







# DECCAN Chronicle

12 FEBRUARY 2021

## Twitter's snub of Centre's selective outrage timely

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

The government's fear of its image abroad being hammered by celebrities with a large following on the social media has led to it calling for Twitter to take down nearly 1,200 accounts following tweets on farmer protests. Some of those accounts may be backed by Pakistan or Khalistan sympathisers, and sported ridiculously hateful hashtags like "farmers' genocide". Orders to take them down are legitimate and may have already been acted upon. To insist on a virtual blanket ban on one side of the arguments in support of the farmers, which might be more universal among Indians than the government may imagine, is what makes government action suspicious in the eyes of the votaries of free speech and expression. In a free world, Indian developers are free, too, to set up microblogging platforms like Koo.

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

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

## PM's red herring

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

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

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

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

DECCAN CHRONICLE

K. SUDHAKAR  
Printer & Publisher

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**Gram: CHRONICLE** Postal registration no: No. H/SD-348/2006-08

Subhani



## Simultaneous polls to be a blow to smaller parties

Sanjay Kumar

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

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

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

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

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

Voters tend to vote for the same party in the Assembly election for which they had voted during the Lok Sabha

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

Evidence suggests that till now there have been 111 instances of the state Assembly election in various states being held along with the Lok Sabha election. In these elections held in different years, a total of 387 national parties contested elections. Of these, in the case of 263 national parties (69 per cent), the difference in their vote percentage, within a less than three per cent variation in vote share. Similarly, when state Assembly elections were held within a gap of less than six months, the variation in vote share of 75 per cent of the dominant regional parties, which contested both these elections, was less than three per cent in both these elections.

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

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

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

## LETTERS

### GP ELECTIONS

It is a big worry that just after the polling in the first phase of Gram Panchayat elections, the leaders of various parties are issuing statements claiming their candidates have bagged majority of votes (YSRC wins in 81% of villages in ph-1 elections, DC, Feb. 11). Similarly, these claims are going to affect fair polling.

**N.S. Sharma**  
Visakhapatnam

### PM'S GESTURE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi set an entirely new but extremely healthy norm towards the Opposition while speaking in the Rajya Sabha to bid farewell to the retiring MP Ghulam Nabi Azad. It's a laudable approach that can be emulated by all politicians.

**K. Nehru Patnaik**  
Visakhapatnam

### BORDER CRISIS

It's good to hear that India and China have come to an understanding to dismantle all structures erected after April 2020 at the disputed Pangong Tso lake area along LAC and resume disengagement from the ongoing stand-off. It has damaged bilateral relations and took several rounds of talks. Both countries with crippled economy and health emergency cannot afford further tensions.

**N.S. Sharma**  
Visakhapatnam

### 50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

### More industries alone can solve unemployment

HYDERABAD, February 11 Setting up of a number of small units was the only answer to solve the unemployment problem, Chief Minister Mr. K. Brahmananda Reddi, said here today.

Inaugurating the Hyderabad Packaging Company at Moula Ali, a unit engaged in the production of corrugated fibre board containers, he said that such units would also help raped industrialisation.

It has been the endeavour of the State to encourage small entrepreneurs and personally he said that he would render all help for small and young industrialists in setting up new units.

Tarun Chugh

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

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

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

The development of any nation depends on transportation networks

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

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

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

The budget has provisioned ₹30,75 crore for Jammu and Kashmir, the highest among UTs. The announcement of a maiden gas pipeline in J&K has further rekindled hopes for the revival of the project that, due to a paucity of funds and the lack of an administrative push, showed no progress for a decade. This gas pipeline project will create a base for increased beneficiary coverage under the Ujjwala

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

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

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

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

graphic characteristics of today's businesses. Further, start-ups played a major role in ensuring availability of sanitizers, PPE kits and related supply chains, and fulfilled a sterling role in meeting local needs like grocery, medicine delivery at doorstep, transportation of frontline workers and online study material.

The Budget provided a boost to start-up investments by extending the eligibility for claiming tax holidays for start-ups along with a capital gains exemption for investment in start-ups till March 31, 2022.

