development and Planning & Infrastructure. The EAM will also call-on Speaker Mohamed Nasheed and meet with other political leaders. During this visit, EAM will review the entire gamut of our bilateral ties as well as progress of ongoing bilateral projects and hold discussions on the ongoing Covid situation, including India's continued assistance to the Maldives for its post-Covid economic recovery."

**Setback for Chirag: 208 members quit LJP to join JD(U)**

■ **Continued from Page 1** LJP to join JD(U)LJP ticket, has also sent his resignation to Mr Paswan. Sources said that he is likely to return to the BJP. Mr Paswan's party LJP had contested Bihar polls against Nitish Kumar after breaking away from the NDA. Though it won only one seat during the Assembly polls, assessment done by the JD(U) suggests that the votes cast for LJP caused heavy damage to it. The BJP had emerged as the largest party in the NDA with 74 seats while its partner JD(U) won 43 seats. Two NDA partners, Hindustani Awam Morcha and Vikasheel Insaan Party, managed to win four seats each during the polls. The JD(U) has been holding Chirag Paswan responsible for its low tally and has been accusing him of "cutting votes" on most of the seats where the party fielded its candidate. Sources said that the JD(U) leadership had urged the BJP to initiate action against Mr Paswan and his party for aggressively campaigning against Nitish Kumar and fielding candidates against JD(U)'s candidates.

■ Court was hearing Ravi's plea to restrain police from leaking info

**Toolkit case: Have not leaked anything to media, cops to HC**

**BHASKAR HARI SHARMA**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 18

The Delhi police, on Thursday, told the Delhi high court that it has not leaked any material to the media in relation to its probe in the FIR against climate activist Disha Ravi for her alleged involvement in sharing a toolkit backing the ongoing farmers' protest.

The court was hearing Ms Ravi's plea to restrain the police from leaking to the media any probe material in relation to the FIR lodged against her.

The submission was made before Justice Prathiba M. Singh by solicitor general Tushar Mehta appearing for the police.

Since there were no counsels representing the News Broadcasting Standards Authority (NBSA) and some of the media houses named in Ms Ravi's petition, the court issued notice to them and said it will hear the matter on Friday. The petition has also sought to restrain the media from publishing the



Police detain NSUI activists who were staging a protest against the arrest of climate activist Disha Ravi in New Delhi.

content or extract of any private chats, including those on WhatsApp, between her and third parties. Ms Ravi claimed that her arrest from Bengaluru on February 13 by a cyber cell team of the Delhi police was "wholly unlawful and without basis."

Her petition has alleged that investigative matters have been leaked to the media and the press briefings by the police are "pre-

judicial" and "grossly violative of her right to a fair trial and presumption of innocence."

It has also claimed that the "media houses have published one-sided defamatory, suggestive innuendos, and half truths about the petitioner."

The Delhi police, probing the "toolkit Google doc" backing the farmers' agitation shared by climate activist Greta Thunberg,

had arrested Ms Ravi while Mumbai lawyer Jacob and Pune engineer Shantanu Muluk have been granted pre-arrest bail by court.

A Delhi court had, on February 14, sent Ms Ravi to a five-day police custody after the agency said her custodial interrogation was required to probe an alleged larger conspiracy against the government of India and to ascertain her alleged role relating to the Khalistan movement.

A 'toolkit' is a document created to explain any issue. It also provides information on what one needs to do to address the issue. This might include information about petitions and details about protests and mass movements.

The cyber cell had lodged an FIR against "pro-Khalistan" creators of the toolkit for waging a "social, cultural, and economic war against the government of India." A case against unnamed persons was registered on charges of criminal conspiracy, sedition, and various other sections of the IPC.

**4,500 cartridges seized in Delhi, 6 men arrested**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 18

The special cell of the Delhi police has arrested six men and recovered 4,500 live cartridges, the largest haul this year, from their possession in North Delhi.

The police said that it has also seized two cars in which the accused used to transport cartridges for supply to criminals. It said that the first arrest of the syndicate member was made from the Burari area of the city on February 14.

The accused has been identified as Ramesh Kumar (46), a resident of Karnal in Haryana; Deepanshu Mishra (35), a resident of Etawah in Uttar Pradesh (UP); Amit Rao (33), a resident of Rewari in Haryana; Ikram (40), a resident of Panipat in Haryana; Akram (42), a resident of Muzaffarnagar in UP; and Manoj Kumar Chauhan (39), a resident of Saharanpur in UP.

According to DCP (Special Cell) Sanjeev Kumar Yadav, after receiving specific inputs on February 14, a police team laid a trap near Mukundpur flyover when at about 3.10 pm Ramesh Kumar arrived in his car. After a few minutes, Deepanshu Mishra also came to the spot in his car.

"The police caught them after a brief chase

● **INVESTIGATIONS REVEALED** that Ramesh had been working at Ambala gun house and earned ₹10,000 per month but owing his low income, he lured Amit (owner of Ambala Gun House) to sell cartridges illegally in the grey market so that they could earn a quick buck

and 4,000 illegal cartridges were recovered from the duo in their cars. On the instance of the accused, the main source of supply of this syndicate, Amit Rao, was also nabbed from Jaipur on February 16," said the DCP.

"Ikram was also nabbed by a police team from Panipat area while Akram was apprehended from Shamli Road in Karnal and 500 cartridges were recovered from his possession," said the deputy commissioner of police, adding that Chauhan was arrested from Panchkula.

"During interrogation they disclosed that they are part of an illegal cartridges supply syndicate. They further disclosed that they used to receive supply of cartridges from Ramesh Kumar illegally and supplied the same to various persons, including criminals of Haryana and UP," said the deputy commissioner of police.

**Many trains hit after farmers block tracks in several states**

■ **Continued from Page 1** for the unions' next call. "Keep your tractors filled with fuel and facing towards Delhi's direction. You can get a call to move at any time, that will be decided by the committee (of farmers unions)," he said.

Mr Tikait, who is now the face of the agitation, said after Haryana, they will hold panchayats in other parts of the nation, including West Bengal, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat. While earlier farmers had called a tractor rally in Delhi, the next time they will go to the national capital with their agricultural implements, he said.

Thursday's "rail roko" protest was announced by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), an umbrella body of farmers' unions spearheading the agitation at Delhi's borders for the past 85 days. The rail blockade was the third major protest by the farmers, after the Republic Day tractor rally and the "chakka jam" on February 6. While several parties,

including NCP, Congress and AAP, protested at Pune railway station, workers of Jan Adhikar Party (Loktantrik) turned up in large numbers at Patna Junction. Samajwadi legislators staged a protest outside the UP Assembly before the state budget session. Raising slogans against the BJP government, the SP MLAs sat before the statue of former PM and kisan leader Charan Singh, demanding that the new laws be repealed. A "kisan mahapanchayat" was also held in Rajasthan's Sri Ganganagar district. During the "rail roko", the farmers climbed on the locomotive of Gita Jayanti Express at Kurukshetra. The train was due to leave from there after 3 pm. There was commotion in Bengaluru as the police refused to allow the farmers to protest.

In Punjab, protesters sat on the tracks at many places on the Delhi-Ludhiana-Amritsar route. They also blocked the Jalandhar Cantt-Jammu rail track in

Jalandhar and squatted on tracks at Mullanpur, Dakhra and Jagraon on Ludhiana-Ferozepur route. The railway tracks on the Bathinda-Delhi, Delhi-Amritsar and Amritsar-Tarn Taran routes were also blocked. BKU (Ekta Ugrahan) general secretary Sukhdev Singh Kokrikalan said the railway tracks were blocked at 22 places in the state.

In Haryana, protesters squatted on the tracks in Ambala, Kurukshetra, Panipat, Panchkula, Rohtak, Sonapat, Hisar and Fatehabad. In Jind, the tracks were blocked near Barsola village. A large number of protesters, including women carrying the tri-colour in their hands, sat on the railway tracks at Yamunanagar.

In Sirsa too, farmers sat on the railway tracks. Carrying placards, some of which read "Kheti Bachao, Roti Bachao" in their hands, they raised slogans against the government and demanded the immediate repeal of the three farm laws.

**Shah, Didi target 'nephew', 'son'**

■ **Continued from Page 1** Your son will also not be spared."

Addressing a rally at Pailan, the TMC supremo said, "Fight Bhatija first before Didi. I challenge Amit Shah to compete with Bhatija and take his name. You have to prove what wrong he has done. Otherwise, your son (Jai Shah) cannot be spared also from the allegations of corruption. You cannot abuse others while keeping your son hidden. We will come to power with a havoc majority by

breaking our past records since 2011."

The Union home minister assured of a tight security arrangement for Assembly polls, adding, "I can guarantee that not even a single goon of the TMC will be seen on the road on polling days. You can cast your vote without any fear."

To woo voters with sops, Mr Shah announced that the BJP, after forming its government, would implement the seventh pay commission for state government employees,

more than 33 per cent reservation for women in state government jobs, a fishermen welfare scheme in line with the PM Kishan Samman Nidhi, a seafood processing hub, a cultural and tourist project at Gargasagar and zero casualty task force to tackle natural calamities including cyclones and storms in the state.

Actor Hiran Chatterjee, who was in the TMC, joined the BJP in presence of Mr Shah at his rally.

**Puducherry CM told to face floor test**

■ **Continued from Page 1** of the House. The voting will take place by a show of hands and the entire proceedings will be videographed, a release from the L-G's secretariat said.

Thursday's developments came days after yet another Congress MLA resigned, becoming the fourth to quit since last month, bringing down the Congress-DMK's

numbers to 14. Mr Narayanasamy earlier in the day attended Ms Soundararajan's swearing-in and also called on her later.

The present party position is: Congress (10, including Speaker), DMK three, All India NR Congress seven, AIADMK four, Bhartiya Janata Party three (all

nominated, with voting rights) and one Independent, who has supported the government all along.

Four Congress MLAs have resigned, and one member has been disqualified. The simple majority in the Assembly with the reduced strength is 15.

The elections are likely in April and the House's term ends on June 8.

**'Pollution claimed nearly 54K lives in city last year'**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 18

Air pollution caused by hazardous PM2.5 fine particulate matter led to the death of 54,000 people in Delhi last year where pollution levels remained almost six times above the prescribed WHO limits, according to a new study.

According to a Greenpeace Southeast Asia analysis of IQAir data, 1,800 deaths per million were estimated due to PM2.5 air pollution in Delhi. PM2.5 refers to fine particulate matter smaller than 2.5 micrometers in diameter. Exposure to PM2.5 is considered the most important environmental risk factor for deaths globally and was attributed to 4.2 million premature deaths in 2015, the study said.

The study noted that the damage is equally worrying in other Indian cities.

Noting that the air pollutant levels in Delhi remained almost six times above the prescribed WHO limits of 10 g/m3 annual mean, the study said the estimated air pollution-related economic losses were \$8.1 billion (₹58,895 crore), which amounts to

**Air 'very poor' in Ghaziabad, Noida, Faridabad for fourth day in a row**

**Noida (UP), Feb. 18:** The average air quality across Ghaziabad, Noida, Greater Noida and Faridabad remained "very poor" for the fourth day in a row, while it improved slightly to reach the "poor" zone in Gurgaon, data issued by a government agency on Thursday showed.

Pollutants PM 2.5 and PM 10 also remained in the air of the five immediate neighbours of Delhi, according to the air quality index (AQI) maintained by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

According to the index, an AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good", 51

and 100 "satisfactory", 101 and 200 "moderate", 201 and 300 "poor", 301 and 400 "very poor", and 401 and 500 "severe".

The average 24-hour AQI at 4 pm on Thursday was 325 in Ghaziabad, 315 in Noida, 336 in Greater Noida, 307 in Faridabad and 296 in Gurgaon, according to CPCB's Sameer app. On Wednesday, it was 328 in Ghaziabad, 322 in Noida, 337 in Greater Noida, 307 in Faridabad and 316 in Gurgaon. On Tuesday, it was 356 in Ghaziabad, 335 in Noida, 375 in Greater Noida, 310 in Faridabad and 302 in Gurgaon. — PTI

accessible transport systems," the study said.

Globally, approximate 1,60,000 deaths have been attributed to PM2.5 air pollution in the five most populous cities of Delhi (30 million), Mexico City (22 million), Sao Paulo (22 million), Shanghai (26 million), and Tokyo (37 million), it said.

**U'khand disaster: 2 more bodies recovered from Tapovan tunnel**

**Tapovan, Feb. 18:** Two more bodies were recovered on Thursday from a tunnel of the NTPC's flood-ravaged Tapovan-Vishnugad hydel project and one from Raini as rescue operations continued for the 12th day to reach workers feared trapped inside after a flash flood in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district.

The confirmed death toll in the Chamoli disaster that took place on February 7 has now mounted to 61 while 143 are still missing, police said.

Thirteen workers have so far been pulled out of the sludge-choked tunnel at Tapovan where a large number of people were at work when the tragedy occurred following a flash flood in Rishiganga.

