





## SHORT TAKES

## Noida reports 16 new corona cases

**Noida:** Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddha Nagar recorded 16 new coronavirus cases on Sunday that pushed the district's infection tally to 25,536, official data showed. The active cases in the district rose to 69 from 65 the previous day, according to the data released by the UP Health department for a 24-hour period. Another 12 patients got discharged during the period, taking the overall recoveries to 25,376, the fifth highest in the state. The death toll in Gautam Buddha Nagar stands at 91 while the mortality rate is 0.35 per cent. The recovery rate has reached 99.37 per cent, the statistics showed. Meanwhile, the number of active coronavirus cases in UP came down to 2,104 from 2,147 on Saturday while the overall recoveries reached 5,92,699 and the death toll reached 8,724 on Sunday, the data showed. — PTI

## Advert row: Govt officer transferred

**New Delhi:** A day after being issued a notice by the state election commission over an advertisement, a senior Delhi government official was on Sunday transferred to the trade and taxes department, an official order said. Manoj Dwivedi, director of directorate of information and publicity (DIP), and two other officers were asked by the Election Commission to submit reply on an advertisement on 20 per cent reduction in circle rates in the city. The commission said in the notice that, prima facie, the advertisement violated the model code of conduct imposed due to the MCD bypolls in the city. An order issued by the services department on Sunday, stated that Dwivedi who held the charge of DIP director was transferred to the trade and taxes department as an additional commissioner. — PTI

## FFDC launches ayurvedic products

**New Delhi:** The Fragrance and Flavour Development Centre (FFDC) under the MSME Ministry prepared a natural face serum and fragrance, and recently transferred the technology (ToT) to an ayurvedic drug firm, which has launched chemical-free herbal beauty products on the basis of it. According to the AIMIL Pharma, which has received the ToT, herbal beauty products, like ayurveda drugs, are also gaining popularity over synthetic products due to lesser side-effects. The FFDC has been set up by the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in Kannauj, Uttar Pradesh, and is accredited by the National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories.

## Delhi records 2nd highest mean max temp for February

**New Delhi:** Delhi has recorded mean maximum temperature of 27.9 degrees Celsius in February, the second highest recorded for the month in the last 120 years, the Indian meteorological department said on Sunday. The highest mean maximum temperature recorded for February in Delhi was 29.7 degrees Celsius in 2006, the IMD officials said. On Sunday, a minimum temperature of 15.6 degrees Celsius, three notches above the season's average, was recorded, while the maximum temperature was 32.3 degrees Celsius, the Met department said. The weather department has predicted clear sky for Monday with mist in the morning. The maximum and minimum temperatures are expected to be around 31 and 13 degrees Celsius respectively. Delhi's air quality was in the poor category throughout the day with the air quality index (AQI) recorded at 211, the realtime data of the Central Pollution Control Board showed. According to the ministry of earth sciences' system of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR), high-surface wind speed, higher temperature and higher boundary layer heights were influencing AQI positively. "Hence, AQI is forecasted to be in moderate to poor category in the next two days," it said. — PTI



Farmers raise slogans during their ongoing protest against new farm laws at Ghazipur border in New Delhi on Sunday.

— PTI

## Kejriwal says new farm laws 'death warrant' for farmers

**Meerut, Feb. 28:** Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday called the new farm laws a "death warrant" for farmers, claiming they would take away their land and reduce them to labourers on their own farms.

Addressing a Kisan Mahapanchayat organised in Meerut by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) against the Centre's contentious laws, Mr Kejriwal said farmers are continuously agitating in the cold because their farms will be taken over by capitalists.

He claimed that three-and-a-half lakh farmers have committed suicide in the last 25 years.

The AAP national convener alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) cheated the farmers after coming to power.

Today, farmers are being tortured all over the country, Mr Kejriwal alleged, referring to the protests.

Water cannons are being used against them and iron nails are studded on roads to restrict their movement, he said.

Stressing that farmers are not enemies of the country, he accused the Union government of surpassing the Britishers in oppressing people.

Mr Kejriwal further alleged that the farmers are being falsely prosecuted.

"These people (government) were behind the incident at the Red Fort. All the people coming to me said that these people deliberately gave way to the farmers so that they move towards the Red



Arvind Kejriwal

Fort. Those who hoisted the flag were their own workers," Mr Kejriwal alleged.

Tens of thousands of protesting farmers clashed with the police in the national capital on January 26, 2021 during a tractor parade to highlight their demands.

Many of them, driving tractors, reached the Red Fort and entered the monument, where a religious flag was hoisted. Over 500 police personnel were injured, and one protestor died. Mr Kejriwal said farmers can be anything but traitors, however, the BJP government is suing them for treason and calling them terrorists.

He claimed that in its 2014 election manifesto, the BJP had said it would implement the Swaminathan Commission report and MSP (minimum support price) at 50 per cent more than actual cost of production would be given to farmers. But upon forming the government, the party gave an affidavit to the Supreme Court saying it was not possible to increase MSP as it would distort the market.

Mr Kejriwal said that people of UP must elect a government with the right intentions in the next elections and the day that happens, farmers will never have to worry about getting paid on time.

— PTI

## Delhi HC justice nominated as NLU's governing council member

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 28

Justice Siddharth Mridul of the Delhi high court has been nominated as a member of the governing council of the National Law University here by Chief Justice D.N. Patel.

Justice Mridul has been nominated for the post for a period up to June 29, 2023, with immediate effect.

The Delhi high court Chief Justice, who is also the chancellor of the National Law University (NLU), Delhi, issued a notification on February 26 nominating Justice Mridul as a member of the governing council of NLU.

Justice Mridul has been nominated pursuant to the elevation of Justice Hima Kohli as Chief Justice of Telangana high court, Hyderabad.

The governing council of

**THE DELHI HC** chief justice, who is also the chancellor of the NLU, issued a notification on Feb. 26 nominating Justice Mridul as a member of the governing council of NLU.

NLU is the supreme authority of the University to take all its crucial decisions relating to administration.

Justice Mridul was designated as senior advocate in May 2006 and was appointed as additional judge of the Delhi high court on March 13, 2008, and as a permanent judge on May 26, 2009.

Justice Mridul worked as a member of the Bar Council of Delhi (BCD) for two terms from 1992 to 1998 and 1998 to 2003. He also served as a member of the disciplinary committee and as honorary secretary of the BCD.

## Final phase trial of contactless ticketing system to begin in 3K cluster buses today

**New Delhi, Feb. 28:** The final phase of trial of contactless ticketing system will begin in the around 3,000 cluster buses run by the Delhi Integrated Multi Modal Transit System (DIMTS) through the 'Chart'r' app from Monday, a transport department statement said.

"The trial of the app is already underway in all 3,760 buses operated by the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC), it said.

Approximately, four lakh tickets have been booked using the app so far. The pink tickets for

women passengers, who travel free of cost in public transport buses, comprise 67 per cent of the total tickets booked through the app, it said.