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

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

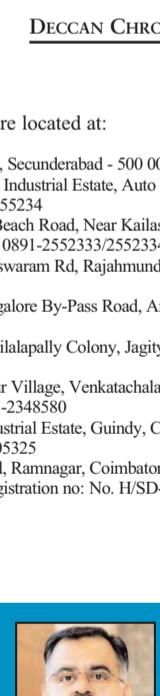
₹1,41,678 crores over a period of five years.

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

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

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

*The writer is national general secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Party*



## A Budget of aspirations, self-reliance

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## SHORT TAKES

## GOVT EXAMINING CLAUSE 6 REPORT: GOV

## J&amp;K SEEKS CANCELLATION OF PRE-BOOKINGS AT GULMARG

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, FEB. 11

Guwahati, Feb. 11: Assam Governor Jagdish Mukhi on Thursday said the state is still examining the Centre's report on implementation of Clause 6 of Assam Accord, which had been submitted to it a year ago.

In his address on the inaugural day of the last session of this Assembly, Mukhi said the union home ministry had constituted a high-level committee headed by Justice Biplob Kumar Sarma for speedy implementation of Clause 6 of Assam Accord.

"The Committee has submitted its report and my government is examining the same from the legal point of view on the suggestions made," he added.

The high-level committee had submitted the report to Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on February 25 last year for handing it to Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

## DIBRUGARH VARSITY VC SUSPENDED

Guwahati, Feb. 11: Assam Governor Jagdish Mukhi on Thursday suspended the vice chancellor of Dibrugarh University, Ranjit Tamuli, with immediate effect over allegations of financial irregularities and misuse of public fund, a statement issued by the Raj Bhawan here said.

The governor handed over the charge of the vice chancellor's office to Dean, Faculty of Biological Sciences, RNS Yadav, who also happens to be the senior-most professor of the university.

Notably, Dibrugarh University Teachers' Association, along with other employee organisations of the university, and Lahowal MLA Rituparna Baruah had submitted petitions to Mukhi, alleging gross financial anomalies and misappropriation of funds by Tamuli.

In a strange move, the authorities in Jammu and Kashmir have asked the hoteliers, cottage owners and other accommodation providers at Gulmarg to cancel all pre-bookings in order to make boarding and lodging facilities available to players and officials who would be arriving in the Valley's premier ski resort at a height of 2,650 m (8,694 ft) for Khelo India National Winter Games later this month.

"You're requested to ensure that boarding and lodging facility is provided to the athletes and officials during the event (being held from February 25 to March 3). Further all pre-bookings if any on this account may be cancelled," reads a letter written to subdivisional magistrate Gulmarg by additional Deputy Commissioner of Baramulla district.

In this connection, the letter refers to a meeting held on January 7 under the chairmanship of Farooq Khan, advisor to J&K Lieutenant Governor, to review the arrangements for the event.

Reacting to it, former chief minister and leader of opposition National Conference Omar Abdullah tweeted,

"The games are a welcome addition to our calendar but its mindless application of government writ when the games become a reason to cancel hotel bookings & inconvenience tourists who have booked flights & made their plans well in advance."

Around 1,000 players from different parts of the country are expected to participate in various games during the event.

## Farmers discuss way forward

## Thousands turn up for mahapanchayat

SANJAY KAW | DC NEW DELHI, FEB. 11

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

Addressing a mahapanchayat in Punjab, the union leaders emphasised that their agitation was apolitical as it was launched by farmers, farm workers and ordinary people for their own survival. This was the first mahapanchayat in Punjab since the widespread protests led largely by farmers from the state - against the Centre's three new laws began in late November last year.

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

Samyukta Kisan Morcha's Surat Singh Dharamkot, Kulwant Singh Sandhu, Manjit Singh Dhaner, Nirbhain Singh Dhudike and Harinder Singh Lakhawal were among the top leaders who attended the mahapanchayat.

The SKM is the umbrella body of the

protesting farmers' unions. This was also the first time in the ongoing agitation that Bharatiya Kisan Union (Ekta Ugrahan) members also joined the event.

Though the outfit was coordinating with the SKM on a regular basis, it has never shared the stage with the Morcha, neither in Punjab nor at the Delhi borders.

BKU (Ekta Ugrahan) general secretary Sukhdev Singh Kokrikalan said:

"Though we had been organising our protests independently after coordinating with SKM, when the cause is big and there are efforts on to create a divide, we had to give a message of unity and hence we are part of this mahapanchayat. After all, everyone is protesting for the repeal of the farm laws as of now."