One human limb was also recovered from the tunnel on Thursday, taking the total number of human body parts recovered from different parts of the affected areas to 27. The glacial burst had triggered a flash flood which had demolished a 13.2 MW hydel project along the river besides causing extensive damage to the NTPC's Tapovan-Vishnugad hydel project along Dhauliganga.

Search operation at the tunnel was resumed on Wednesday after hours of interruption caused by water which had entered making it difficult to remove slush.

— PTI

**Quad mantris meet virtually**

■ **Continued from Page 1** "rules-based order" in the Indo-Pacific region.

Instead, the US state department said that the four ministers "discussed countering disinformation, counterterrorism, maritime security, the urgent need to restore the democratically elected government in Burma (Myanmar) and the priority of strengthening democratic resilience in the broader region."

New Delhi, meanwhile, said in a separate statement that the recent developments in Myanmar (where a military coup took place earlier this month) was discussed at the meeting, with India reiterating the "upholding of rule of law and the democratic transition." The meeting was attended by US secretary of state Antony Blinken, external affairs minister S. Jaishankar, Australian foreign minister Marise Payne and Japanese foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi, where a "productive exchange of views on regional issues" took place, New Delhi said. The four Quad nations

"emphasised the commitment to upholding a rules-based international order underpinned by respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, rule of law, transparency, freedom of navigation in international seas and peaceful resolution of disputes", the New Delhi statement added, in what is seen by observers as the usual veiled indication towards China. Highlighting their "shared attributes as political democracies, market economies and pluralistic societies", the four Quad nations "reiterated their common vision for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, with clear support for Asean cohesion and centrality" and "noted that the Indo-Pacific concept gathered growing international support, including in Europe". New Delhi added, "The US state department said: "The ministers discussed Quadrilateral cooperation on the Covid-19 response and recovery and climate change and committed to working together to address these global challenges."



## SHORT TAKES

### CONG THREATENS TO STOP AMITABH, AKSHAY SHOOT

**BHAGWAN PARAB**  
MUMBAI, FEB. 18

The Maharashtra Congress on Thursday threatened to stall the movies of film stars Amitabh Bachchan and Akshay Kumar accusing them of not raising a voice against the spiralling prices of petrol and diesel.

State Congress chief Nana Patole alleged that these stars are acting on the directives of the BJP. "Several celebrities including Amitabh Bachchan and Akshay Kumar, through their tweets, had earlier criticised the fuel price rise when the Congress-led UPA Government was in power. However, they have now kept mum despite the huge rise in fuel prices. Why are they silent now on the rising petrol and diesel prices?" he asked.

Mr Patole on Thursday flagged off the bullock cart and tractor rally organised by the Congress at Bhandara to support the farmers, who are protesting at Delhi against the Centre's new farm bills.

"Just like they criticised the UPA Government, these celebrities are now expected to raise a voice against the policies of the Modi Government. Instead they are quiet now as they have become a puppet of the BJP. They did not speak up when the farmer's protests were vilified by the BJP's IT cell, but they took a stand against the farmers," he said.

If these celebrities do not take a stand now on the injustice meted out by the Modi government, we will not let any films or shootings of Amitabh Bachchan or Akshay Kumar in Maharashtra, the Congress leader said.

## I-T RAIDS MP CONGRESS MLA'S HOUSE

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
BHOPAL, FEB. 18

Income Tax sleuths on Thursday conducted raids at residences and business establishments of Congress MLA Nilay Daga over suspicion of tax evasion. He is the first sitting MLA in Madhya Pradesh to be on I-T radar for alleged tax evasion.

The raids were conducted on the lawmaker's properties at 20 places in five cities, Betul and Satna in Madhya Pradesh, Mumbai and Sholapur in Maharashtra and Kolkata, simultaneously, a senior IT officer said here.

"The I-T raids may continue for three days," Rajendra Singh Chouhan, an officer in the I-T department here told the media.

The I-T raids were conducted at his residence and edible oil factory in Betul, rice and oil mills in Satna and various business establishments in other cities in the country, sources said.

The legislator who represented Betul Assembly constituency is considered close to former chief minister and Congress veteran Digvijay Singh. His father was also a Congress MLA.

He was the only Congress leader in MP who supported construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya and was actively involved in mobilisation of funds for the purpose.

Meanwhile, a large crowd of supporters of the lawmaker's gathered before his residence in Betul as a show of solidarity to him.

## 3rd SUICIDE BID OUTSIDE ODISHA HOUSE IN A WEEK

**AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO**  
BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 18

A woman along with his son hailing from Jagatsinghpur district on Thursday attempted suicide in front of Jayadev Bhawan near Odisha Legislative Assembly by pouring kerosene on them.

The mother-son duo was whisked away by the security officials before they lit the matchstick.

The police did not reveal why the woman and her son wanted to take the extreme step.

Following the incident, the police tightened the security around the Assembly and restricted vehicular movements in the vicinity.

On Wednesday evening, a man belonging to Hanspal in Bhubaneswar had also attempted self-immolation in front of the Assembly before being overpowered by the security forces. He resorted to such an extreme step alleging that Mancheswar police turned mute to his complaint.



Locals stage a protest after bodies of two minor Dalit girls were found in a field and another in critical condition on Wednesday evening, near Baburaha village in Unnao district on Thursday. — PTI

# No injury marks on Unnao victims' bodies, says DGP

**Congress targets UP govt over death of two teenage girls in Unnao**

**Unnao (UP), Feb. 18:** There were no injury marks on the bodies of the two teenage girls found dead in Unnao and the cause of their death could not be immediately ascertained in the post-mortem, Uttar Pradesh Police chief Hitesh Chandra Awasthi said on Thursday.

The third girl, admitted in a critical condition to a Kanpur hospital, was being treated for suspected poisoning and is presently on ventilator, sources in the healthcare facility said.

A police officer also rejected suggestions that the hands of the girls were tied, citing the absence of any injury marks.

Viscera samples the two victims have been preserved for further examination, Awasthi said.

The Opposition slammed the government over law and order, and demanded a high-level inquiry, while Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath took a serious note of the incident and sought a detailed report from the director general of police (DGP).

The three girls, aged 15, 14 and 16, were found in a field at Baburaha village in Asoha - around 36 km south of Lucknow - on Wednesday evening by the villagers when they did not return after leaving their house to take fodder for cattle, police had said.

The villagers rushed the teenagers, who are related, to a hospital, where two of them were declared brought dead. The other girl was rushed to the Unnao hospital and later referred to a Kanpur healthcare facility, according to police.

The DGP said six police teams had been constituted and senior officials were supervising the probe.

"The post-mortem of the

## SC closes proceedings to probe larger conspiracy in Gogoi case

**PARMOD KUMAR**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 18

The Supreme Court on Thursday brought the curtains down on its suo motu proceedings to investigate the alleged larger conspiracy behind the allegation of sexual harassment against former Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi. Without giving details, it added that the possibility of a larger conspiracy cannot be ruled out.

"Two years have passed and the possibility of recovery of electronic evidence now is unlikely. Three-member committee headed by the CJI S.A. Bobde has already submitted a report. Suo motu case is closed and proceedings are disposed off. There is no requirement to keep the case going on," the court said in its order closing the case. The order was passed by a bench comprising Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul, Justice A.S. Bopanna and Justice V. Ramasubramanian.

The court added that the one-man committee headed by former judge Justice A.K. Patnaik has not ruled out the possibil-

ity of a conspiracy against former CJI Gogoi. In 2019, the top court had, in a suo motu matter it said was of "great public importance touching upon the independence of judiciary", initiated proceedings and set-up a one-man committee to inquire into the claims of wider conspiracy behind the allegation of sexual harassment against former CJI Gogoi.

The three-judge bench comprising Justice Arin Mishra (since retired), Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman and Justice Deepak Gupta (also retired), had referred to a letter by the director of



Ranjan Gogoi

Intelligence Bureau (IB) which said that some conspiracy might have been hatched because of the tough decisions taken by Justice Gogoi, including the preparation of National Citizens Register in Assam and streamlining the court registry.

However, the top court's order on setting up the Justice A.K. Patnaik Committee had said that it will not inquire into the "alleged misbehaviour" involving former CJI Gogoi.

Referring to Justice Patnaik's report, the court said on Thursday, "The veracity of the allegations levelled by lawyer Utsav Singh Bains could not be verified completely due to the limited access of records and other collaborative material."

A three-member committee headed by Justice Sharad A. Bobde (present Chief Justice) and comprising Justices Indu Malhotra and Indira Banerjee that inquired into the allegation of sexual misconduct gave a clean chit to former CJI Gogoi. The report of the committee was never made public.

on government expenses, according to a spokesperson. Earlier, Unnao Superintendent of Police Anand Kulkarni said there was a contradiction in the statements of the mother and brother of the girls. He added that the brother had said the girls were tied with a stole, while her mother said on

ing help of forensic experts and looking into all possibilities." A medical bulletin issued by the Kanpur hospital treating the third girl has noted it was a suspected case of poisoning, the officer said.

Adityanath has directed officials to ensure proper treatment of the teenager

Thursday that it was around her neck.

"Our investigation has found that bodies had no marks on them either in the hands or legs, suggesting that they were not tied, the SP said.

Kulkarni said the family members who were the first ones to reach the spot were being questioned.

Asked if an FIR had been lodged, the SP said the matter was being investigated and action would be taken on the basis of the post mortem report, which was conducted by a panel of three doctors and videographed.

On speculation about it being a case of honour killing, the officer said all aspects would be included in the probe, adding that it would not be right to say anything on it at the moment.

Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra hit out at the state government over the issue of women safety.

"The UP government is not only crushing Dalit society, but also the honour and human rights of women," Rahul Gandhi tweeted. "But they should remember that I and the entire Congress party will stand as the voice of victims and will endeavour to get them justice."

He also used the hashtag "Save Unnao\_Ki\_Beti" (daughter of Unnao) with his tweet.

Priyanka Gandhi demanded that the third girl be shifted to Delhi for better medical treatment and asked why her family had been detained.

In a Facebook post, she said: "The Unnao incident is heart-wrenching. Hearing out the family and providing immediate medical help to the third victim is very important for investigation and justice."

# Drive against encroachments frees 3K acres

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY**  
BHOPAL, FEB. 18

In the biggest ever anti-encroachment drive in Madhya Pradesh, around 3,000 acres worth hundreds of crores have been freed in Indore.

The drive undertaken jointly by the local administration and police on Thursday led to recovery of the encroached land from land sharks in the city, a senior officer of Indore district said.

The lands were in the illegal possession of the land mafias in Indore for around two decades. Twelve people were booked in this connection. An official probe has unearthed the modus operandi of the land-sharks to grab government and private lands by taking recourse to forgery, sources said.

The land mafia formed housing societies to create land banks and then sold the same plots to several people by using fake documents, the probe has found.

"We have received complaints against 128 out of total 858 housing societies in Indore alleging land grabbing by them", Mr Singh said.

Indore which has earned the sobriquet of 'mini-Mumbai' for its proximity to Mumbai and hence the city has attracted real estate barons from Mumbai and other big cities in the country to invest in the sector, leading to proliferation of land sharks there.

Police suspected a strong presence of Mumbai underworld also in the real estate sector in Indore.

"We have received reports that several Mumbai underworld dons have made huge investments in the real estate sector in Indore, one of the key financial hubs of India, by proxy, leading to growth of land grabbing cases by leaps and bounds in recent times.

"A probe was on into it", a senior police officer of Indore told this newspaper requesting anonymity.

# Sreedharan: Will join BJP soon

**GILVESTER ASSARY**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB. 18

The BJP in Kerala received a shot in the arm ahead of crucial Assembly polls with 'Metro Man' E Sreedharan announcing his decision to join the party.

The 88-year-old legendary engineer is set to join the BJP during the party's Vijay Yatra which will be flagged off by Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath in Kasargod on Sunday.

"I am joining the BJP with the belief that I will be able to do something for the state. I am not interested in becoming Governor. The LDF and UDF are not able to do anything for the development of the state. They are only going for confrontation with the Centre. Kerala lacks an investor-friendly environment," he told media persons.

"I have a good name in Kerala. I enjoy the goodwill of people. If a person like me joins BJP more people will get attracted and join the party," he said. Notwithstanding the fact that leaders of his age in BJP are now mainly confined to the "marg darshak mandal", the party is likely to make an exception for fielding him in the forthcoming Assembly polls.

The 'Metro Man' said the decision to join BJP was not taken hurriedly.

"For the past ten years I have been in Kerala. I viewed the state from close quarters. I find that most political parties are shying



E. Sreedharan

away from working for the state. Instead they are prompted by their party and organisational interests," he said.

The architect of Konkan Railway and Delhi Metro which changed the face of public transport in the country, played a major role in starting metro rail in Jaipur, Lucknow and Kochi subsequently. After retirement from Delhi metro in 2011, he has been confined to his native place Ponnani in Malappuram district.

Sreedharan says he has many plans for the development of the state. Though he worked closely with the LDF government on a couple of projects, the veteran feels that the left rule has not been up to the mark. He believes only the BJP can usher in the required development.