"The total daily ticket booking through 'Chart'r' app is around 10,000. In the last 10 days, the ticket count through this app has witnessed around 10 per cent increase on a daily basis," it said.

The app has seen a progressive increase in the number of users since its trial began and over two lakh people have downloaded it since its release, it said.

Trial of app was

launched in August last year amid rising numbers of Covid infections in the city.

The one-month trial would cover all the routes of DIMTS buses.

In the last week of February, the trial of this app was extended to all 3,760 DTC buses till March 31.

Chart'r has been developed with the technical support of the Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology Delhi (IIIT-Delhi).

E-ticketing in DIMTS was started in August last year on route num-

ber 473. The total number of buses increased to 550 thereafter in a phased manner.

In DTC, the trial of this online ticketing app was started in September last year on route 534 in Ghazipur and Hasanpur depots. It started in a total of 35 buses from both depots.

The transport department in collaboration with IIIT-Delhi trained all the depot managers and the staff of around 50 depots who trained bus conductors as they play a crucial role in the whole system, the statement said. — PTI

## Woman stabbed to death for resisting snatching bid

2 people held in connection with the case, says police

**BHASKAR HARI SHARMA**  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 28

In a tragic incident, a 25-year-old woman was stabbed to death by a snatcher while she was resisting a robbery bid. The incident took place on Saturday in Northwest Delhi's Adarsh Nagar area. The police said that it has arrested the accused involved in the incident.

A CCTV footage of the incident went viral on social media. In the video, two women can be seen walking when a man chases them and tries to snatch the victim's chain from behind. The woman chases him, following which he falls on the road. Thereafter, he stands up and stabs the woman.

The deceased has been identified as Simran Kaur. The incident took place hardly 20 metres from the victim's house. There is a police post around 100 metres from the spot.

Police teams have arrested two accused persons



Security personnel stand guard outside a mortuary after a woman identified as Simran Kaur was allegedly stabbed by a miscreant while snatching her necklace in New Delhi on Sunday.

— PTI

identified as Fardeen (19) and Agibul (22), both residents of Jahangirpuri. The weapon of offence and the two-wheeler used in the commission of the crime were recovered on their instance.

The accused stabbed the victim and fled, the police said, adding that she was taken to a hospital where she was declared brought dead.

According to a senior police official, she was returning home from the market along with her

two-year-old daughter and mother when the incident took place at around 9.30 pm on Saturday.

"A case under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) has been registered at the Adarsh Nagar police station," said the senior police official.

"The police is patrolling the area and pickets have been placed to stop these kinds of incidents," said DCP (Northwest district) Usha Rangnani.

Simran's aunt said that the former had gone to the

market to buy medicines for her daughter.

"She was wearing a chain and holding her daughter in her arms. The accused was chasing them and tried to snatch the chain but Simran caught hold of it and did not lose her grip. When she resisted, the accused fell on the road. When she turned towards him, the accused stabbed her twice and left the spot. We got to know that the accused was with his accomplice, who picked him up on a scooter and fled from the spot," her aunt said.

Amit Mehra, Simran's neighbour, said he took her to the hospital in his car.

"When the incident took place, the guard followed the accused, but he escaped along with his accomplice who was waiting for him on a scooter. I took her to MD City Hospital at Model Town in my car. They referred her to Fortis hospital where she was declared brought dead," Mr Mehra said.

## Man held for killing occultist in Ghaziabad

**Ghaziabad, Feb. 28:** The Murad Nagar police have arrested a man for allegedly killing an occultist, an official said on Sunday.

According to police, the incident had taken place on February 19 at 10.30 am near the Firdous mosque of the New Noorganj area.

The accused has been identified as Salman of Husseinpur in Murad Nagar, SP (Rural) Iraj Raja said.

During investigation, Salman told police that his wife frequently visited Aas Mohammad, who also worked as an auto driver, to get rid of evil spirits. Salman said Aas Mohammad tried to establish illicit relations with his wife. After knowing it, in gush of anger, Salman killed him while the victim was waiting for passengers at an auto stand.

— PTI

## Protest against Metro 'skipping' some stations during peak hours

**Noida, Feb. 28:** Hundreds of city dwellers are suffering due to the Aqua Line metro "skipping" 10 stations during peak hours, office bearers of residents' groups claimed on Sunday, as they held a protest against the Noida Metro Rail Corporation (NMRC) here.

Among the stations skipped by the metro train during the peak hours (8 am to 11 am and 5 pm to 8 pm on weekdays) are Sector 101 and Sector 50, which is dedicated to the transgender community, they said.

The NMRC, which manages the Aqua Line, had started "Fast Trains" from February 8 which skip certain "low-rider-ship" stations during peak hours with an objective to reduce the travel time between terminus stations in Noida and Greater Noida by nine minutes.

Around three dozen people, including office-

bearers of residents' bodies like the Noida Extension Flat Owners Welfare Association (NEFWA), the Noida Federation of Apartment Owners Association (NOFAA) and social activists, on Sunday afternoon staged a protest at the Sector 101 metro station, demanding a rollback of the NMRC move.

The stations "skipped" during peak hours are: Sector - 50, Sector - 101, Sector - 81, Sector - 83, Sector - 143, Sector - 144, Sector - 145, Sector - 146, Sector - 147 and Sector - 148.

"We need to strike a balance between convenience and speed. A nine minutes faster journey does not give any significant advantage to commuters but it definitely causes inconvenience to several commuters (whose stations are being skipped)," NOFAA president Rajiva Singh said.

— PTI

## 197 new Covid cases recorded in Delhi

**New Delhi, Feb. 28:** Delhi recorded 197 new Covid cases on Sunday, while one more fatality pushed the death toll to 10,910, according to data shared by the city health department.

On preceding three days, the count of daily cases have stood at 200-mark or beyond.

On Friday, 256 Covid cases were registered, the highest number of single-day incidences in February, while on Thursday and Wednesday the count stood at 220 and 200, respectively.

On Sunday, Delhi recorded 197 fresh Covid cases and a positivity rate of 0.34 per cent, authorities said, adding that the infection tally in the city has risen to 6,39,289.

One more death was recorded on Sunday, taking the toll to 10,910, according to the latest



Dr Ritu Saxena and her team members stand in front of the Covid ward at LNJP Hospital in New Delhi.

— PTI

health bulletin issued by the city government.

From February 1-23, count of daily cases had been recorded below 200.

Delhi had recorded 199 fresh Covid cases on January 28.

From January 15-26, the daily figures ranged from 148 on January 25 to 299 on January 16, according to official data.

On Thursday, no fatality was registered, the fourth

time the single-day fatality count stood at zero this month. On February 9, 13 and 17 too, the death count was zero.

On February 9, no fatality from coronavirus infection was registered in the national capital for the first time this month, and after a gap of nearly nine months.

The 197 new cases on Sunday came out of the 57,772 tests conducted the

previous day, according to the health bulletin.