The Punjabi mahapanchayat also holds immense political significance as the state government has been openly supporting the farmers' agitation, unlike the BJP governments in Haryana and UP. Punjab will hold local body polls later this week. The farmers' protests have been a talking point even in the local body elections.

The Aam Aadmi Party and the Shiromani Akali Dal are the two main Opposition parties in Punjab and they have already extended their support to the farmers' agitation.

At the mahapanchayat, the union leaders vowed to fight the Narendra Modi government till it reaches a definitive conclusion on the issue of the farm laws. Mr

Dhaner even praised Bharatiya Kisan Union's Rakesh Tikait for giving a new lease of life to the struggle.

Mr Dhaner said: "It is no longer a fight of only farmers but has now become a mass agitation. In the ongoing agitation, 99 per cent of people are standing by farmers but unfortunately Prime Minister Narendra Modi has chosen to side with corporate houses."

Mr Lakhawal said that the Centre's claim that its doors were open for a dialogue on the farm laws was a white lie because all the doors had been slammed shut in the form of barricades erected on the borders, with nails and iron rods fixed on the roads, and denial of basic amenities to protesters.

"Farmers are prepared to shed their last drop of blood to safeguard their lands and their rights to remunerative prices," he added.

Mr Ugrahan exhorted farmers and people to be prepared for a long-drawn struggle because "the fight is not merely against Modi or the NDA government".

He said: "The real culprits for these new economic policies are the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the IMF and the World Bank, who were out to snatch the bread from the mouths of the hungry people and turn the farmers into paupers."

Mr Ugrahan said if the three farm laws were implemented, more than 80 per cent farmers, especially those with small holdings, would lose their land to the corporate and big business houses.

## MAYOR BUILT HOUSE BY OCCUPYING DUSIB LAND: AAP

New Delhi, Feb. 11: The Aam Aadmi Party on Thursday claimed that the BJP-ruled north municipal corporation's Mayor Jai Prakash has built his house by illegally occupying DUSIB land, an allegation he termed as baseless. AAP leader Durgesh Pathak claimed that the Delhi Police and the Delhi

Urban Improvement Board (DUSIB) have repeatedly asked the corporation to stop the construction of this building. —PTI





## SHORT TAKES

**3 TURKISH SOLDIERS KILLED IN IRAQ CLASHES**

Ankara, Feb. 11: Three Turkish soldiers were killed in a new Turkish military offensive against a Kurdish militants in northern Iraq, Turkey's Defence Ministry said.

Two of soldiers were killed Wednesday in a clash that erupted in northern Iraq's Gara region on the first day of the latest Turkish operation, the ministry said. Another soldier died of his wounds on Thursday. The military said Turkish jets retaliated by striking targets of the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, in Gara.

There was no immediate comment from the militant group on the clashes. Turkey has carried out numerous cross-border ground and aerial offensives against the PKK, which maintains bases in northern Iraq.

**BROADCAST OF OSCARS FROM MANY VENUES**

Los Angeles, Feb. 11: Hollywood's Dolby Theatre has been the home of the Oscars since 2001 and the organisers say the upcoming show will keep that tradition, but they will enlist a supporting cast of venues. An academy spokesperson said Wednesday that the ceremony will broadcast live from multiple locations on April 25.

The announcement comes as many cities that are important film hubs, including Los Angeles, New York and London, remain under strict Coronavirus restrictions. Specific plans have yet to be unveiled for the show, but the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences is "determined to present an Oscars like none other, while prioritising the public health and safety of all those who will participate," the spokesperson said. The Golden Globes, which has also been scarce on specific details, is planning its own bicoastal broadcast for Feb. 28.

**U.S. ASKS TURKEY TO FREE BUSINESSMAN**

Washington, Feb. 11: The United States on Wednesday called on Turkey to release businessman and philanthropist Osman Kavala, who was arrested for what the US called "specious" charges related to the 2016 failed coup and 2013 anti-government protests. The US State Department called for Kavala's "immediate release." "The specious charges against Kavala, his ongoing detention, and the continuing delays in the conclusion of his trial, including through the merger of cases against him, undermine respect for the rule of law and democracy," State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement.