The metro man disclosed that he had discussed his ideas of development of Kerala with the state BJP leaders. Most of his ideas would be incorporated in the BJP manifesto for Kerala polls.

## INCREASE IN PERIODICITY OF KANPUR CENTRAL - NEW DELHI - KANPUR CENTRAL SUPERFAST SHATABDI SPECIAL

For the convenience of rail passengers, Railways have decided to increase the periodicity of train no. 02033/02034 Kanpur Central - New Delhi - Kanpur Central superfast shatabdi special as per the details given below:

**02033/02034 Kanpur Central - New Delhi - Kanpur Central Superfast Shatabdi Special (06 days in week)**

Train No. 02033	STATIONS	Train No. 02034
ARR. DEP.		ARR. DEP.
-- 06:00	Kanpur Central	20:50 --
07:19 07:21	Etawah	19:05 19:07
09:10 09:12	Aligarh	-- --
10:33 10:35	Ghaziabad	16:22 16:24
11:20 --	New Delhi	-- 15:50

**Days of Run :** - 02033 Ex. Kanpur Central & 02034 Ex. New Delhi everyday (except Sunday) from 01.03.2021 to till further advise. **Accommodation:** Executive Chair Car & AC Chair Car.

**Note: The above Special Train will have the reserved accommodation only.**

Note: All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., may be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

For any kind information such as detailed Time-Table and stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

RailMadad Helpline No. 139 Visit RailMadad website: [www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in](http://www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in) & Download Railmadad app.

Please join us on **NORTHERN RAILWAY** Visit us at: [www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in](http://www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in)

**SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE**

### IMPORTANT NOTICE

It is notified for the information of rail passengers that Railways have decided to provide a new stoppage to following special trains at Chandlodiya Railway station from the dates shown against each. Further this is also notified that stoppage already provided to these trains at Ambliroad railway station will be withdrawn due to operational reasons. The Arrival/Departure time of these trains at Chandlodiya Station will be as under:-

Arrival/Departure Time Table at Chandlodiya station			
Train No. & Name	Arr.	Dep.	w.e.f.
04312 Bhuj - Bareilly Ala Hazrat Express Special	22:01	22:06	19.02.2021
04311 Bareilly - Bhuj Ala Hazrat Express Special	04:21	04:26	20.02.2021
09263 Porbandar - Delhi Sarai Rohilla Special	03:38	03:43	20.02.2021
09264 Delhi Sarai Rohilla - Porbandar Special	00:14	00:19	22.02.2021
09269 Porbandar - Muzaffarpur Jn. Special	03:38	03:43	19.02.2021
09270 Muzaffarpur Jn. - Porbandar Special	05:15	05:20	21.02.2021

**Note: All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., may be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.**

For any kind information such as detailed Time-Table and stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

369/2021

**SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE**



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51324.69	-0.73
Nifty 50	15119.00	-0.59
S&P 500*	3,895.88	-0.90
Dollar (₹)	72.64	0.16
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.98	0.02
Euro (₹)	87.67	0.15
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	45,867*320	0.69
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	64.47	0.20
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.132	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.311	0.012

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Piramal Group gets RBI nod for DHFL acquisition

Piramal Group on Thursday said the Reserve Bank is understood to have approved acquisition of debt-ridden DHFL by the group's subsidiary as part of resolution process. The committee of creditors (CoC) had approved a resolution plan submitted by a Piramal Group company, Piramal Capital and Housing Finance Limited, last month. DHFL was the first finance company to be referred to NCLT by the RBI under IBC.

Record 2.5 lakh FASTags sold in two days



After the payment of user fee through FASTags was made mandatory on NH toll plazas on Feb. 15, FASTag sales touched a new record of 2.5 lakh in the past two days. The rollout of cashless tolling has been positively received by the highway users, the National Highway Authority of India said. With nearly 60 lakh transactions, the per day toll collection through FASTag crossed the highest ever mark of Rs 95 crore.

Haldiram's partners Africa's Futurelife

Food and snack company Haldiram's has partnered with Africa's Futurelife to bring its nutritional food product range to India. The two companies announced the launch of a range of four products—Smart Foods, Smart Oats and Ancient Grains, Crunchy Granola and High Protein—in India. "Haldiram's is committed to being part of an increasing trend... with regards to better eating habits, the firm said.

Benelli rides in BS-VI Leoncino 500 bike at ₹4.6 L

Benelli, Italian superbike manufacturer, launched the all-new BS VI Leoncino 500 at a starting price of Rs 4,59,900 at pan-India showroom. The company has also started bookings on the model at a token amount of Rs 10,000. Benelli India is also offering the bike with '3-year unlimited kilometre warranty as standard'. The Benelli Leoncino gets a DOHC, twin-cylinder four-stroke and liquid-cooled 500cc engine.

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at BFL Infotech Ltd, C-9 Sector 3, Noida-201301. Published at 219, N D Tiwari Bhawan, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editor: T.Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 30074/09, Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

Govt treats power as separate sector, not in industry PM: Policy & regulatory setup for discoms soon

New Delhi, Feb. 18: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said the Centre is working to remove problems in the power distribution sector and a policy and regulatory framework for discoms is in the offing. Consumers should be able to choose their supplier according to performance like any other retail commodity, he said at a webinar for consultation towards effective implementation of the Union Budget provisions in the power and renewable energy sector, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said in a statement.

Modi said the government treats power as a separate sector and not as part of the industry sector while adding that the Centre's approach towards it has been holistic and guided by the four mantras of "reach, reinforce, reform and renewable energy".

He noted that the renewable energy capacity of the country has been enhanced by two-and-a-half times in the last six years and the solar energy capacity by 15 times.

"This year's budget has shown unprecedented commitment towards investment in infrastructure. This is



evident in mission hydrogen, domestic manufacturing of solar cells and massive capital infusion in the renewable energy sector," Modi said.

Referring to the performance-linked incentive (PLI) scheme, he said high-efficiency solar PV modules are now part of it and the government is committed to investing Rs 4,500 crore in this. Modi hoped for a massive response to the scheme.

Under the PLI scheme, integrated solar PV manufacturing plants with a capacity of 10000 MW will be operationalised with an estimated investment of Rs 14,000 crore.

This is likely to increase demand for locally produced materials such

as EVA, solar glass, backsheet and junction box.

"We want to see our companies to become global manufacturing champions, not just to fulfil local demands," the prime minister said.

The government has indicated its commitment of additional capital infusion worth Rs 1,000 crore in the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) to promote investments in the renewable energy sector. Similarly, the Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency (Ireda) will get additional investments worth Rs 1,500 crore. This will enable the SECI to invest in innovative projects worth Rs 17,000 crore, Modi said.

The investment in the Ireda will lead to additional loans of Rs 12,000 crore by the agency. This will be over and above the Ireda's current loan-giving capacity of Rs 27,000 crore, the statement noted.

Stakeholders and experts of the power sector, representatives of industries and associations, MDs of discoms, CEOs of state nodal agencies for renewable energy and consumer groups attended the webinar.

—PTI

McD ties executive pay to diversity

CRAYTON HARRISON & ANNE RILEY MOFFAT FEB. 18

McDonald's Corp said it is tying 15 per cent of executives' bonuses to meeting targets including diversity and inclusion and began disclosing data on the racial makeup of its workforce, major steps by one of the largest US companies to better reflect the population.

Among the information McDonald's is releasing for the first time is a full breakdown of US employees by race, ethnicity and gender—a victory for transparency advocates and investors increasingly pressing companies to do more to address the country's deeply rooted social inequality.

In addition to publicly releasing its worker demographics, the fast-food giant laid out a plan to increase the number of people of colour in its US management ranks and to achieve gender parity worldwide, according to a filing on Thursday.

"We cannot be complacent in our pursuit to better ourselves and our communities. Few brands in the world have our size and reach," McDonald's CEO Chris Kempczinski wrote in a memo to employees. "Our customers, franchisees, employees, suppliers, and shareholders expect us to make a difference." —Bloomberg

India ranks 71 in e-commerce

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 18

Indian ranks 71st globally in terms of usage of business-to-consumer (B2C) e-commerce, as per United Nations

Conference on Trade and Development's annual index for 2020. India has moved up four slots from the 2019 index, but is still placed lower than countries like Vietnam.

India has moved up from 75th position in the 2019 index to 71st in the latest index. However, it fares quite poor in several parameters of the index. Only 2.9 per cent of the total population in India aged 15 years and above used the internet to buy something online in a year's time, as per the latest data available with Unctad.

While 20 per cent of the internet users in India are e-commerce shoppers, only 34 per cent of the people in India use the internet. However, 80 per cent of the population has an account with a financial institution or a provider of mobile money services.

"The e-commerce divide remains huge," said Sharmika N. Sirimanne, director of Unctad's division that prepares the annual index. "Even among G20 countries, the extent to which people shop online ranges from 3 per cent in India to 87 per cent in the United Kingdom."

While Unctad has used data available up to 2019 for the 2020 index, the pandemic has improved many of the parameters



since then.

For the first time, Switzerland topped the Unctad B2C E-commerce Index, just ahead of the Netherlands. In 2019, as high as 97 per cent of the Swiss population used the internet. The only non-European economies among the top 10 are Singapore, ranked fourth, and Hong Kong, in the 10th position. The index scores 152 nations on their readiness for online shopping.

Countries are ranked on the basis of access to secure internet servers, reliability of postal services and infrastructure, and the portion of their population that uses the internet and has an account with a financial institution or provider of mobile money services.

Countries like Kazakhstan, Mongolia and Vietnam ranked higher than India in the global index. Even among the East, South and Southeast Asian economies, India was ranked 10th.

"The Covid-19 pandemic has made it more urgent to ensure the countries trailing behind are able to catch up and strengthen their e-trade readiness," Sirimanne said.

IT sector can double in 4-5 years: HCL Tech CEO

New Delhi, Feb. 18: Indian IT players are well-positioned to capture at least 20 per cent share of the \$1 trillion incremental spend on technology over the next four-five years, potentially doubling the size of the industry, HCL Technologies chief executive officer C. Vijayakumar said.

Infosys CEO Salil Parekh and Wipro CEO Thierry Delaporte expressed similar views at a Nasscom

event, saying the pandemic has accelerated digital adoption, and there is a need to continue upskilling people on latest technologies for driving the industry's growth.

"If you look at all the projections, there is at least a trillion dollars of incremental spend in the next four-five years. I think, as an industry, we should get at least a 20 per cent share, which means that \$200 bil-

lion growth over the next five years, could potentially double the industry," Vijayakumar said.

He said while Indian IT services companies have a fair share in about five-six countries, there are many countries where the industry is underrepresented.

By Nasscom estimates, Indian IT industry revenues are set to grow by 2.3 per cent to \$194 billion in FY21 and exports will be to

the tune of \$150 billion.

Parekh noted that localisation is a critical element of globalisation as clients, especially large global enterprises, are looking for delivery capabilities across multiple geographies.

Wipro's Delaporte said one of the challenges to growth could be around how much talent is available that can cater to the burgeoning demand for digital services. —PTI

Apple lobbies for more incentives

SANKALP PHARTIYAL FEB. 18

Apple Inc is angling to participate in a new scheme to boost India's exports of computer products, part of what government and industry sources say are plans to bring iPad tablet manufacturing to the South Asian country.

India launched a \$6.7-billion plan to boost smartphone exports last year, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi stepped up efforts to promote electronics manufacturing and create jobs. Apple, which has steadily

raised production of iPhones in India to lessen its dependence on Chinese manufacturing, took part in that scheme via its contract manufacturers.

Now the government is preparing to unveil another incentive to drive local manufacturing of IT products, including tablets, laptops and servers, three sources involved in the drafting of the plan said.

The new performance-linked incentive (PLI) scheme, which offers cash-back to manufacturers for exports, will have a budget of up to Rs 7,000 crore

(\$964.5 million) over five years, the sources said. It's expected to be launched by the end of February.

Apple, along with others, is lobbying for a bigger budgetary outlay of Rs 20,000 crore before that plan is finalised, as India doesn't yet have the scale or the supply chain for making IT products and competes with duty-free imports of tech products, two of the sources said.

Apple's push comes at a time its iPhone supplier Wistron is just restarting operations at a southern Indian plant after angry

workers went on a rampage last year. Apple is yet to take the Taiwan manufacturer off of probation.

New Delhi is also planning another PLI, at a budget of roughly Rs 5,000 crore over five years, to boost domestic manufacturing of wearable devices such as smartwatches, the sources said, adding the plan could be announced within two months.

Apple assembles a bulk of its iPads in China, but is fast diversifying production to markets such as India and Vietnam. —Reuters

Visa curbs on Chinese hurting assemblers

SHRUTI SRIVASTAVA & SUDHI RANJAN SEN FEB. 18

Geopolitical tensions between India and China are beginning to hurt some of Taiwan's biggest technology companies, including suppliers to Apple Inc and hindering New Delhi's incentive programme for electronics manufacturing.