The total number of tests conducted the previous day included 39,070 RT-PCR tests and 18,702 rapid antigen tests, the bulletin said.

The tally of active cases on Sunday rose to 1,335 from 1,307 the previous day, according to the bulletin. The number of people under home isolation as on Sunday rose to 691 from 627 on Saturday, it said, adding over 6.27 lakh people have recovered.

Delhi had recorded 94 fresh Covid cases on February 16, the lowest in over nine months.

Delhi had recorded 96 coronavirus cases on January 27, that time the lowest in over nine months, and the first time the daily incidences count had stood below the 100-mark in that month.

— PTI

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## SHORT TAKES

## PUDUCHERRY ASSEMBLY SPEAKER QUILTS

**Puducherry, Feb. 28:** Puducherry Assembly Speaker V.P. Sivakolundhu quit on Sunday citing health reasons even as his brother joined the BJP just over a month ahead of the elections in the Union Territory. In the resignation letter to lieutenant-governor Tamilisai Soundararajan, a copy of which was made available to mediapersons, Mr Sivakolundhu, a Congress leader, said he quit as Speaker only on health grounds. Later, he told PTI that he handed over the letter of resignation addressed to the L-G to the Assembly secretary. Mr Sivakolundhu won from the Lawspet constituency in the 2016 Assembly elections on a Congress ticket. Meanwhile, Mr Sivakolundhu's brother V.P. Ramalingam joined the BJP in Karaikal in the presence of Union home minister Amit Shah, who is on a campaign visit. Also, former DMK legislator K. Venkatesan and former Congress legislator K. Lakshminarayana who had quit their MLA posts on February 21 joined the BJP in Karaikal in the presence of Mr Shah who was in Karaikal to address a public meeting. The Puducherry government headed by V. Narayanasamy fell on February 22 after the coalition ministry was reduced to a minority following a spate of resignation of Congress MLAs and a DMK legislator. — PTI

## SREEDHARAN'S ENTRY INTO BJP A 'GIMMICK': CONG

**New Delhi, Feb. 28:** Terming technocrat E. Sreedharan's entry into the BJP a "gimmick", Congress' Kerala in-charge Tariq Anwar on Sunday said it would be a direct fight between the UDF and the ruling LDF in the upcoming Assembly polls as the people will not "waste" their votes on the BJP which will remain a marginal player in the state. The Congress general secretary also asserted that it was not the party's tradition to announce a chief ministerial face and after polls the name of the CM candidate will be arrived at through consensus. In an interview with PTI, Mr Anwar exuded confidence that the Congress-led UDF would form the next government in Kerala and stated that the main issue in polls would be the LDF government's "corruption and mismanagement" in the last five years. "The results will be in UDF's favour. People had given mandate to the LDF last time but their performance in the last five years has not been good and three-four scandals have also been unearthed recently in which even the CPI(M) office has come under suspicion," the AICC in-charge Kerala said. — PTI

## MALALA: DREAM TO SEE INDIA-PAK AS 'GOOD FRIENDS'

**New Delhi, Feb. 28:** The old philosophy of having borders and divisions doesn't work anymore and the people in India and Pakistan want to live in peace, Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai said on Sunday, stressing that it is her dream to see the two countries become "good friends". She also said that minorities need protection in every country, be it Pakistan or India, adding that the issue is not related to religion but to the "exploitation of power" and must be taken seriously. Yousafzai, a Pakistani activist for girls education who miraculously survived a bullet to the head from the militant Taliban in October 2012, said the news of internet shutdown and arrests of activists "protesting peacefully" in India is "worrying" and expressed the hope that the government will make sure that people are heard. "It is my dream to see India and Pakistan become true good friends and that we can visit each other's countries. You can continue to watch Pakistani dramas, we can continue to watch Bollywood films and enjoy cricket matches," the youngest Nobel Peace Prize winner said. She was speaking on her book "I am Malala: the story of the girl who stood up for education and was shot by the Taliban" on the concluding day of the Jaipur Literature Festival which is being held in the virtual mode. — PTI



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi addresses supporters at Pavoorchatram in Thenkasi district on Sunday during his election campaign for the Tamil Nadu Assembly polls. — PTI

## Modi may control 'corrupt' EPS, but not Tamils: Rahul

*Says Tamil Nadu now needs a leader like former chief minister Kamaraj*

ARULOLI M  
TENKASI/ TIRUNELVELI,  
FEB. 28

To be worthy to earn the respect of the Tamil people, Prime Minister Narendra Modi should keep his mouth shut and ears open when he visits the state, suggested Rahul Gandhi, adding a word to chief minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami also, to stop stooping before Prime Minister Modi if he wants votes this election. Addressing the electorates at Pavoorchatram in Tenkasi constituency, in the second day of his three-day election campaign in the southern districts on Sunday, Congress leader, Rahul Gandhi criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi of trying to control Tamil Nadu as he does

**I'm looking forward for a government to work for the people after the election, so that the state would reach its full potential in all fields — Rahul Gandhi, Congress leader**

with its chief minister, Edappadi K. Palaniswami, threatening him with the ED and CBI.

"He may control the chief minister as the latter is corrupt, but not the Tamil people," said Mr Gandhi. The state now needs a leader like former chief minister Kamaraj, who listened to the people and implemented schemes for their development. So, Modi also should keep his ears open and listen to the people, and keep his mouth shut.

"I'm looking forward for a government to work for the people after the elec-

tion, so that the state would reach its full potential in all fields," he added, promising his commitment for the formation of such a state government.

Participating in an interaction with professors and teachers, organised by the People's Education Protection Movement at St. Xavier's College in Tirunelveli on Sunday, Mr Gandhi responding to the teacher participants on varied issues relating to the system of education, said, "The Centre's 'new education' policy is an attempt to promote a particular ideology. The

National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) was framed without proper consultations with major stakeholders in the education system, the teachers, and the student community. It aimed at centralisation, communalisation and commercialisation of the education system in the country."

Clarifying his stance, Mr Gandhi said that he was not against private participation in education, but the government should not shirk off its responsibility in ensuring free education to the poor people.

To a professor's question, who asked if the ideas he was propagating was not utopian, Mr Gandhi said that he agreed that the Congress has been facing a formidable enemy, who had been crushing his opponents.

## Isro chairman: 14 missions lined up for launch in 2021

**Sriharikota, Feb. 28:** Isro has lined up 14 missions for launch in 2021, including the space agency's first unmanned mission later this year, its chairman K. Sivan said on Sunday.

He was addressing scientists at the Mission Control Centre here after the successful launch of Amazonia-1 of Brazil and 18 other satellites.

"Definitely our hands are full. We are going to have something like 14 missions this year. Seven launch vehicle missions and six satellite missions, as well as our first unmanned mission by the end of the year. That is our target and the scientists are working on that," he said.