"We urge Turkey to abide by the European Court of Human Rights' rulings and ensure a just, transparent, and speedy resolution to the case in line with its domestic laws and international obligations." Kavala, a well-known figure in Turkish civil society, has been jailed since October 2017. He faces a potential sentence of life in prison.

**DUMP RUSSIAN MISSILE SYSTEM, U.S. TO TURKEY**

Washington, Feb. 11: The United States on Wednesday renewed its call on Turkey to get rid of an advanced Russian air defense system, appearing to reject an offer by Ankara to avoid US sanctions.

Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar in an interview this week proposed a compromise in which the NATO ally does not fully deploy the S-400s, which Russia originally built to target Western jets.

"Our policy vis-a-vis the S-400s has not changed," State Department spokesman Ned Price said when asked about the Turkish proposal.

"Russian S-400s are incompatible with NATO equipment, they threaten the security of NATO technology and they are inconsistent with Turkey's commitments as a NATO ally," he told reporters.

"We have and continue to urge Turkey not to retain this system." Akar drew a parallel to historic rival Greece, which bought Russia's older S-300 system after Turkish threats to attack Cyprus but did not make them fully operational.

US officials downplayed the parallel, saying the S-400 was a more advanced system.

**Celebration time**

People wearing face masks walk on Qianmen street in Beijing to welcome the Lunar New Year, which ushers in the Year of the Ox on Thursday.

**INDIA-U.S. DEF, SECURITY TIES STRONG: ENVOY**

Washington, Feb. 11: The India-US defence trade, which has grown significantly in a short span of time, now stands at \$21 billion. India's envoy here has said, asserting that the bilateral military and security ties are stronger than ever before.

India's ambassador to the US Tarunjit Singh Sandhu said that India's designation as a 'Major Defence Partner' and accordance of Strategic Trade Authorisation-1 Status by the US and the signing of the four foundational agreements with Washington will enhance military-to-military cooperation between the two countries.

India has signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), Industrial Security Annex and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) to facilitate military-to-military cooperation.

"Our defence and security ties are stronger than ever before," Sandhu said in a recent interview.

"Our defence exercises — in bilateral and plurilateral formats, have increased in both frequency, scope and coverage. The recently concluded Exercise Malabar with US, Japan and Australia has been yet another important initiative," Sandhu said, responding to a question on India-US defence relationship at the start of the Biden administration.

"Our defence trade has grown significantly in a short span of time, and today stands at over \$21 billion," he said.

Under the framework of the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative, launched during former president Barack Obama's administration, the two countries have been working together for co-production and co-development of defence equipment, he added.

— PTI

**UN: ISIS may orchestrate attacks in 2021**

**ALLEGED ATTACK PLOT: 3 NABBED**

Berlin, Feb. 11: German and Danish authorities have arrested three Syrian men on suspicion of planning an attack, prosecutors said Thursday.

Klaus Tewes, spokesman for federal prosecutors in the eastern German town of Naumburg, said a warrant was issued for the three men, aged 33, 36 and 40, last weekend on charges of preparing a serious act of violence. They're alleged to have purchased several kilograms (pounds) of chemicals in January that could be used to manufacture explosives.

A search of a residence linked to the suspects in the city of Dessau-Roßlau, between Naumburg and Berlin, turned up 10 kilograms (22 pounds) of black powder, and fuses. Two of the suspects were arrested in Denmark, where more chemicals were seized. The third was arrested in Germany near Frankfurt. None of their names were given in line with German privacy laws. Tewes would not give further details, and federal police, whose agents made the arrest in Germany, declined to comment.

"Der Spiegel" magazine reported that the three men were brothers, and that one of the two arrested in Denmark had been registered in Dessau. In addition to the chemicals, Spiegel reported that authorities found a homemade flag of the Islamic State extremist group in their search of the residence there. — AP

different parts of the world in the course of 2021," he said, adding that ISIS's primary focus remains resurgence in Iraq and Syria, where the international community continues to grapple. — PTI

**TRUDEAU SAYS TALKS CAN RESOLVE ISSUES**

**TRUDEAU IN**  
December said that Canada will always be there to defend the rights of peaceful protests, and had expressed concern over the situation, evoking a strong reaction from India.

Washington, Feb. 11: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has said that he held a "good discussion" with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi on many important issues, including on the two nations' commitment to democratic principles, recent protests, and the importance of resolving issues through dialogue.