India has been slow to issue visas to Chinese engineers, who are needed to help Taiwanese compa-

nies set up factories in India, people with knowledge of the matter said. India is also nudging companies to opt for the more difficult to obtain employment permits, they added.

The wrangling may delay Prime Minister Narendra Modi's plan to bolster India's manufacturing capacity and deter overseas investors, who invested \$30 billion in the six months to September, with the maximum foreign direct investment flowing in the computer

hardware and software sector. The companies are looking to India to diversify their supply chains. New Delhi has banned hundreds of Chinese apps and slowed approvals for Chinese investment in recent months.

Last year, iPhone assemblers—Foxconn Technology Group, Pegatron Corp, and Wistron Corp—along with many others pledged \$1.5 billion to set up mobile-phone plants in India after the government offered them special-

ly designed incentives. The move was also expected to shift supply lines to India from China.

Visas are an important resource to help expand domestic manufacturing and the "government has to balance its existing policies with the genuine and short-term requirements of technical manpower for setting up new factories," said Pankaj Mohindroo, chairman of the India Cellular and Electronics Association. —Bloomberg

GOLD, DORE FOR LOCAL USE TO ATTRACT CESS

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 18

The government has exempted gold and silver bars and dore imports meant for export purposes from the agriculture infrastructure and development cess (AIDC), introduced in the last Budget. However, gold and silver bars and dore imported for domestic use will continue to attract AIDC.

The finance ministry has issued a notification on the amendment made to the Finance Bill 2021 with regards to the AIDC exemption on gold/silver bars and dore for exporters.

In the Finance Bill 2021, AIDC of 2.5 per cent was levied on import of gold and silver bars and dore.

SPOTTING | MOOLAH

5Y Capital also made 866-fold gain from its bet on Xiaomi

Venture firm made \$30 bn on video app

LULU YILUN CHEN FEB. 18

5Y Capital, the venture firm that delivered a \$30 billion return on its investment in Chinese short-video app

Kuaishou, is seeking to raise another fund to bet on a new generation of startups, according to people familiar with the matter.

One of the earliest investors in Kuaishou, 5Y Capital is planning to raise at least \$1 billion, the people said, asking not to be named because the matter is private.

A representative for the company declined to

comment.

Before its Kuaishou windfall, 5Y Capital was best known for generating an 866-fold gain from its bet on smartphone maker Xiaomi Corp. Founded by Richard Liu and Ken Shi, 5Y Capital has also invested in Agora Inc, the Chinese company that is said to power the breakout social networking app

Clubhouse. Formerly known as Morningside Venture Capital, 5Y Capital was a spinoff from Hong Kong property mogul Ronnie Chan's Morningside Group. The fund renamed itself last year after a



Shanghai street known as Wu Yuan where it started operations about 13 years ago. It manages about \$3 billion of assets for sovereign wealth funds, family offices, university endowments and pensions, according to its

LinkedIn page.

Liu's early career included a stint in IT maintenance at a state-owned steel factory in the 1990s. He joined Morningside in 2000 after receiving a degree from China Europe International Business School.

Around 2011, one of Liu's investment managers spotted an app that focused on sharing GIFs, the precursor to Kuaishou. The fund invested 2 million yuan (\$310,000) for a 20 per cent stake the following year. 5Y Capital holds a 16.59 per cent stake in Kuaishou, which is now

worth about \$35 billion after the shares more than tripled since listing on the Hong Kong stock exchange earlier this month.

Other 5Y Capital investments include Musical.ly, which was sold to TikTok's owner, and Trip.com Group Ltd., which is now a \$23 billion company, according to 5Y Capital's website.

For new areas of growth, 5Y Capital is investing in cloud computing, artificial intelligence, semiconductors and bio-pharma companies, Liu said in a speech last year. —Bloomberg

CAIRN CEO MEETS FINANCE SECY OVER ARBITRATION

New Delhi, Feb. 18: Nearly two months after it won an international arbitration tribunal ruling against the Indian government levying taxes retrospectively, Britain's Cairn Energy Plc chief executive Simon Thomson on Thursday met finance ministry officials in the hope of quickly resolving the issue.

"We had a constructive dialogue and the dialogue is ongoing," Thomson told reporters after meeting finance secretary Ajay Bhushan Pandey, CBDT chairman P. C. Mody and other tax officials.

He refused to reveal what transpired at the meeting. "I can't comment more on the meeting." —PTI



# THE ASIAN AGE

19 FEBRUARY 2021

## Covid-19 variants: India not out of the woods yet

The detection of four cases of South African and one of Brazilian variants of SARS-CoV-2 in India and the data that came out of the third national Sero Survey conducted in December and January are a reminder that India cannot afford to let the guard down against the pandemic.

The arrival of the latest South African variant indicates that India has, at present, all the three variants: B.1.1.7 which was first found in the UK; B.1.351, which is now spreading in South Africa; and P.1, discovered in Brazil. Experts and scientists fear that all three have a tendency to spread faster than the original one. And the worst fear is that since they mutate, they could survive the vaccine, which the world has got after a wait for almost a year and which is thought to be the normaliser of human life on earth. Director of the Covid-19 Genomics UK consortium, the country's genetic surveillance programme, Sharon Peacock, is on record saying vaccines were so far effective against the variants in the United Kingdom, but "mutations could potentially undermine the shots". The British variant was likely "to sweep the world, in all probability", she has said.

The results of the Sero Survey conducted by the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) offers little reason to be complacent. As per the data, 21.5 per cent Indians have developed antibodies to the virus, indicating that the number of people exposed to the pandemic is not small. True, the number of new daily case-load is coming down sharply and so is the case with the number of deaths. Maharashtra and Kerala account for most of the new cases and

deaths. However, a disturbing piece of information coming out of the survey is that Kerala, which has half the national exposure to the pandemic, records the highest number of new case every day. There can be safer explanations but the worst one points to the lack of testing or reporting, especially in the rural areas in many states. The reports of fudged testing from Bihar do not inspire confidence about the testing data.

India's Covid-19 vaccination programme makes steady progress and as per the latest reports, 68.3 per cent of all healthcare workers and 28.2 per cent of all frontline workers have been administered the vaccine. Of the healthcare workers, 37.6 per cent got the second dose, too. While the feat is commendable, the government should stop patting on its back talking of the distance covered; it should take a realistic assessment of the enormity of the task on hand instead. The vast majority of Indians are still vulnerable to the pandemic's attack and the new variants are on the door, knocking. We are yet to start the programme for the 50 years plus category, the next most vulnerable group. The government must explore every avenue to speed up the programme. And at the same time, it must reinvigorate the awareness programme on Covid-appropriate behaviour — wearing of masks, use of sanitiser and social distancing — and advise caution on social gatherings, especially political and religious. No amount of caution is excessive while fighting a pandemic.

## A shining verdict

Wednesday's Delhi court ruling acquitting journalist Priya Ramani of defaming M.J. Akbar, a former newspaper editor and a former minister in the Narendra Modi government, goes far beyond just clearing her name. In upholding the dignity of a sexual harassment survivor, the court has not only shone the light on how such cases should be dealt with but also lays a solid foundation for the #MeToo movement in India. Women — and men too — should feel empowered to come out with the names of people who may have been guilty of sexually harassing them by dint of a superior position in the workplace. There is nothing so reprehensible as the dignity and honour of a woman being offended by those who wield the power of retaliation over subordinates. The court has shown great empathy for the victims while defining a virtual template for those who suffer sexual harassment to be able to name their tormentors regardless of whether such episodes took place decades ago, as indeed it did in this case revolving around a 1996 episode.

Speaking truth to power has been given a new definition in Priya Ramani's case as a battery of lawyers had laid out these charges of defamation on the premise that the reputation of their client had been damaged. The additional chief metropolitan magistrate was emphatic that the right of life and dignity of women as guaranteed in the Constitution rules supreme. As the #MeToo movement raged in the United States and elsewhere in the wake of Hollywood mogul Harry Weinstein being named in 2017 as a serial predator, the victimised women of India began finding their voice. A few of the perpetrators named may have taken to legal recourse not so much to defend their reputation as frightening those naming and shaming them in public. The great difficulty in pinning sexual harassment not amounting to rape as a criminal offence is that it takes place where there can be no witnesses. The verdict itself may be subject to appeal, but what the celebrated case has already achieved is to give every victim the chance to plead that truth is their witness as they name sexual predators.

### THE ASIAN AGE

T. VENKATRAM REDDY  
Editor in Chief

Printer & Publisher: K. SUBHAKAR

THE ASIAN AGE office is located at:

New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 23211124.

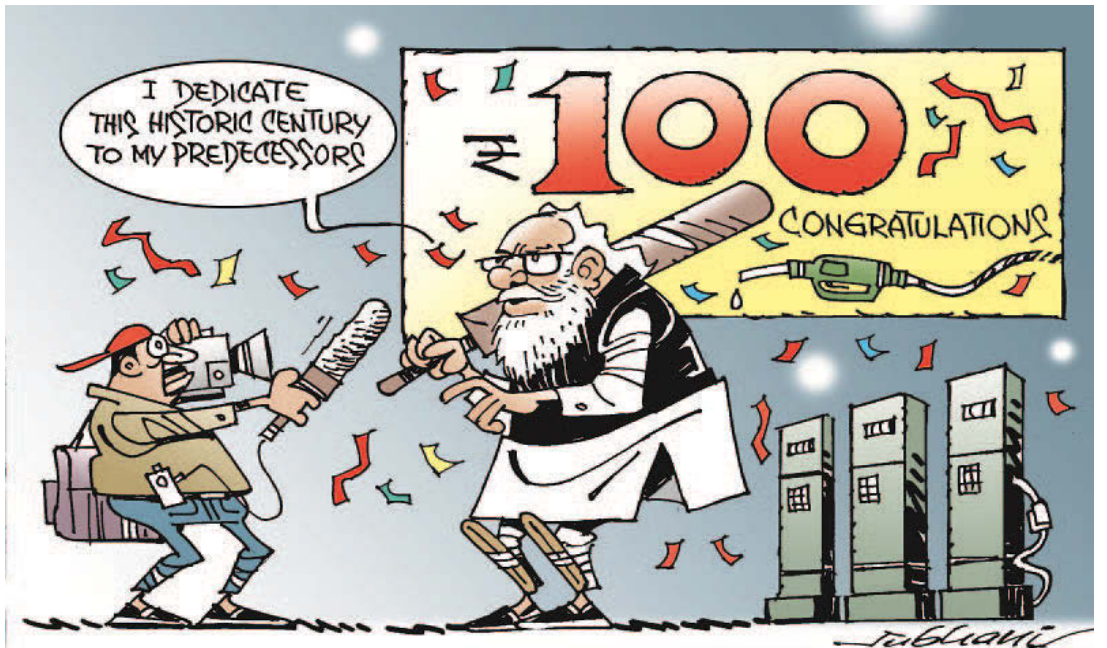
Published and Printed on behalf of and for

Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.

London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.

RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani



## Decoding the numbers: What the FM didn't say



Karan Thapar

As I See It

I know it's a cliché but first impressions can often become lasting ones. That's frequently true of the Budget. Most of us form an early impression from the initial coverage but few bother to examine the details, leave aside the small print. So what we're initially told remains what we believe, even if the full truth is quite different.

Now I'm not an economist but I have read and interviewed widely and my belief is that the experts' view is very different to what television told me on Budget night or the newspapers the next morning. Let me share with you some issues that could alter your perception of the Budget. No doubt they've been written and spoken about, but that was mainly to small and restricted audiences. So some of this could come as a surprise.

Let's start with what the finance minister said about the year ending March 31. She claimed government expenditure has increased by 28.4 per cent and she got a huge cheer for that. However, the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) points out ₹3 lakh crores of this is to write off past borrowings of the Food Corporation. No doubt that will increase government borrowing but it will not create demand. If you exclude this, government expenditure has only increased by 17 per cent. That's not "we have spent, we have spent", as the FM claimed.

Mahesh Vyas, CMIE's CEO, told me a 17 per cent hike is only marginally more than last year's 16 per cent. "That was a business-as-usual budget", he said. "It's hard to deny this year's is no dif-

ferent." Incidentally, in the earlier crisis year of 2008-09, government expenditure increased by 24 per cent.

Let's now come to the fiscal deficit. The FM was applauded when she announced it will be 9.5 per cent this year. That sounded like fiscal honesty. Industrialists on TV and the stock market were pleased. Three days later *Business Standard* revealed there are substantial off-budget items the fiscal deficit excluded. They amount to 0.64 per cent of GDP. No doubt that's less than the 0.72 per cent in 2019-20 and 0.86 per cent in 2018-19 but it's sizeable.

Let's now discuss a few of the big announcements for next year. First, health. The FM said expenditure would increase by 137 per cent to 2.23 lakh crores. Once again, she was cheered to the rafters. But the details show that 58.7 per cent is for drinking water, sanitation and vaccines. In fact, the actual outlay on health, if you compare last year's RE with this year's BE, has fallen by almost 10 per cent. The government document "Budget-at-a-Glance" doesn't really hide this. It says the Centre's actual outlay on health is 0.33 per cent of GDP this year compared to 0.31 per cent last year. First, that's hardly an increase. But, as Pronab Sen, our former chief statistician, told me, if you bear in mind GDP this year has shrunk, the 0.33 per cent figure represents a smaller sum.