Isro plans to take up two unmanned space missions before the Gaganyaan-manned space mission. — PTI

## One yr on, LNJP corona warriors recall challenges

**New Delhi, Feb. 28:** At state-run LNJP Hospital, the nerve centre of Delhi's battle against the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, many doctors at times had to wear PPE kits for nearly 18 hours to attend to struggling patients in the sweltering heat when its first wave had hit the city and the mortality was piled up with bodies.

It's been one year since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in the national capital, and daily cases and death counts have both come down significantly, and scenes of distress in the hospital's corridors and outside morgue have been replaced by talks about the ongoing vaccination.

It was on March 1 that the first case of Covid-19 was recorded in the city, a few months after the "unpredictable virus" had wreaked havoc in Wuhan in China, where it was first reported globally.

Rohit Datta, a businessman from east Delhi, who had returned from Italy last year, tested positive for the new virus that had left the world puzzled and in a grip of extreme fear.

The world had not seen anything like this before since the Spanish Flu of 1918, and certainly not in India. As the cases began to spiral in large parts of the country, including Delhi, a nationwide lockdown was imposed late March by the government to contain the spread of the virus.

While most people were practically left confined to their houses for several months and work from home became the new nor-

## Mantri praises health staff for fight against pandemic

**New Delhi, Feb. 28:** India has been able to perform well on various COVID-19 management parameters and maintained one of the lowest fatality rates and highest recovery rates in the world due to a pre-emptive, proactive and graded approach, health minister Harsh Vardhan said Sunday.

He made these remarks at the Global Indian Physicians Congress, organised by the Global Association for Physicians of Indian Origin (GAPIO), through video conference, the ministry said in a statement. Mr Vardhan praised the contribution of medical professionals in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

"As the world faced the unprecedented crisis of Covid-19, it has been our doctors, nurses and healthcare workers who have cemented their position as the foremost champions of humanity, saving

humankind as it was starting at an existential crisis," Mr Vardhan was quoted as saying.

"I salute their courage, valour and selflessness in serving society. No words are enough to express gratitude towards all the corona warriors, who risked their own lives to save the lives of others. It's unfortunate and a great personal loss for me that so many of them lost their lives during this time," he said.

In this context, the Union minister also noted GAPIO's efforts towards establishing the Global Indian Physician Covid-19 Collaborative to continuously share their knowledge and experiences to arrive at the best possible approach for the management of Covid, the statement said. He took the occasion to highlight the government's efforts in controlling the Covid-19 pandemic. — PTI

mal, healthcare workers faced the heavy brunt of the pandemic, as doctors, nurses, served patients day in and day out, without any weekly breaks, isolated from their family members for days, weeks or even months.

Amit Anand, a 35-year-doctor at the 2,000-bed LNJP Hospital who has been on duty since the outbreak of the pandemic here, said, "It's one year of Covid-19, and I also met

my family back home, after a gap of one year."

The Begusarai native, whose wife also holds an MBBS degree, said, "I met my wife and son, now two-and-a-half years old, in Bokaro this February, and he almost didn't recognise me. The pandemic literally separated us from our families. But we have to do our job, which we have chosen, so that motivated us throughout this very tough period." — PTI

## Tikait to tour five states in March to drum up support

**Ghaziabad, Feb. 28:** Farmer leader Rakesh Tikait will be touring five states in March to drum up support for the ongoing farmers' protest against Centre's new agriculture laws, a Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) office-bearer said.

Tikait, the national spokesperson of the BKU and a prominent face of the farmers' protest, will begin the tour from March 1, the office-bearer said.

"Farmers' meetings will be held in Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana, while two meetings will also be held in Uttar Pradesh in March," BKU media in-charge Dharmendra Malik said.

Two meetings will be held in Rajasthan and three in Madhya Pradesh. The last three meetings will be held on March 20, 21 and 22 in Karnataka, Malik said.

"One event is scheduled on March 6 in Telangana, but we have not got permission for it yet due to some election in the state. If permission is granted, the meeting in Telangana will be held as per schedule," he said.

Thousands of farmers are camping at Delhi's border points at Tikri, Singhu and Ghaziapur since November with a demand that the Centre should repeal the contentious farm laws enacted in September last year and frame a new one guaranteeing the minimum support price (MSP) on crops.

Tikait is leading the protest at Ghaziapur. The government, which has held 11 rounds of formal talks with the protesting farm unions, maintains that the laws are pro-farmer.

Meanwhile, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday called the new farm laws a "death warrant" for farmers, claiming they would take away their land and reduce them to labourers on their own farms.

Addressing a Kisan Mahapanchayat organised in Meerut by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) against the Centre's contentious laws, Kejriwal said farmers are continuously agitating in the cold because their farms will be taken over by capitalists. — PTI



R. Hari Kumar  
**R. HARI KUMAR APPOINTED WESTERN NAVAL COMMANDER**

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 28

Vice Admiral R. Hari Kumar on Sunday took over as the Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief (FOC-in-C) of Indian Navy's most crucial command Western Naval Command that is responsible for the all naval forces in the Arabian Sea and western parts of the Indian Ocean.

Western Naval Command saw extensive operational deployments in response to developing security situation post the Pulwama attack and the Galwan crisis in Ladakh across the Indian Ocean Region.

Vice Admiral Kumar succeeds Vice Admiral Ajit Kumar, who retires upon superannuation, after an illustrious career, spanning forty years, in the Indian Navy.

At a ceremony held at the Command Post of Headquarters, Western Naval Command, the outgoing and incoming Commanders-in-Chief were accorded a Guard of Honour after which the formal handing-taking over took place with the handing over of the baton to the new Commander-in-Chief. On assuming command Vice Admiral Kumar laid a wreath at the Gaurav Stambh monument.

Vice Admiral Kumar was CISC/ VCDS (Vice Chief of Defence Staff) at HQIDS prior to taking over as FOC-in-C Western Naval Command.

Vice Admiral Kumar, an alumnus of the National Defence Academy was commissioned into the Indian Navy in January 1983. He specialised in Gunnery and has commanded five ships including a Destroyer and the aircraft carrier INS Viraat.

**MADE IN INDIA** Only when every person takes pride in indigenous product, India will become self-reliant: PM

## Aatma Nirbhar Bharat a national spirit, says Modi

**New Delhi, Feb. 28:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday underlined that Aatma Nirbhar Bharat is not just a government policy but also a national spirit, and said the mantra of self-reliant India is reaching villages of the country.

Modi highlighted an assertion made by a person who had written to him from Kolkata that the Aatma Nirbhar Bharat campaign is not just a government policy but also a national spirit, and said this was hundred per cent correct.

When every person in the country takes pride in indigenous products and connects with the idea of self-reliance, Aatma Nirbhar Bharat doesn't just remain an economic campaign but becomes a national spirit, he asserted.



**When we see fighter plane Tejas made in our own country doing acrobatics in the sky, when Made in India tanks, Made in India missiles increase our pride..., then our heads are held high**

— Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

"When we see fighter plane Tejas made in our own country doing acrobatics in the sky, when Made in India tanks, Made in India missiles increase our pride, when we see Made in India coaches in Metro trains in wealthy-advanced nations, when we see Made in India Corona vaccines reaching dozens of countries, then our heads are held high," Modi said.