Trudeau made a telephone call to prime minister Modi on Wednesday. "I had a good discussion with Prime Minister NarendraModi on many important issues, and we've agreed to stay in touch," Trudeau tweeted.

"The leaders discussed Canada and India's commitment to democratic principles, recent protests, and the importance of resolving issues through dialogue," the Canadian Prime Minister's office said in a statement, in an apparent reference to the ongoing agitation by farmers in India.

Trudeau in December said that Canada will always be there to defend the rights of peaceful protests, and had expressed concern over the situation, evoking a strong reaction from India. — PTI

**BIDEN IN NO RUSH TO COURT NETANYAHU**

Washington, Feb. 11: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is waiting for the phone to ring. But President Joe Biden is taking his time.

Biden is making clear he is in no rush to court the Israeli leader, a marked shift from his predecessor Donald Trump that some observers see as an early signal that the United States will no longer give carte blanche to its ally.

Three weeks into his presidency, Biden has yet to talk to Netanyahu, although he spoke to him after the election and the two have had a largely cordial relationship for years.

In his first major political speech, Biden did not even mention Israel as he spoke of his efforts to solidify US alliances.

The message has clearly been heard in Israel with Danny Danon, the head of the global wing of Netanyahu's Likud Party, tweeting a list of Biden's conversations.

Netanyahu earlier played down the delay. — AP

**WH names SolarWinds response leader**

**ANNE NEUBERGER**, the deputy national security adviser for cyber and emergency technology, was in charge of remediating the hack, the White House said.

Neuberger, the deputy national security adviser for cyber and emergency technology, was in charge of remediating the hack, identifying issues with the federal government's response and launching a study aimed at preventing similar incidents, the White House said.

Intelligence and law

enforcement officials are still trying to piece together the cyberespionage campaign blamed on Russia that has badly shaken the US government and private sector.

The hack, connected to tainted software from the US firm SolarWinds, was publicly revealed in December but believed to have begun more than a year earlier. The intruders stealthily scooped up intelligence for months, carefully choosing targets from thousands of cus-

tomers infected with malicious code they activated after sneaking it into an update of network management software first pushed out last March by Texas-based SolarWinds.

The company makes popular software that monitors computer networks of businesses and governments. So far, the list of agencies known to have been affected includes the Treasury, Commerce and Justice departments, along with several private companies. — AP

**SCIENTIFIC FINDING****Exhaled aerosol particles vary, depending on their age, state of viral infection, and BMI****What makes some people Covid-19 super-spreaders**

**BOSTON, Feb. 11:** Obesity, age, and the state of Covid-19 infection influence the number of virus particles an infected person breathes out, according to a new study which says these factors determine if a person becomes a super-spreader of the virus.

The observational study published in the journal *PNAS*, assessed 194 healthy people and also examined the findings of an experimental study of nonhuman primates with Covid-19. According to the researchers, including th-

ose from Harvard University in the US, exhaled aerosol particles vary greatly between subjects, depending on their age, state of viral infection, and body mass index (BMI). Body mass index is the ratio of a person's weight to the square of their height in metres, and the scientists said older people with a higher BMI and an increasing degree of Covid-19 infection had three times the number of exhaled respiratory droplets as others in the study groups.

The scientists also found that the aerosol droplets in nonhuman primates increased as infection stage with other infectious diseases like tuberculosis.

Covid-19 progressed, reaching peak levels a week after infection before falling to normal after two weeks. As infection with Covid-19 progressed, they said the viral particles got smaller, reaching the size of a single micron at the

peak of infection.

These tiny particles, the researchers said, are more likely to be expelled as people breathe, talk or cough and can also stay afloat much longer, travel farther in the air and penetrate deeper into the lungs when inhaled. They said the increase in exhaled aerosols occurred even among those with asymptomatic cases of Covid-19. "We've seen a similar increase in droplets during the acute infection stage with other infectious diseases like tuberculosis.

the Coronavirus, may be at risk of producing a large number of respiratory droplets. They said further studies are needed to determine other factors which may influence the quantity of virus particles an infected person may spread.

"Understanding the source and variance of respiratory droplet generation, and controlling it via the stabilisation of airway lining mucus surfaces, may lead to effective approaches to reducing Covid-19 infection and transmission," scientists wrote. — PTI