The second big announcement was spending on infrastructure. The

When you dig into details and ponder over the implications, the Budget feels rather different to what you've heard

FM said Capex would increase by 34.5 per cent, and on top of that there is an additional ₹2 lakh crores for states. Once again, the MPs applauded. But, if you compare BE to BE, Capex has only increased by 26 per cent and compared to last year the allocation for states is marginally down. So, by carefully choosing her figures, the FM's speech created a rather different impression to the details in the supporting documents.

Pronab Sen raises some fundamental questions. "We don't know whether this is payment owed to contractors for earlier commissioned projects, some of which are stuck, or for new ones. If it's the former, then it's likely to have a supply side effect rather than a demand side impact." The former won't lift GDP so much as clear the government's debts. As yet we don't know which it is.

The third big announcement was that FDI in insurance would be raised to 74 per cent. If that actually happens — and it's a big if — it could certainly expand the insurance sector and provide funds for long-term investment. But the critical question is: are foreign insurance companies itching to increase their percentage? Many were reluctant to even go to 49 per cent when that was allowed. Jahangir Aziz, J.P. Morgan's top economist for emerging markets, tells me foreign insurers have grave concerns about India's regulations. If they remain unchanged, that will considerably dampen their interest.

The fourth big announcement was the government's decision to create an Asset Reconstruction Company to handle non-performing

assets (NPAs). Given the RBI's forecast that NPAs could increase to 13.5 per cent by September 2021 and to 16.2 per cent for public sector banks, this received another huge round of applause. But Pronab Sen notes an ARC would require public sector banks to take "haircuts" of up to 40 per cent or more. That, in turn, would affect their reserve position adversely. If that happens, it would force the government to take substantial steps to recapitalise banks. But none of that was mentioned in the Budget.

Finally, the announcement on privatising PSU banks and insurance companies and monetising assets like surplus land, airports, roads and highways, oil and gas pipelines. Once again, the stock markets loved this as did the experts in TV studios. But the devil lies in the unseen details. Pronab Sen notes civil servants will be very reluctant to sign-off on asset sales unless they're guaranteed protection against adverse inquiries by the investigating agencies. Such protection is not yet forthcoming.

That's even more true of the intention to strategically privatise banks and insurance companies. This means they are likely to be bought by corporates, and that could lead to political charges of crony capitalism. Dr Sen says the government will only go ahead if the Prime Minister is prepared to face political attacks and isn't deterred by fresh accusations of "Suit-Boot-ki-Sarkar".

Well, I think I've done enough to substantiate the cliché with which I began. When you dig into details and ponder over the implications, the Budget feels rather different to what you've heard. But I'm not criticising the FM for that. A good politician always presents a pretty face. It's a gullible media that won't scratch the surface to discover what lies behind.

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

### LETTERS

#### FAILING OUR GIRLS

Three girls, cousins, were found lying poisoned and unconscious in a field, their hands tied with a dupatta, in Uttar Pradesh's Unnao district on Wednesday night. Two of them had expired. Their ages are 13, 16 and 17. Sadly but predictably, police tried to pass the cases off as suicide, accompanied by a liberal dose of victim blaming and shaming. When will grass-roots society stand by its girls?

Bhagwan Thadani  
Mumbai

#### JUST DESSERTS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Kiran Bedi pawn in BJP power games in Pondy". The unceremonious removal of Kiran Bedi as governor of Puducherry is of her making but raises more questions than answers. Why the tearing hurry at this critical juncture when state elections are on the horizon? During her entire stint, Ms Bedi and the chief minister were at each other's throats. All of her actions seemed to have been guided by two key factors: Her desire to hog the media limelight and a strong conviction that by discrediting the elected government she will become close to the top leadership of the BJP. In the process she overplayed her hand and the strategy backfired. Ms Bedi has been served her just desserts.

Deepak Singhal  
Noida

#### UNLUCKY SERENA

IT IS REALLY painful to note that the legendary Serena Williams has once again missed a golden opportunity to equal the Grand Slam record of Margaret Court. The 23-time Grand Slam champion has missed at least six to seven such chances, losing in the semi-finals or finals over the past two years. At the same time, hats off to young Naomi Osaka, who has proved to be a stumbling block in her quest. At any rate, it now looks like it will remain unfulfilled. Serena turns 40 this September. She left the court in tears, saying "I'm done". Her big farewell to the crowd had the tennis world questioning whether it would be her last match on Rod Laver arena.

Janaki Mahadevan  
Chennai

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Mahir Ali



## Why Navalny's challenge poses threat to Putin's grip on power

The scale of the threat Alexei Navalny poses to the status quo in Russia is hard to estimate.

After all, even the unusually widespread protests that erupted across the vast country after Navalny was arrested on his return from Germany attracted tens of thousands of participants. In themselves, they could hardly be viewed as a serious challenge to Vladimir Putin's grip on power, which has been reinforced during his 20-plus years at the helm.

That longevity itself could be problematic. An entire generation has grown up without experiencing a change in leadership. There have been rumours of restlessness even within the power structure. The state has in many ways been stagnating for at least a decade — a phenomenon reminiscent of the soul-sapping Brezhnev years that contributed to the demise of the Soviet Union.

The absence of viable alternatives eventually begins to take its toll, especially if it begins to seem indefinite. By lifting term limits, Putin has effectively ensconced himself as pres-

ident for life, should he wish to carry on. Legislation indemnifying all past presidents has also been rubber-stamped by the State Duma, pre-emptively thwarting any legal proceedings should Putin be obliged to step down.

Authoritarian regimes are sometimes inclined to permit a certain amount of opposition, provided it serves only as a safety valve — allowing disaffected segments of the population to let off steam — and stops well short of posing a serious threat. Until last summer, it was possible to see Navalny's campaign against corruption in that light.

Last August, though, Navalny became agonisingly ill during a flight across Siberia. The pilots arranged an emergency landing in Omsk, where the paramedics and medics took over. The German doctors who treated him after he was airlifted out of Russia acknowledged the pilots and paramedics had saved his life.

When the Germans announced that Navalny had been poisoned with novichok — a chemical poison accessible only to state operatives, which

had previously been deployed against military intelligence defector Sergei Skripal and his daughter in England — the Putin administration predictably denied all responsibility.

Navalny eventually came out of his coma, and during his recuperation managed to prank-call one of the perpetrators of the assassination attempt. It turned out that the poisoning was a rear-end manoeuvre — Navalny's under-pants had been laced with the deadly substance. Which explains why blue underwear was among the emblems paraded by protesters last month.

Another was toilet brushes. That related to an almost two-hour video released on Navalny's YouTube channel a couple of days after his latest arrest, which explains in detail the genesis of Putin's corrupt practices and focuses on their apogee: a billion-dollar estate on the Black Sea coast that stretches to more than 30 times the size of the European principality of Monaco.

This goes beyond garden-variety luxury and more than matches tsarist extravagance. The props

apparently include golden toilet brushes worth 800 euros each. The median Russian monthly wage is less than 400 euros. The overpriced excrement-wipers inevitably struck a chord. So did the overall impression of resources being dedicated to an exclusive luxury resort while at least 20 million Russians subsist below the poverty line and others struggle to make ends meet. Many others bristle at the direct or indirect restrictions on freedom of thought.

Navalny has used social media cleverly for more than a decade, and the effort has borne fruit. His "Putin's Palace" video has been viewed more than 100 million times on YouTube. The administration could not ignore it, so Putin denied he owned the estate, and within days a reliable poodle was prodded into claiming ownership of the sprawling estate.

Although the existence of the "palace" had been revealed more than 10 years ago, most Russians had forgotten about it until Navalny's video surfaced as a searing reminder. Navalny's crusade against corrup-

tion and for corporate transparency was initially tolerated to an extent but has lately been deemed too dangerous. It's interesting, though, that the regime's propaganda has largely overlooked his former dedication to far-right nationalism, perhaps because it chimes too closely with Putin's own predilections.

Navalny, it is said, has since moved on. He no longer rants about immigration from Central Asia, or militates against assistance to Russia's Muslim populations in the Caucasus. But what exactly he stands for is difficult to ascertain, beyond his admirable campaign against corruption.

Interestingly, even among those who have risked arrest and brutalisation at the hands of the ruthless Russian security forces in recent weeks, less than a quarter would like to see Navalny replace Putin. Yet Putin is clearly rattled. Whether something deeper is stirring in the Russian psyche, only the years ahead will tell.

By arrangement with Dawn



## SHORT TAKES

QUAKE INJURES  
AT LEAST 10 IN  
CENTRAL IRAN

**Tehran, Feb. 18:** A magnitude 5.6 earthquake struck central Iran on Wednesday, injuring at least 10 people, Iranian media reported.

The state TV said the quake jolted the country of Sisakht, about 500 kilometres (310 miles) south of the capital, Tehran. The reports said search and rescue teams have been deployed to the area. It said the tremor struck at a depth of 10 kilometres (6.2 miles).

Sisakht is a farming area with a population of about 6,000 people; its part of the province of Kohkiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad.

There were no further details on possible damages or casualties.

Iran lies on major seismic faults and experiences one earthquake a day on average.

NASA ROVER  
STREAKS TOWARD  
MARS LANDING

**Cape Canaveral, Feb. 18:** A NASA rover streaked toward a landing on Mars on Thursday in the riskiest step yet in an epic quest to bring back rocks that could answer whether life ever existed on the red planet.

Ground controllers at the space agency's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, settled in nervously for the descent of Perseverance to the surface of Mars, long a deathtrap for incoming spacecraft. It takes a nail-biting 11 1/2 minutes for a signal that would confirm success to reach Earth. The landing of the six-wheeled vehicle would mark the third visit to Mars in just over a week. Two spacecraft from the United Arab Emirates and China swung into orbit around the planet on successive days last week.

All three missions lifted off in July to take advantage of the close alignment of Earth and Mars, travelling some 300 million miles in nearly seven months.

HK ACTIVIST  
JIMMY LAI  
DENIED BAIL

**Hong Kong, Feb. 18:** Prominent Hong Kong democracy advocate and newspaper publisher Jimmy Lai was again denied bail on Thursday ahead of his April trial on charges of colluding with foreign forces.

Lai is one of several activists facing charges and possibly lengthy prison terms under the sweeping National Security Law that Beijing imposed on the semi-autonomous southern Chinese city last year following massive anti-government protests in 2019.

Critics at home and abroad say the legislation amounts to a crackdown on political dissent and free speech that is eroding the rights and freedoms promised to Hong Kong under the one country, two systems framework following the handover from British colonial rule in 1997.

Arrested and charged in early December, Lai was at first denied bail then granted it on appeal under strict conditions amounting for a form of house arrest. That prompted a withering attack on the Hong Kong judiciary by the ruling People's Daily newspaper.

BOMBING KILLS 2  
KABUL VARSITY  
LECTURERS

**Kabul, Feb. 18:** An explosion in the Afghan capital on Thursday killed two lecturers at the Kabul University, after a bomb attached to the car they were travelling in went off, a police spokesman said.

The attack took place around noon near the university, said Kabul police spokesman Ferdaws Faramarz. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the bombing.

The two lecturers, Mubasher Muslimyar and Marouf Rasikh, taught at the university's Islamic studies faculty, according to an Afghan official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media.

Two years ago, Muslimyar had been briefly arrested by the Afghan intelligence agency over allegations of promoting militant propaganda by the Islamic State group among university students.

No charges were raised and he was later released. Kabul police said an investigation team had arrived at the scene of the explosion.

This was the second explosion on Thursday in Kabul.

## Facebook blocks access to news in Oz

Actions to unfriend Australia were as arrogant as they were disappointing, says PM Morrison

**Canberra, Feb. 18:** In a surprise retaliatory move Thursday, Facebook blocked Australians from sharing news stories, escalating a fight with the government over whether powerful tech companies should have to pay news organisations for content.

Australia's government condemned the step, which also blocked some government communications, including messages about emergency services, and some commercial pages. The digital platforms fear that what's happening in

Australia will become an expensive precedent for other countries as governments revamp laws to catch up with the fast changing digital world.

Facebook acted after the House of Representatives passed legislation that would make it and Google pay for Australian journalism, said Treasurer Josh Frydenberg. He said he was given no warning before Facebook acted. The legislation must be passed by the Senate to become law.

Australian news organisations could not post sto-

ries and people who tried to share existing news stories got notifications saying they were blocked from doing so. "This post can't be shared," the website said. "In response to Australian government legislation, Facebook restricts the posting of news links and all posts from news Pages in Australia. Globally, the posting and sharing of news links from Australian publications is restricted."

The legislation mentioned by the notice has not yet been enacted. "Facebook's



actions were unnecessary, they were heavy-handed and they will damage its reputation here in Australia," Frydenberg said. Prime Minister Scott Morrison lashed out on his own Facebook page.