Noting that is not that only bigger things will make India self-reliant, he said, be it textiles Made in

India, handicraft goods made by talented artisans of the country, electronic appliances, mobiles, in every field "we have to raise this pride".

"When we move forward with this thought, only then will we become self-reliant in the truest sense," the PM said.

Modi expressed happiness that the mantra of self-reliant India is reaching the villages. He cited several examples of people using innovative techniques to emerge as shining examples of Aatma

## PM calls for 100-day campaign to clean up all water bodies

**New Delhi, Feb. 28:** Underlining the importance of collective responsibility towards water conservation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday called for a 100-day campaign to clean up all water bodies and prepare them for rain water harvesting before the monsoon season starts.

In his monthly *Mann Ki Baat* broadcast, Mr Modi said water has been crucial for the development of humankind for centuries.

"We have to understand our collective responsibility towards water conservation," he said.

The Prime Minister also

said that when people feel proud of indigenous products then Aatma Nirbhar Bharat does not just remain an economic programme but becomes a national spirit.

Noting that monsoon will begin in many parts of the country by around May-June, the Prime Minister asked can there be a 100-day public campaign to clean up all nearby water bodies and prepare those for rain water conservation.

In this regard, the Union jal shakti ministry is also launching "Catch the rain" campaign and its main theme is "catch the

rain, where it falls, when it falls," he said.

"This is the best time to think about water conservation in the summer months ahead," Mr Modi said.

He also said there is a need to make science more popular across the country and asserted that science cannot be limited to physics-chemistry and labs. Mr Modi called for expanding science with a mantra of "lab to land".

During the broadcast, the Prime Minister also rued not being able to make enough efforts to learn the world's oldest language, Tamil. — PTI



## SHORT TAKES

## TN quota issue: SC to hear plea Mar. 5

**New Delhi:** The Supreme Court has agreed to hear on March 5 a plea challenging the constitutional validity of the 1993 Tamil Nadu law providing 69 per cent quota to scheduled castes (SCs), scheduled tribes (STs) and backward classes in admissions and government jobs in the state. A bench of Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and Dinesh Maheshwari on Friday took note of submissions that a similar plea against the Tamil Nadu quota law has been pending before the apex court since 2012, and ordered tagging of the fresh plea filed by one Dinesh B this year with the earlier one. The bench also said that the application of National Union of Backward Classes, SCs, STs and minorities, seeking to be made a party in the pending proceedings would also be taken up by it on March 5. — PTI

## 60-yr-old arrested for raping 8-yr-old

**Bhadoli (UP):** A 60-year-old man was arrested on Sunday for allegedly raping an eight-year-old girl in the Gyanpur police station area of Bhadohi district. Gyanpur police station station house officer (SHO) Mohammad Alamgir said the incident took place on Friday when the girl had gone to fields outside her village to collect firewood. The accused followed the girl, caught hold of her there and forced himself upon her, the SHO said. The girl, however, raised an alarm, prompting people to rush to her aid, the SHO said. The accused then fled the spot while the child's family members took her to a hospital, he added. They informed the police on Saturday after which a case was registered, the station house officer said. — PTI

## GIRL OVERPOWERS 2 SNATCHERS, HANDS THEM OVER TO COPS

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO  
BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 28

A girl in Odisha capital Bhubaneswar on Saturday evening exhibited uncommon bravery as she overpowered two youths who attempted to snatch her mobile phone. The girl, identified as Sushree Rinu, not only subjugated the mobile snatchers but ensured that they were caught and handed over to the police. The incident occurred near Dumduma auto-rickshaw stand, in the northern parts of the city. As per reports, Rinu was returning home on a two-wheeler when the two miscreants attempted to loot her mobile phone and other valuables. Instead of panicking, Rinu decided to fight back and teach the miscreants a lesson. Rinu has now been lauded for her bravery by people in the city. Rinu has reportedly sustained multiple injuries in the incident. "I was returning home after work when I realised that two youths were following me. I was speaking over the phone when one of the youths snatched my mobile phone. Though I screamed for help, nobody helped. Later, I decided to follow the miscreants on my two-wheeler," said Rinu.

## Congress: Bengal needs to be rescued from Trinamul's rule

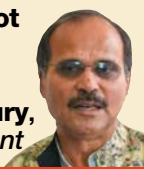
Says Opp. grand alliance to win polls, both BJP & TMC trying to divide people

**Kolkata, Feb. 28:** — PTI The Opposition "grand alliance" will win the upcoming Assembly elections in West Bengal, senior Congress leaders asserted on Sunday while addressing a mega rally in Kolkata, maintaining that the country needs to be saved from the BJP and the state rescued from the ruling Trinamul Congress.

Addressing lakhs of supporters at the Brigade parade grounds, state Congress president Adhir Chowdhury said the gathering proved that the Bengal elections will not be a two-cornered contest. "The grand alliance of the Left-Congress and

**The grand alliance of the Left-Congress and other secular forces will defeat both the TMC and the BJP... In the future, there will not be any BJP or TMC. Only the grand alliance will remain.**

— Adhir Chowdhury,  
Bengal Congress president



other secular forces will defeat both the TMC and the BJP," Mr Chowdhury, the leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha, said.

He said that the BJP and the TMC want that other than the two, there should not exist any other political force in Bengal and that no other party should come between them.

"But in the future, there will not be any BJP or TMC. Only the grand alliance will remain," he claimed. Those trying to propagate the idea that TMC and BJP are the only ones contesting the polls in West Bengal have been proved wrong by the huge gathering, he said. "Morning is the harbinger

of the day, and this meeting proves that the TMC and BJP will be defeated in the coming elections," Mr Chowdhury said.

He said that the goal of the alliance is to ensure the victory of secularism and democracy and to defeat communal and repressive politics in Bengal.

Alleging that both the BJP and the TMC are trying to divide the people, Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel said that the country has to be saved from one, and Bengal has to be rescued from the other.

"Both the BJP and TMC are trying to divide the people," he said. — PTI



Supporters during a joint election rally of the Congress, Left and Indian Secular Front (ISF) in Kolkata on Sunday.

— PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

## Army recruitment exam is cancelled after paper leaked

At least 3 persons held in Pune so far

**New Delhi, Feb. 28:** The Army has cancelled an examination for pan-India recruitment of general duty personnel after paper was found to have been leaked, officials said on Sunday.

They said at least three persons have been arrested in Pune so far in this connection.

"The Indian Army has zero tolerance towards corrupt practices in the recruitment process for selection of suitable candidates," an official said.

Based on a proactive joint operation with the local police at Pune, a case of possible leakage of question paper for the Common Entrance Examination for Recruitment of Soldiers (General Duty) was reported on Saturday night, the official added.

While further investigation is still underway, it was decided to cancel the examination to ensure continuous transparency in the recruitment process, he added.