"Facebook's actions to unfriend Australia today, cutting off essential information services on health and emergency services, were as arrogant as they were disappointing," Morrison posted. "These actions will only confirm the concerns that an increasing number of countries are expressing about the behavior of BigTech companies who think they are bigger than governments and that the rules should not apply to them. They may be changing the world, but that doesn't mean

they run it," he added. "We will not be intimidated by BigTech seeking to pressure our Parliament."

Facebook said the proposed Australian law "fundamentally misunderstands the relationship between our platform and publishers who use it." "This is an assault on a sovereign nation," Health Minister Greg Hunt told Parliament. "It is an assault on people's freedom and, in particular, it's an utter abuse of big technologies' market power and control over technology."

The government contends the proposed News Media Bargaining Code will ensure media businesses will be paid fairly for journalism linked online. Both Google and Facebook had threatened to retaliate. Australia's proposal requires a negotiation safety net through an arbitration panel. The digital giants would not be able to abuse their dominant negotiating positions by making take-it-or-leave-it payment offers to news businesses for their journalism. — AP



Snow covers the ground of a neighborhood school in Waco, Texas as severe winter weather conditions over the last few days has forced road closures and power outages over the state on Wednesday. — AFP

Frigid temperatures, outages  
result in water problems

**Memphis (US), Feb. 18:** About 7 million people in Texas — a quarter of the nation's second-most populous state — were told to boil their water or stop using it entirely as homeowners, hospitals, and businesses grappled with broken water mains and burst pipes, many in areas unaccustomed to dealing with sustained frigid temperatures.

Winter storms during the past week in the Midwest, Texas and the South forced water service providers to scramble to manage flows as sub-freezing temperatures presented serious problems. The Texas city of Kyle, south of Austin, asked residents Wednesday to suspend water usage until further notice because of a shortage. "Water should only be used to sustain life at this point," the city of 45,000 said in an advisory.

"We are close to running out of water supply in Kyle." In Memphis, Tennessee, the power and water company asked residents to reduce their water usage through Friday. Memphis, Light, Gas & Water said in a news release that it is experiencing reduced pressure across its distribution system due to freezing temperatures this week. The utility also said it is seeing reduced reservoir levels at pumping stations and several water mains have burst.

Thousands of cold-stunned  
sea turtles rescued in Texas

**South Padre Island, Feb. 18:** Residents, some of whom lack heat or basic amenities in their own homes due to the unusually chilly weather, have been rescuing cold-stunned sea turtles and taking them to a convention centre in a South Texas resort town.

"Every 15 minutes or less there's another truck or SUV that pulls up," Ed Caum, executive director of the South Padre Island Convention and Visitors Bureau, told The Associated Press on Thursday.

He said sometimes people bring one or two sea turtles, sometimes more. "We had trailers full yes-

terday coming in that had 80, 100, 50," he said.

The South Padre Island Convention Centre started pitching in Monday when it's neighbour, Sea Turtle Inc., could no longer handle the number of sea turtles being dropped off, and their mostly outdoor operation had lost power. He said the convention centre itself didn't have power or water till early Wednesday morning.

He says they've "collected" more than 3,500 sea turtles so far. He said he hesitates to use the word rescued because "we know we're going to lose some." Caum said that with another cold front

approaching, they don't know when they'll be able to return the sea turtles to the water.

Temperatures in the area on Wednesday afternoon were in the 40s. He said it may be Saturday — when temperatures are expected to reach the low 60s (above 15 Celsius) — before the turtles can be released back into the Gulf. He said with power returned they have been able to bring the convention centre's temperature to 60 degrees.

"We're trying to do the best we can to save as many turtles as possible," he said. — AP

UAE DISMANTLES  
ERITREA BASE AS  
IT PULLS BACK

**Dubai, Feb. 18:** The United Arab Emirates is dismantling parts of a military base it runs in the East African nation of Eritrea after it pulled back from the grinding war in nearby Yemen, satellite photos analysed by The Associated Press show. The UAE built a port and expanded an airstrip in Assab beginning in September 2015, using the facility as a base to ferry heavy weaponry and Sudanese troops into Yemen as it fought alongside a Saudi-led coalition against Iranian-backed Houthis rebels there.

But the country once praised as "Little Sparta" by former US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis appears to have found the limits of its military expansion in Yemen's stalemate conflict, experts say. "The Emiratis are paring back their strategic ambitions and are pulling out of places where they had presences," said Ryan Bohl, an analyst at the Texas-based private intelligence firm Stratfor. — AP

German cops raid  
buildings in Berlin

**Berlin, Feb. 18:** Hundreds of German police and other investigators raided more than 20 buildings in Berlin and the surrounding state of Brandenburg early Thursday in a crackdown on two feuding organised crime families, authorities said.

Berlin prosecutors said on Twitter that two people were arrested in the raids targeting illegal drug and weapons trafficking. In addition, authorities were investigating bodily harm charges linked to a "clash

of clans" between an Arabic and a Chechen organised crime family last November, prosecutors said.

At that time, there were several violent confrontations between the two organisations. Berlin police said in addition to their own SWAT teams and other personnel, federal agents, Brandenburg police and tax officials were involved in the raids, more than 500 personnel in all. Authorities did not immediately provide further details. — AP

Internet services  
disrupted in Pak

**Islamabad, Feb. 18:** Internet services were hampered in Pakistan on Thursday as the country's telecom authority said one of its six international undersea cables developed a fault. The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) said the international submarine cable system near Abu Talat, Egypt, developed the glitch on Wednesday.

The authority acknowledged lower internet speeds and frequent outages. The PTA said the fault developed at SEA-ME-WE 5 (South East Asia-Middle East-Western Europe 5), which is operated by the Trans World Associates (TWA). The Dawn newspaper reported that the TWA had communicated about the service degradation in international connectivity towards Europe and said that repair work was underway through international counterparts in Egypt.

"While the work to remove the fault is continuing, the internet service providers (ISPs) are being shifted to the spare capacity maintained by the company," said a senior executive of the Trans World Associates.

The TWA and the Pakistan Telecommunication Company Ltd (PTCL) are the two licence holders for international landing stations of submarine cables. — PTI

LANKA CANCELS  
IMRAN ADDRESS  
TO PARLIAMENT

**Colombo/Islamabad, Feb. 18:** Sri Lanka has cancelled Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's planned address to its Parliament during his upcoming visit to Colombo, according to media reports. Sergeant-at-Arms of Parliament, Narendra Fernando said he has informed Parliament that the Pakistan Prime Minister's visit to Sri Lanka will go ahead as scheduled, the Colombo Gazette website reported on Wednesday. However, the Foreign Ministry had informed Parliament officials that his proposed visit to the Parliament complex will not take place.

Pakistan Prime Minister Khan will arrive in Sri Lanka on February 22 on a two-day official state visit. Khan, who will be the first head of state to visit the country since the Covid-19 pandemic, is to hold talks with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, PM Mahinda Rajapaksa and Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena during the visit. It is said that the speech to Parliament had been included in Khan's itinerary at the Pakistan government's request. — PTI

## ANNUAL | FEATURE

## Twitter's top lawyer Vijaya Gadde, UK FM Rishi Sunak included

## 5 PIOs in TIME emerging leaders' list

**New York, Feb. 18:** Five Indian-origin personalities, including Twitter's top lawyer Vijaya Gadde and UK's finance minister Rishi Sunak, and an Indian activist feature in TIME magazine's annual list of 100 "emerging leaders who are shaping the future". The 2021 TIME100 Next, released on Wednesday, is an expansion of TIME's flagship TIME100 franchise of the most influential people in the world and highlights 100 emerging leaders who are shaping the future.

"Everyone on this list is poised to make history. And in fact, many already have," Dan Macsai, the editorial director of the TIME100, said. Other Indian-origin personalities on the list are Instacart founder and CEO Apoorva

Mehta, doctor and Executive Director of nonprofit Get Us PPE Shikha Gupta and founder of nonprofit Upsolve Rohan Pavuluri. Bhim Army chief Chandra Shekhar Aazad is also on the list.

Sunak's profile in the TIME feature says that a little over a year ago, the 40-year old was an "unknown junior minister in the British government" but after he was named to lead Britain's Treasury last year, he "quickly became the benevolent face of the government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, approving large handouts for many citizens whose jobs were disrupted by the virus."

Sunak has however also been criticised for advocating early relaxation of lockdown rules, the pro-

file said. "Nonetheless, Sunak remains the country's most popular politician, according to the pollster YouGov. And he's the oddsmakers' favourite to be Britain's next Prime Minister," it added. On Mehta, 34, the TIME profile said that in the initial days of the Covid-19 pandemic, Instacart "faced a tidal wave of orders, as people with means opted

service interruption and low pressure for customers. Crews helped turn off water for thousands of customers who had their private water lines break. "Leave your cabinet doors open to allow warm air to circulate," the city said in a tweet. "Do not try to use open flames or boiling water to thaw pipes." Three hospitals in Shreveport, Louisiana, lost water because of the storm, KSLA-TV reported.

City fire trucks delivered water and officials were getting bottled water for patients and staff. In the city of Lake Charles, hospitals were faced with the possibility they might have to transfer patients to other areas because of low water pressure. Mayor Nic Hunter said. It also caused water issues in Texas cities of Austin, Houston, San Antonio, Fort Worth, Galveston and Corpus Christi. — AP

en masse to pay the service's workers to buy groceries for them."

Mehta describes that period as a "wartime moment," it said. However, later Instacart also "faced new criticism about the way it treated its workers, including labyrinthine sick-pay policies, frequent rule changes for shoppers and demanding performance metrics." Instacart continues its focus on expansion. "The smartphone is the supermarket of the future. We are going to help co-create that," Mehta said in the TIME article.

The TIME profile described Gadde, 46, as "one of Twitter's most powerful executives" who was the one to convey the news to CEO Jack Dorsey that President Donald Trump's





## SHORT TAKES

OPPN LEADER  
ARREST: PM IN  
GEORGIA QUILTS

**Tbilisi, Feb. 18:** Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia announced his resignation Thursday following a court ruling that ordered the arrest of a man who leads the ex-Soviet nation's top opposition party. Gakharia said in a statement he was stepping down because of disagreements within his own team over the decision to arrest Nika Melia, chairman of the United National Movement opposition party.

A Tbilisi court on Wednesday ruled to place Melia, who is accused of organising "mass violence" during anti-government protests in 2019, in pre-trial detention after he refused to pay an increased bail fee of \$12,000.

If convicted, Melia faces nine years in prison.

FAKE COVID  
VACCINES: 6  
HELD IN MEXICO

**Mexico City, Feb. 18:** Police in northern Mexico arrested six people Wednesday for allegedly trafficking in fake Coronavirus vaccines. The federal Public Safety Department said the arrests were made in the northern border state of Nuevo León, though they did not say what kind of fake shots were involved or whether they had been offered for sale.

"You don't play around with health, and in these moments of pandemic, nobody should be profiteering," said Public Safety Secretary Rosa Icela Rodríguez. Assistant Health Secretary Hugo López-Gatell later said that the fakes were presented as Pfizer vaccines, which are only available in Mexico through government vaccinations teams. He said the suspects had offered the vaccines for sale for the equivalent of around \$2,000 per dose. Analysts have long worried that criminal gangs in Mexico could seek to steal, hijack or counterfeit.

MORE PROTESTS  
OVER ARREST OF  
RAPPER IN SPAIN

**Madrid, Feb. 18:** Spanish police fired rubber bullets and baton-charged protesters as clashes erupted for a second night in a row Thursday at demonstrations against the arrest of rap artist Pablo Hasl. Many protesters threw objects at officers and used trash containers and overturned motorbikes to block streets in both Madrid and Barcelona.

Hasl barricaded himself in a university building earlier this week to avoid his arrest in a case centering on free speech. After a 24-hour stand-off, police took him away early Tuesday. He was taken to prison to serve a 9-month sentence for insulting the monarchy and glorifying terrorism in a song about former King Juan Carlos I and in 64 tweets several years ago.

Hasl's legal situation has drawn considerable public attention, with performers, celebrities and politicians demanding a change in the law he was convicted of violating.

Amnesty International said the case was the latest in a string of artists and social media personalities being put on trial.

SHOOTING IN  
PHILADELPHIA:  
8 INJURED

**Philadelphia, Feb. 18:** At least eight people were wounded by gunfire Wednesday near a transit station in north Philadelphia, and one was critically injured, police said.

A 71-year-old man was listed in critical condition after he was hit once in the stomach and multiple times in the legs shortly before 3 pm (local time) near the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority station in the Olney neighbourhood, police said.

Police said a 22-year-old man was shot in the back, two other men aged 21 and 53 were hit in the legs and a 36-year-old woman and 70-year-old man were each struck in the thigh. A 17-year-old girl was grazed on the right arm.

A 48-year-old man later walked into a hospital with a graze wound to his stomach, police said. He and the others were listed in stable condition.