The soldiers (general duty) are the backbone of the Army and consist mainly of fighting troops

▶ **'THE INDIAN Army has zero tolerance towards corrupt practices in the recruitment process for selection of suitable candidates,' an official said**

apart from other trades. They are enrolled into Arms or Services.

In arms, they could join the Infantry, Artillery, Armoured Corps, Engineers or the Army Air Defence (AAD) as fighting troops, drivers, operators, gunners and many other general duties.

In Services, they could be enrolled into the Army Service Corps (ASC), Army Ordnance Corps (AOC), Army Medical Corps (AMC) on General Duties, operators and drivers.

The Indian Army recruitment offices conduct exams for enrolment of jawans, while officers are recruited through the Combined Defence Services (CDS) exam conducted by the Union Public Service Commission and the Staff Selection Commission (SSC). — PTI

## Gang takes away ATM after vain bid to steal cash in TN

**Coimbatore, Feb. 28:** A four-member gang stole an ATM (automated teller machine) by pulling it out of the kiosk with the help of a vehicle after failing to break the teller machine to lift the cash, the police said on Sunday.

The incident was reported at Periyapalayam near Tirupur, the police said.

Passersby noticed the door of the ATM kiosk, belonging to a nationalised bank, broken open early this morning and alerted the police.

Fingerprint experts and a sniffer dog were pressed into service as part of the

investigation, the police said. CCTV footage showed the masked men entering the kiosk, tying one end of a rope to the ATM and pulling it out from the other end tied to a four-wheeler as they could not break open the teller machine, they said.

The vehicle was later found abandoned near Perundurai in Erode district, they added.

Bank officials told the police there could be ₹2 lakh in the missing ATM. The teller machine was last filled up with ₹15 lakh on February 19.

— PTI

## Bengal will get better of BJP &amp; 'its B-team Mamata' in polls: ISF's Siddiqui 'People will teach Didi lesson for arrogance'

**Kolkata, Feb. 28:** The newly-formed Indian Secular Front (ISF) led by Abbas Siddiqui on Sunday vowed to defeat the TMC and the BJP in the upcoming Assembly elections, asserting that people of West Bengal would teach chief minister Mamata Banerjee "a lesson for her arrogance".

Proclaiming support for the Left Front and its allies in the state, Siddiqui said Bengal will get the better of the BJP and "its

B-team Mamata Banerjee" in the polls. However, in a word of caution for the Congress, with which his party's talks are in choppy waters, Mr Siddiqui said that he is in politics to become a partner and get his rightful claims.

"Mamata and her TMC have destroyed democracy and unleashed anarchy. They will pay for it in the elections. The TMC government did nothing for the minorities and the backward communities of

**Mamata and her TMC have destroyed democracy and unleashed anarchy. They will pay for it in the elections.**

— Abbas Siddiqui,  
ISF leader

the state," he said, addressing a mega joint rally at the Brigade

Parade Ground in Kolkata.

The ISF, floated by influential Muslim cleric of Hooghly district's Furfura Sharif last month, is against the politics of appeasement, he said.

"We don't want appeasement. We want our rightful claims, just like any other citizen of this country. We too have equal rights," Mr Siddiqui said.

The BJP often accuses the TMC of appeasing Muslims for vote bank politics.

"No one is allowed to speak in Bengal, except a few brave hearts like us. The chief minister has lost her sleep. It is our battle to free Bengal from dictatorship," he said.

Lashing out at the TMC for allegedly betraying the minorities of the state, Siddiqui said that they will ensure that the ruling party loses its political significance after the polls.

"We won't get swayed by false promises," he said.

— PTI

## Jaish-ul-Hind: Responsible for bomb scare outside 'Antilia'

SHAHAB ANSARI  
MUMBAI, FEB. 28

Jaish-ul-Hind, the organisation previously unheard of, has claimed responsibility for planting an explosives-laden SUV outside Mukesh Ambani's house. It has demanded money through bitcoin from Reliance Industries Ltd's chairman. The same organisation has claimed responsibility for the blast outside the Israel embassy attack in Delhi.

The organisation claimed responsibility by posting a message on social media messaging app Telegram on Sunday.

The message on social media posted by the organisation stated that the man who placed the SUV near Ambani residence has reached the safe house and that this was "just a trailer and big picture is yet to come".

The message further said, "You (Ambanis) know what you have to do, just transfer the money regarding which we have told you earlier".

The organisation has also threatened Mukesh and Nita Ambani that the next time the SUV will ram into their kids if the businessman does not give into their demands.



Tourists take sledge rides after fresh snowfall at the ski resort of Gulmarg on Sunday.

— PTI

## Asthana front-runner for post of CBI chief

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, FEB. 28

The Central government has reportedly initiated the process for the appointment of a full-fledged CBI director. Final decision, sources said, will be taken in a day or two.

The government on February 3 appointed Praveen Sinha, a 1988-batch Gujarat cadre IPS officer, as the acting chief of the CBI. Mr Sinha is

currently posted as additional director in the CBI. While several names are doing the rounds, Gujarat cadre IPS officer and currently director general (DG) of the Border Security Force (BSF), Rakesh Asthana, is the front-runner for the post of the next CBI chief.

According to sources, several other senior IPS officers of the 1984, 1985 and 1986 batch are also in the running for the top post, including Y.C. Modi,

who is currently heading the NIA, Arun Kumar, director general (DG) of the Railway Protection Force and Rakesh Asthana (DG, BSF). Besides, names of Kerala cadre IPS officer Loknath Behra and H.C. Awasthi, DG (Uttar Pradesh), are also doing the rounds, sources said.

The CBI director is chosen by a high-powered committee of the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition and Chief

Justice of India. "The high-powered committee is expected to meet in a day or two. The committee will appointment a full-fledged CBI director", sources said.

The CBI recently gave clean chit to Mr Asthana in the Gujarat-based pharma company Sterling Biotech bribery case. Earlier, he was cleared by the CBI last March in another bribery case, linked to the Kanpur-based meat exporter Moin Qureshi.

## Maharashtra mantri quits

■ **Continued from Page 1** should come out through an impartial probe."

Pooja Chavan allegedly ended her life by jumping off a building in Pune on February 8. Mr Rathod is a four-time MLA and a strong leader from the Vidarbha region.

According to sources, the minister had requested the CM not to accept his resignation until the inquiry is completed. Mr Thackeray, however, did

not budge as he was apparently livid over Mr Rathod's show of strength at Pohradevi temple in Washim earlier this week, violating the Covid-19 guidelines.

Mr Thackeray said that "dirty politics was being done to ruin someone's political life". He said: "Rathod has given his resignation. It is our responsibility to be just. We have directed an impartial probe in this."

## Yechury: Mamata may join hands with NDA if Bengal results 'hung'

■ **Continued from Page 1** doing the same to youths what the Narendra Modi government is doing against the farmers.

"Many people ask me what we would do in case of a hung assembly. I tell them to direct their question to the TMC as they are in the best position to answer it.

"The TMC has been part of NDA (for several years) since 1998. It was part of the NDA

government (at the Centre). In case of a hung assembly, I am confident that the TMC would join hands with the BJP to form the state's government," he said.

"All the secular forces have to fight together to defeat the Trinamul Congress and the BJP in Bengal. Once we stop this communal juggernaut in Bengal, we will stop it in the country also," Mr Yechury said. — PTI

## Seniors, etc to get Covid-19 vaccine jab from today

■ **Continued from Page 1** The number of those who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,07,75,169, which translates to a national Covid-19 recovery rate of 97.10 per cent.

On the vaccination front, a total of 1,43,01,266 doses have so far been administered through 2,92,312 sessions. These include 66,69,985 healthcare workers (first dose), 24,56,191 healthcare workers (second dose) and 51,75,090 frontline workers (first dose).

To ramp up the vaccination capacity, the government has roped in 20,000 private hospitals and 10,000 government centres.

Other private hospitals empanelled under state governments' health insurance schemes can also participate as Covid-19 Vaccination Centres

(CVCs).

People who have at least one of the 20 co-morbidities, including diabetes and heart failure with hospital admission in the past one year, will be prioritised in the second phase.

The prioritised co-morbidities include post-cardiac transplant, moderate or severe valvular heart disease, end-stage kidney disease on haemodialysis, a severe respiratory disease with hospitalisation in the last two years, primary immunodeficiency diseases/HIV infection and angina and hypertension/sion/diabetes on treatment.

Vaccination will be free of charge at government vaccination centres. Those taking the vaccine at any empanelled private health facility will have to pay a pre-fixed charge. All that one will need to get

vaccinated is a simplified one-page certificate signed by any registered medical practitioner. The certificate can either be uploaded on Co-WIN 2.0 by the beneficiary while self-registering, or a hard copy can be carried by the beneficiary to the Covid Vaccination Centres (CVC).

The first is advance self-registration, under which beneficiaries will be able to self-register in advance by downloading the CO-WIN 2.0 portal and through other IT applications like Aarogya Setu. This will show the government and private hospitals serving as Covid vaccination centres with the date and time of available schedules.

The beneficiary will be able to choose the CVC of his/her choice and book an appointment for vaccination.

## Shah tries to seal TN seat deal

■ **Continued from Page 1** Gandhi family" from out of the ₹15,000 crore Central funds.

The home minister said the Congress government which collapsed after losing its majority had indulged in petty politics over Central schemes meant for the people of Puducherry. Hitting out at Mr Narayanasamy for blaming the BJP for the fall of his government, Mr Shah said many senior leaders were leaving the Congress "because it is collapsing across the country due to dynasty politics".

During his speech, Mr Shah had time to aim his barbs at his pet target Rahul Gandhi. Mr Shah took an elaborate swipe at him, mocking him for saying there was no "dedicated" fisheries ministry at the Centre, pointing out that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had set one up two years ago.

"Rahul Gandhi said a few days ago here: 'Why has the Modi government not created a separate department for fishermen?' Narendra Modi has already worked to form a separate ministry for fishermen... Rahul

bhaiyya ... you were on leave, so you are not aware," Mr Shah said, to rub it into the former Congress president.

The "you were on leave" swipe was aimed at Rahul Gandhi's frequent foreign trips abroad, which give endless ammunition to the BJP. "I want to ask the people of Puducherry... the party whose leader has been in the Lok Sabha for four terms ... does not know that the fisheries department started in the country two years ago. Can that party take care of the welfare of Puducherry?" he wondered.

## Tamil 'beautiful', I failed to learn it: PM

■ **Continued from Page 1** our pride, when we see Made in India coaches in Metro trains in wealthy-advanced nations, when we see Made in India corona vaccines reaching dozens of countries, then our heads rise higher."

In a boost to water conservation, Mr Modi also announced the launch of a 100-day campaign for "cleaning up water sources around us and conserving rainwater", adding: "We shall get existing rainwater harvesting systems

repaired, clean up lakes and ponds in villages, remove impediments in the way of water flowing into water sources". The PM also paid tribute to the memory of sage Ravidas, who lived in the 15th and 16th centuries AD.



## THE ASIAN AGE

1 MARCH 2021

# Code flawed, equates media, gossip, art

A code of ethics and a three-tier grievance redressal mechanism are applicable to news publishers, Over The Top (OTT) entertainment platforms and digital media encompassing the social media that is used by millions of Indians. The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 have recycled many existing provisions with the sole aim of establishing stringent government control over the giants of the Big Tech world. The logic of placing the digital news media in the same basket as a social gossip platform and entertainment channel is fundamentally flawed.

Official India is under pressure like never before. The country's international image has been hit hard in the arrest of Disha Ravi after India chose to respond to the likes of pop singer Rihanna and climate activist Greta Thunberg. The response is seen now in the new moves to rein in the digital world, which fall just short of the notorious pre-publication censorship attempted during the Emergency in 1975. As a hypersensitive nation that makes the most requests to digital media sites to take down content, India will be judged by its intent in its actions after empowering itself formally.

**The streaming media like OTT platforms also host creativity in avant-garde content and it's moot whether government servants can stand in judgment on such matters**

The second fundamental flaw in this hotch-potch approach, which mercifully falls short of creating a Great Firewall type of censorship as in China's total control over its Internet ecosystem, is that compliance regulations are being added to existing provisions even as a bipartisan Parliamentary panel is studying the subject in detail after inviting representatives of Big Tech to depose before it. The impatience is owed to the image hits and subsequent crude retaliatory responses by the bureaucracy in intimidat-

ing the media and criminalising dissent. The sum total of this effort at damage control is the casting of a huge shadow on media freedom in the guise of averting irresponsible comment on social media by individuals.

There is little to fault the framing of compliance requirements being thrust upon a social media that has till now gone scot-free while monetising hate and doing little to keep out fake news. They cannot host all manner of irresponsible comment in the guise of freedom of speech either. They may have armed the common man with a platform to vent out his angst, but they are not a substitute for organised news presentation. Nor can news media be clubbed with social media under one umbrella. News content is subject to various rules and regulations already and additional compliance requirements will only burden them while threatening their established news streaming procedures through oversight committees filled with bureaucrats.

The sensitivities of the bureaucracy or the ruling party alone cannot be the sole criterion for reining in the social media. In the normal course, the government should have prepared legislation for data protection and privacy issues rather than look at it in the narrow perspective of controlling opinion being expressed on social media even as certain elements tyrannise the net through vicious online trolling. The streaming media like OTT platforms also host creativity in avant-garde content and it's moot whether government servants can stand in judgment on such matters as the art of cinema. In short, these rules are best abandoned and legislation prepared with greater thought.

# Stakes high in state polls

The elections to four state Assemblies and a Union territory in March and April this year will assume added significance because it would be a major milestone in the lives of two major national parties in their efforts to survive and succeed even as it will decide the fate of several regional parties.