Police reported two firearms recovered and one person in custody. Philadelphia Police Commissioner Danielle Outlaw said it's unclear whether the firearms confiscated were used in what she called a very brazen shooting.

## The long wait



People sleep framed by their empty oxygen cylinders waiting for a shop to open to refill their tanks, in the Villa El Salvador neighbourhood of Lima, early Thursday morning. — AP/PTI

US unravelling hack  
of nine govt agencies

## Task force is investigating the extent of the damage

**Washington, Feb. 18:** US authorities are still working to unravel the full scope of the likely Russian hack that gave the "sophisticated" actor behind the breach complete access to files and email from at least nine government agencies and about 100 private companies, the top White House cybersecurity official said Wednesday.

Anne Neuberger, the newly appointed deputy national security adviser for cyber and emerging technology, also warned that the danger has not passed because the hackers breached networks of technology companies whose products could be used to launch additional intrusions. A task force is investigating the extent of the damage from the breach, assessing potential responses and trying to confirm the identity of whoever was behind it — a

This is a sophisticated actor who did their best to hide their tracks. We believe it took them months to plan and execute this compromise. It will take us some time to uncover this layer by layer

— ANNE NEUBERGER  
Deputy national security adviser for cyber and emerging technology

process Neuberger warned will take more time.

"This is a sophisticated actor who did their best to hide their tracks," she told reporters at the White House. "We believe it took them months to plan and execute this compromise. It will take us some time to uncover this layer by layer." US authorities have said the breach, first disclosed in December, appeared to be the work of

Russian hackers.

Neuberger, a former senior official at the National Security Agency who was appointed by President Joe Biden this month, went no further. "An advanced, persistent threat actor likely of Russian origin was responsible," she said, without providing any details on the potential responses. The Russian government has denied involvement. Private security company FireEye was first to publicly identify the breach, revealing that hackers had hijacked widely used network software from SolarWinds Inc. to install malicious software through a routine security update.

Intelligence agencies did not detect the breach because they largely have "no visibility into private-sector networks," and it was launched within the US, Neuberger said. She

said the Biden administration supports changes to "culture and authorities" that prevented the hack from being detected on the federal civilian systems.

The hack, Neuberger said, highlights the need to modernize the nation's IT infrastructure and its cyber defences, issues that will be addressed in an upcoming executive order. Several agencies have acknowledged that they were breached, including the Treasury Department and Justice Department, but the full list has not been publicly released. Once inside, the hackers had full access to the victims' data.

"The techniques that were used lead us to believe that any files or emails on a compromised network were likely to be compromised," Neuberger said.

— AP

Floyd death trial: Security  
beefed up in Minneapolis

**Minneapolis (US), Feb. 18:** Minneapolis leaders have said they are beefing up security plans, preparing to close streets and making sure businesses and residents are well informed as the trial approaches for the former police officer charged in the death of George Floyd.

Mayor Jacob Frey said safety will be a top priority "during this very difficult time in our city" and that the trial of Derek Chauvin will likely increase trauma for many, especially as a verdict draws near. "We believe it is on us to honor the magnitude of this moment and ensure that our families in this city feel safe," Frey said.

Floyd, a PoC man who was handcuffed, died May 25 after Chauvin, who is white, pressed his knee against Floyd's neck as Floyd said he couldn't breathe. Floyd's death

sparked protests in Minneapolis and days of violent unrest in which buildings — including a police station — were burned and damaged. Chauvin, who was fired, is charged with second-degree murder and manslaughter. Jury selection in his trial is scheduled to begin March 8; opening statements are scheduled for March 29.

sparked protests in Minneapolis and days of violent unrest in which buildings — including a police station — were burned and damaged. Chauvin, who was fired, is charged with second-degree murder and manslaughter. Jury selection in his trial is scheduled to begin March 8; opening statements are scheduled for March 29.

The city has already started installing a security perimeter around the Hennepin County Government Center, City Hall and nearby buildings. Frey said a law enforcement presence in the city will increase in coming weeks, and will peak during the trial, with the help of up to 2,000 National Guard members and 1,100 law enforcement officers from 12 agencies.

On Monday, the Democratic-controlled Minnesota House pulled a bill that would have created a \$35 million fund to bolster security during Chauvin's trial. Frey said Wednesday that its time to pass that measure, noting that Minneapolis has seen a dramatic loss in revenue due to Covid-19. "There is no place for gamesmanship or politics over the next couple of months in ensuring the city of Minneapolis is safe," he said. — AP

US reaches H-1B  
visa cap for 2021

**Washington, Feb. 18:** The US has received enough petitions needed to reach the Congressionally-mandated 65,000 H-1B visa cap for the fiscal year 2021 and successful candidates for the most sought-after work visa among foreign professionals, including Indians, would be decided by a computerised draw of lots.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows the US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. The technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has said it has received a sufficient number of petitions needed to reach the congressionally

mandated 65,000 H-1B visa regular cap and the 20,000 H-1B visa US advanced degree exemption, known as the master's cap, for fiscal year (FY) 2021.

Successful applicants would be decided by a computerised draw of lots. We have completed sending non-selection notifications to registrants' online accounts, a media release said.

We will continue to accept and process petitions that are otherwise exempt from the cap, it said. Petitions filed for current H-1B workers who have been counted previously against the cap, and who still retain their cap number, are exempt from the FY 2021 H-1B cap.

The USCIS will continue to accept and process petitions.

— PTI



Kamala Harris

NO HARRIS NAME  
FOR COMMERCIAL  
ACTIVITY: WH

**Washington, Feb. 18:** US Vice President Kamala Harris and her family will uphold the highest ethical standards, her spokesperson said, asserting that it is the policy of the White House that her name should not be used in connection with any commercial activity.

The statement comes following media reports that the White House has asked Meena Harris, niece of the vice president, to stop "using her aunt to boost her brand". The Vice President and her family will uphold the highest ethical standards and it is the White House's policy that the Vice President's name should not be used in connection with any commercial activities that could reasonably be understood to imply an endorsement or support, Sabrina Singh, Deputy Press Secretary to the Vice President, said.

According to *Los Angeles Times*, the White House has asked Meena not to build her brand by using the name of the US Vice President.

After Joe Biden and Harris won the election, the transition team's ethics lawyers told Meena that she could no longer produce clothing or write new books with her aunt's name or likeness, an unnamed White House official was quoted as saying by the daily.

According to the daily, the White House official said Vice President Auntie sweatshirts, Harris-themed swimsuits and other products previously sold, were not allowed under the current rules.

Meena did not respond to a question sent through a social media platform.

— PTI

## UN chief 'extremely grateful' for India's vax

**United Nations, Feb. 18:** UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is "extremely grateful" for the gift of 200,000 Covid-19 vaccine doses announced by India for peacekeepers, the spokesperson for the UN chief has said.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, while addressing the UN Security Council meeting on Covid-19 on Wednesday, announced a gift of 200,000 Covid-19 doses for the UN peacekeepers. "Keeping in mind the UN Peacekeepers who operate in such difficult circumstances, we would like to announce today a gift of 200,000 doses for them," he said.

"We are extremely grateful for this donation announced today by the Indian delegation. The distribution will be operationalised by the UN's Department of Support," Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesman for the Secretary-General, said. The 200,000 doses essentially mean that it will be possible to administer the required double doses of Covid-19 vaccines to all UN peacekeepers across missions.

According to the UN Peacekeeping, currently a total of 94,484 personnel are serving in 12 peace-



A general view of the Connect@Changi courtyard, billed as the world's first virus-safe hotel and conference complex is pictured in Singapore on Thursday. — AFP

keeping operations across the world led by the Department of Peace Operations. A total of 121 nations are contributing uniformed personnel to the UN peacekeeping missions. India is traditionally among the largest troop contributing countries to peacekeeping missions.

The UN Department of Operational Support (DOS) provides "operational support to all UN Secretariat entities, includ-

ing advisory, operational and transactional support services and, where needed, exercises delegated authority on behalf of clients." The DOS supports the entire UN Secretariat, consisting of almost 100 entities located around the globe. It is led by Under-Secretary-General Atul Khare and consists of three offices working in the areas of Support Operations, including human resources, health-care management

and capacity-building, Supply Chain Management and Information and Communication Technology, the DOS website said.

The announcement by India was welcomed by UN diplomats. Permanent Representative of Canada to the UN, Ambassador Bob Rae tweeted: "This is an important and generous announcement by Indian government on vaccinating 95000 UN peacekeepers."

— PTI

## TESTING | TIME

## Scientists continue monitoring as shots roll out around the world

## How do we know vaccines are safe?

**Washington, Feb. 18:** How do we know the Covid-19 vaccines are safe? Scientists look for safety issues during the testing phase and continue their monitoring as shots roll out around the world. So far, the only serious warning to emerge is a rare risk of severe allergic reactions.

Different types of Covid-19 vaccines have been authorised and it's possible side effects will differ for each — although there's more public data on the vaccines being rolled

out in Western countries than elsewhere. Countries also vary in their vaccine standards, with some allowing the use of shots before final-stage testing involving large numbers of volunteers. But in the US, Britain and European Union, regulators required any vaccine to be tested in tens of thousands of people before distribution.

So far, the US is using shots from Pfizer and Moderna, while Britain and Europe have cleared those plus the AstraZeneca vaccine. Those compa-

nies' large studies found that common side effects were minor and typical of the immune system revving up: Soreness in the arm, fever and flu-like symptoms including fatigue, chills and headache. But since extremely rare problems might not turn up even in large tests, the vaccines still are being monitored. The US and British governments and the European Medicines Agency track reports filed by health workers and the public about suspected side effects.

Extra scrutiny in the US includes tracking insurance claims for red flags. And US vaccine recipients can sign up for a program that sends text messages to see if they're feeling side effects. Those checks are proving reassuring. People are supposed to wait around for a short time after vaccination in case they have a severe allergic reaction, called anaphylaxis.

Such incidents so far have been rare, with between 2 and 5 anaphylaxis reports for every mil-

lion vaccine doses in the first weeks of US inoculations, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Officials expected to receive reports of health problems, even deaths, that occur just by chance in the days or weeks after vaccination, given the huge numbers of people, including the frail elderly, getting inoculated.

Deaths and other serious events are investigated to see if the vaccine played a role.

— AP

Shringla inaugurates  
embassy's digital library

**Moscow, Feb. 18:** Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla on Thursday inaugurated the digital and online library of the Indian Embassy here to make around 4,400 books on India easily accessible to Russians.

Shringla arrived in Moscow on Tuesday on his first foreign trip this year and called on Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and held wide ranging talks with Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov on Wednesday. "Foreign Secretary

@harshvshringla inaugurated the Digital and Online Library of @IndEmbMoscow that makes available around 4,400 books on India in digital format for ease of access of our Russian friends," the Indian Embassy said in a tweet.

On Thursday, he also exchanged views with leading Russian academics and strategic thinkers on the India-Russia relationship in view of the fast-changing geopolitical landscape. Earlier in the day, he also met with the officials of the Indian mission.

— PTI



## SHORT TAKES

Osaka leaves  
Serena in tears

**Melbourne:** Japan's Naomi Osaka brutally halted Serena Williams's latest bid for a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title on Thursday, as Novak Djokovic wrote the final chapter of qualifier Aslan Karatsev's fairy-tale run. Fans returned after a five-day Coronavirus lockdown in time to see an emotional exit from Williams, Jennifer Brady's win over Karolina Muchova and top-ranked Djokovic preserving his perfect semifinal record at Karatsev's expense. Osaka again proved Serena's nemesis with a one-sided 6-3, 6-4 win which heightened questions about whether the American, 39, will ever match Margaret Court's all-time record for Slam singles titles. Serena put her hand on her heart as she acknowledged a standing ovation on Rod Laver Arena, and later walked out of her post-match press conference in tears, saying: "I'm done." — *AFP*

Ever scoring City  
down Everton

**London:** Everton manager Carlo Ancelotti said he expects Manchester City to cruise to the Premier League title after Pep Guardiola's men opened up a 10-point lead at the top of the table with a 3-1 win at Goodison Park on Wednesday. Riyad Mahrez scored the pick of the goals in between Phil Foden and Bernardo Silva's strikes as City extended their English top-flight record winning run to 17 games. Elsewhere, Atletico Madrid failed to move eight points clear at the top of La Liga on Wednesday as they were held to a 1-1 draw at Levante in a game which saw a dreadful miss from Angel Correa. Diego Simeone's men sit six points clear of second-placed Real Madrid and have a game in hand. — *AFP*

Asian youth star  
Ankit in quarters

**New Delhi:** Asian youth silver-medallist Ankit Narwal (64kg) advanced to the quarterfinals of the 30th Adriatic Pearl Tournament in Budva, Montenegro with a comfortable opening-round win. Ankit registered a resounding 5-0 win over Uzbekistan's Lazizbel Fattoev and moved to the last-eight stage, where he will face Ukraine's Ratmir Turchaninov. However, Meitei Sanjambam (56kg) and Vishal (75kg) lost their pre-quarterfinal bouts to Ukraine's Dmytro Todorov and Nurisom Ismoilov respectively, held on Wednesday. Arundhati Choudhary (69kg), Babyrojisana Chanu (51kg) and Vinka (60kg) are in contention among the women and four male boxers — Arambam Naoba Singh (52kg), Sumit (69kg), Vishal Gupta (91kg), Jugnoo (91+ kg) — will be competing in the quarters. — *PTI*

Hashimoto is the  
new Olympic chief

**Tokyo:** Tokyo 2020's new president Seiko Hashimoto on Thursday vowed to "regain trust" in the Olympic organising committee after an embarrassing sexism row, with just over five months until the virus-postponed Games. Hashimoto, a seven-time Olympian, had been one of just two women in Japan's cabinet, serving as Olympic minister before stepping down to take the key post. She replaces Yoshiro Mori, who resigned after saying women talk too much in meetings, sparking outcry in Japan and abroad. — *AFP*

## Live on TV

## TENNIS

**Australian Open:** Women's doubles final from 10.30 am; Men's semifinal from 2 pm on on Sony Six, Sony Ten 2, HD

## CRICKET

**South Africa T20 League:** Titans vs Knights from 1.30 pm; Dolphins vs Cobras from 5.55 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

## FOOTBALL

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

**Italian League:** Fiorentina vs Spezia from 11 pm; Cagliari vs Torino from 1.15 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 2

Published by K. Sudhakar for and on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002. And Printed by him at BFL Infotech Limited, C - 9, Sector - III, Noida - 201301.  
**Editor** - T. Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 57290/94, Price in Nepal - Nep. Rs. 20.00 per copy.

## MORRIS THE MAN!

## Bought for ₹16.25 crore, SA's Chris is most expensive ever at IPL auction

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR  
CHENNAI, FEB. 18

It began with an awkward silence and ended in laughter. In between, during the three-and-a-half-hour auction, franchises spent an extravagant amount of ₹145.3 crore on 57 players.

It took some time for the auction to heat up as the first three names — Karun Nair, Alex Hales and Jason Roy — that came out of the bag evoked little interest. Delhi Capitals broke the ice by snapping up Australia's Steve Smith for ₹20 lakh more than his base price of ₹2 crore. But it was the arrival of Glenn Maxwell that spiced up the proceedings.

## Tug of war for Maxwell

After Rajasthan Royals and Kolkata Knight Riders dragged the bid from ₹2 crore to ₹4 crore, Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bangalore swooped in. Both seemed desperate. The ensuing tug-of-war meant that Maxwell, who didn't hit a single six in the previous edition, laughed all the way to the bank, again. The price that RCB finally paid for Maxwell was ₹14.25 crore — ₹3.5 crore more than what Punjab paid him last time around.

In what was a terrible outing in 2020, Maxwell scored only 108 runs in 11 innings. The Aussie has vowed, in a tweet, to end RCB's barren run in the IPL.

Mike Hesson, RCB's director of cricket, said Maxwell is the X-factor player they have been looking for. "We know how good a player he is away from the IPL. Only a couple of years ago he was used higher up and had his best IPL. He can help AB de Villiers and provide an extra bit of power in the middle," he said.

## Morris the surprise

The biggest surprise, however, was Chris Morris. The South African all-rounder (sold to Rajasthan Royals for ₹16.25 crore) overtook Yuvraj Singh (₹16 crore in 2015), Pat Cummins (₹15.5 crore in 2020) and Ben Stokes (₹14.5 crore in 2017) to become the most expensive player ever at the IPL auction. Morris hasn't played a single game since he suffered an injury in IPL-13. Jake Lush McCrum, CEO of Rajasthan Royals, is confident that Morris will live up to their expectations. "He is a quality bowler who can win us games with the bat too," said McCrum.

Having lost Maxwell to RCB, Chennai Super Kings went after another off-spinning allrounder. CSK got Moeen Ali for ₹7 crore. Moeen said he can't wait to play under M. S. Dhoni. "It would be amazing. CSK have a massive fan base, I'm absolutely buzzing now," he added.



Glenn Maxwell, perennial underperformer in the IPL, was bought by RCB for ₹14.25 crore.

CSK also bought off-spinner Krishnappa Gowtham for ₹9.25 crore, making him the most expensive uncapped player.

K.S. Viswanathan, CEO of CSK, expected a tough auction as the other teams knew CSK would be looking to buy an off-spinning allrounder. "We are happy it turned out to be fruitful. I'm also delighted to have one more local player, Hari Nishant, in our line-up," he said.

## Field day for pacers

It was a field day for fast bowlers from Down Under as Kyle Jamieson (sold to RCB for ₹15 crore), Jhye Richardson (Punjab, ₹14 crore), Riley Meredith (Punjab, ₹8 crore) and Nathan Coulter-Nile (Mumbai, ₹5 crore) made some moolah.

Former India pacer Zaheer Khan, Mumbai Indians' director of cricket operations, said it was exciting to see fast bowlers in high demand. "It's something the franchises have taken note of, over the past 12 years or so. There's a rise in demand now and that's reflected in the auction," he said.

## Pujara back after 6 years

India's 'Test specialist' Cheteshwar Pujara made a comeback to IPL after a six-year gap with CSK bagging the Saurashtra batsman for his base price of ₹50 lakh. CSK bowling coach L. Balaji said Pujara deserved an IPL contract. "He deserves that mark of respect. He is one player I genuinely feel is giving his sweat and blood to the country. I feel genuinely happy for him," Balaji said.

## Tendulkar Jr in Mumbai

It was the name everybody was waiting for and it came at the end. When auctioneer Hugh Edmeades called out Arjun Tendulkar's name, pat came the response from the Mumbai Indians. No surprise. Zaheer raised the paddle and sealed the deal with a smile. A hearty laugh signalled the end of the auction.

## Shahrukh Khan



When the auction was being held on Thursday, Shahrukh was on his way back after training and watching the proceedings on his mobile phone. "I was in the team bus. I was a bit nervous in the beginning but after the first bid



South African Chris Morris was bought by Rajasthan Royals, became the most expensive player.



Kyle Jamieson of New Zealand was bought by RCB for ₹15 crore.

## This SRK is PK's blockbuster pick

NEHA SURANA  
CHENNAI, FEB. 18

Most of Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan's movies are based on love and heartbreak. The journey of his namesake, one of the biggest attractions at the IPL auction on Thursday, has followed a similar script.

As someone who had a strong desire to play in the IPL when he was a teen, getting the snub from franchises last year was heartbreaking for Tamil Nadu batsman Shahrukh Khan. It upset him terribly when he found no takers despite his stellar performance in the domestic circuit. But he didn't lose hope. The 25-year-old channelled his energy into performing for his state. This year, when he played a key role in Tamil Nadu's title triumph in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, a couple of franchises asked him to attend trials.

When the auction was being held on Thursday, Shahrukh was on his way back after training and watching the proceedings on his mobile phone. "I was in the team bus. I was a bit nervous in the beginning but after the first bid

went up, I was super excited," said Shahrukh from Indore where Tamil Nadu are preparing for the upcoming Vijay Hazare Trophy. "It definitely feels great to play for a franchise like Punjab. KL Rahul is a

dynamic captain. I am excited to play under coach Anil Kumble sir. I am hoping to learn a lot from them," added Shahrukh.

From his base price of ₹20 lakh to the winning bid of ₹5.25 crore, it was a fierce battle that played out. "To be honest, money is secondary for me and there are a lot of other important things I need to do now. The focus is only on my game and not money," he said.

Shahrukh expressed his gratitude to personal trainer Azariah Prabhakar and TN assistant coach R. Prassana for shaping his career. "They have always been there for me and I can rely on them for anything. I feel grateful to have them as my guiding light. And my family has also played a special role in my career. Right now, they all have mixed emotions. I just hope they calm down soon," he said.

VIVO BACK AS  
IPL SPONSORS

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, FEB. 18

Chinese mobile manufacturing giants Vivo will be back as Indian Premier League's title sponsors for the 2021 edition, confirmed the tournament's chairman Brijesh Patel on Thursday.

"Vivo is back with us," Brijesh said during his opening address at the IPL auction here.

The announcement has put an end to the speculation that Vivo was looking to exit the five-year deal worth ₹2,199 crore.

The IPL chairman also confirmed that the upcoming edition will most likely see fans return to the stadium. "We can't wait to have fans back in attendance. We held one season behind closed doors in the UAE, now most likely fans will be in attendance," Brijesh said.



Krishnappa Gowtham is top gainer at the auction.

Cheteshwar Pujara back in IPL after six years.

## MONEY BAGS

**57** Number of players sold at the auction. There were 61 vacant slots. Only Rajasthan Royals (24) and RCB (22) have not completed the 25-player limit.

**22** Number of overseas players sold. Every team has exhausted their overseas quota of eight.

**₹145.3 cr**

Total money spent by eight franchises. Punjab Kings still have ₹18.8 crore remaining in their purse. RCB have the least with ₹35 lakh left.

## BIG BUYS

Name	Base price	Sold for
Chris Morris (Rajasthan Royals)	75L	16.25cr
Kyle Jamieson (RC Bangalore)	75L	15cr
Glenn Maxwell (RC Bangalore)	2cr	14.25cr
Jhye Richardson (Punjab Kings)	1.5cr	15cr
Krishnappa Gowtham (CSK)	20L	9.25cr

## TOP GAINERS

Name	Base price	Sold for
Krishnappa Gowtham (CSK)	20L	9.25cr
Shahrukh Khan (Punjab Kings)	20L	5.25cr
Chris Morris (Rajasthan Royals)	75L	16.25cr
Riley Meredith (Punjab Kings)	40L	8.00cr

## TEAM SHOP

## CHENNAI SUPER KINGS

Name	Base price	Bought for
Krishnappa Gowtham (India)	20L	9.25cr
Moeen Ali (England)	2cr	7cr
Cheteshwar Pujara (India)	50L	50L
K. Bhagath Varma (India)	20L	20L
C. Hari Nishanth (India)	20L	20L
M. Harisankar Reddy (India)	20L	20L

## DELHI CAPITALS

Name	Base price	Bought for
Tom Curran (England)	1.5cr	5.25cr
Steven Smith (Australia)	2cr	2.20cr
Sam Billings (England)	2cr	2cr
Umesh Yadav (India)	1cr	1cr
Ripal Patel (India)	20L	20L
Vishnu Vinod (India)	20L	20L
Lukman Hussain Meriwala (India)	20L	20L
M. Siddharth (India)	20L	20L

## KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS

Name	Base price	Bought for
Shakib Al Hasan (Bangladesh)	2cr	3.20cr
Harbhajan Singh (India)	2cr	2cr
Ben Cutting (Australia)	75L	75L
Karun Nair (India)	50L	50L
Pawan Negi (India)	50L	50L
Venkatesh Iyer (India)	20L	20L
Sheldon Jackson (India)	20L	20L
Vaibhav Arora (India)	20L	20L

## MUMBAI INDIANS

Name	Base price	Bought for
Nathan Coulter-Nile (Aus)	1.5cr	5cr
Adam Milne (New Zealand)	50L	3.20cr
Piyush Chawla (India)	50L	2.40cr
James Neesham (New Zealand)	50L	50L
Yuvvir Chakar (India)	20L	20L
Marco Jansen (South Africa)	20L	20L
Arjun Tendulkar (India)	20L	20L

## PUNJAB KINGS

Name	Base price	Bought for
Jhye Richardson (Australia)	1.5cr	14cr
Riley Meredith (Australia)	40L	8cr
Shahrukh Khan (India)	20L	5.25cr
Moises Henriques (Australia)	1cr	4.20cr
David Malan (England)	1.5cr	1.5cr
Fabian Allen (West Indies)	75L	75L
Jalaj Saxena (India)	30L	30L
Saurabh Kumar (India)	20L	20L
Utkarsh Singh (India)	20L	20L

## RAJASTHAN ROYALS

Name	Base price	Bought for
Chris Morris (South Africa)	75L	16.25cr
Shivam Dube (India)	50L	4.40cr
Chetan Sakariya (India)	20L	1.20cr
Mustafizur Rahman (Bangladesh)	1cr	1cr
Liam Livingstone (England)	75L	75L
K. C. Cariappa (India)	20L	20L
Akash Singh (India)	20L	20L
Kuldip Yadav (India)	20L	20L

## ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE

Name	Base price	Bought for
Kyle Jamieson (New Zealand)	75L	15cr
Glenn Maxwell (Australia)	2cr	14.25cr
Dan Christian (Australia)	75L	4.8cr
Sachin Baby (India)	20L	20L
Rajat Patidar (India)	20L	20L
Mohammed Azharudeen (India)	20L	20L
Suyash Prabhudesai (India)	20L	20L
Kona Srikr Bharat (India)	20L	20L

## SUNRISERS HYDERABAD

Name	Base price	Bought for
Kedar Jadhav (India)	2cr	2cr
Mujeeb Zadran (Afghanistan)	1.5cr	1.5cr
J. Suchith (India)	20L	30L