As for the BJP, the south and the east were a forbidden territory in its formative years but not anymore. It is ruling Karnataka, Assam and Tripura, and is a partner in government in many northeastern states. The party is now eyeing West Bengal, once a formidable Left citadel, with some confidence. A win there will not just add a state to its kitty; it will make for a major psychological breakthrough. The party, by virtue of its being in power at the Centre, has ensured its political relevance in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry through deft political manoeuvring.

The stakes are high for the Congress, whether the party realises it or not. The fall of the ministry in Puducherry will have consequences in both Tamil Nadu and Kerala: The DMK has now been less accommodative of its claims in Tamil Nadu while in Kerala, the party and the UDF it heads will have to convince the voters that they are not up for sale if they were to be voted back. It is also to be seen how the party puts up a fight in Assam.

The regional majors — the Trinamul Congress, the AIADMK and the DMK — will have their bases intact whether they win or lose but power is a major factor that keeps them going. A loss is sure to leave the Trinamul gasping for breath; and hence the stiff opposition to the eight-phase voting in the state. The Left is of little consequence in West Bengal and hence a return to power in Kerala has become all the more critical for the formation. A very interesting and significant electoral battle looks to be unfolding.

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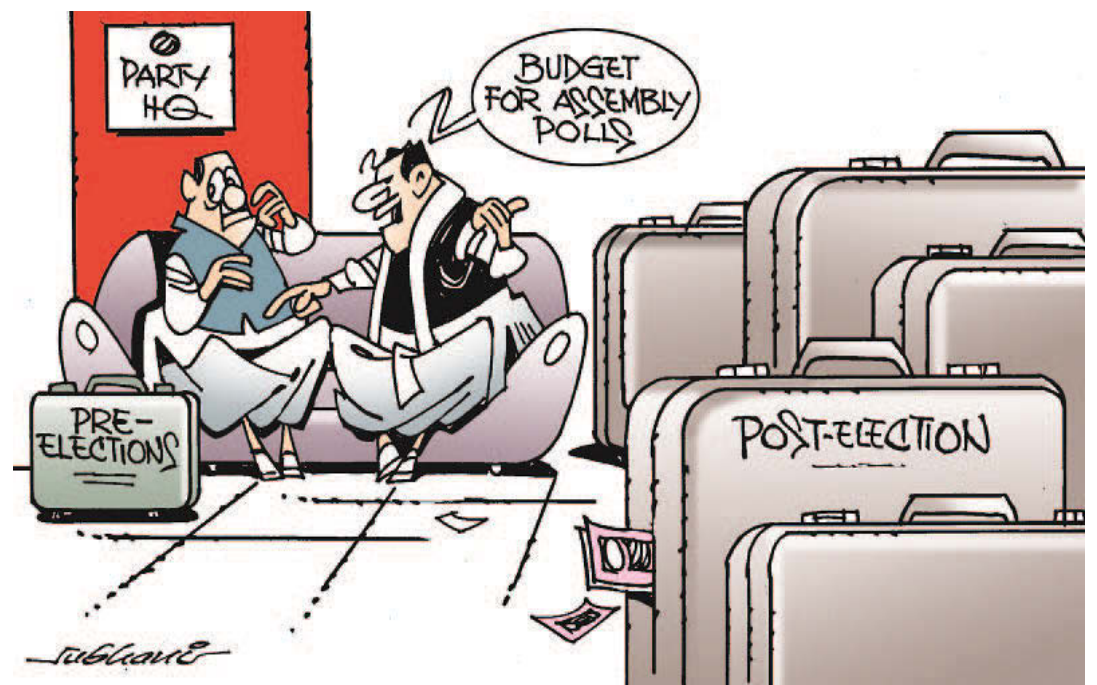
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Subhani



# Special effort needed in Pak to make truce work



Syed Ata Hasnain

No one in India or for that matter in Pakistan seems too enthused by the joint statement of the two directors-general of military operations (DGMOs) of India and Pakistan recommitting to the spirit of the November 2003 ceasefire. It essentially means an attempted quieting of the Line of Control and removal of the dangers of escalation caused by the artillery exchanges and missile attacks on villages and fortifications which cause casualties among the civilian and uniformed elements in the LoC's vicinity. The cynicism is understandable; renewed attempts have been made in the past too but unless actions in the military domain are accompanied by those in the political, diplomatic and social domains the glue for peace and stability just doesn't set. Quoting statistics of ceasefire violations (CFVs) over the years is meaningless. It's more important to understand how and why those ceasefire agreements did not succeed.

CFVs have three connotations. First is the tactical purpose; usually to give covering fire for terrorist infiltration, a practice which has been on the wane with quieter means of infiltration. Second is a reminder to the world by Pakistan to project the continued existence of the J&K issue; a few casualties, civilian or military, does get sentiments high in both India and Pakistan, with the world worrying about escalation between the two nuclear-armed neighbours. The initiation of such CFVs by Pakistan is often in conjunction with politico-diplomatic events like the UN General Assembly session or timed with visits of important international leaders to

either country. The third is usually a spirit of competition, also called "moral ascendancy"; and no specific reason for CFVs except something contrived such as an allegation of construction of fresh fortifications.

What it takes to keep the ceasefire in place without violations is the existence of a conducive political and diplomatic environment, absence or minimisation of infiltration related events and stability in hinterland streets. The November 2003 ceasefire, many times incorrectly called a unilateral ceasefire by Pakistan, was a result of tremendous backroom work by the political leaderships and diplomats who too understood the significance of a quiet LoC on the overall peace process. This time Moed Yusuf, Pakistan's national security adviser, has denied any back channels were worked between him and India's NSA Ajit Doval and ascribes the ceasefire agreement to military-to-military discussions and consultation. This appears to be Pakistan's way of trying to prove the initiative didn't come from it but rather from India. In other words, that Pakistan had minimal compulsion to call for a ceasefire and attaches little importance to it. That is usually a ploy by a country known to resort to violations of international norms.

Even if we agree that it's unimportant about who took the initiative, will a political-diplomatic situation exist in the near future to allow the ceasefire to persist without CFVs. It is best not to expect a zero CFV situation in the near future as flexibility towards the agreement may actually help to give it more substance. Imran Khan and Moed Yusuf have both tried to focus on

one theme — that is the absolute lack of any change by Pakistan in its J&K policy — even as the ceasefire comes into effect. In the 2004-08 the ceasefire held with minimal CFVs except in some areas like Mendhar. Both sides continued back channel discussions and didn't allow CFVs to upset them. It lasted as long as there was no big-ticket event; Mumbai 26/11 effectively put an end to them and the CFVs multiplied progressively. A big-ticket event remains a threat this time too.

The strategic environment of the emerging times appears different from the recent past. Internationally, there appears a trend towards dilution of confrontation to assist the world recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. The passing of the Donald Trump era is marked by new hope which America's new President Joe Biden and his administration is attempting to facilitate. Pakistan's importance due to its influence in Afghanistan and the high-end relationship it has with China gives it scope to punch above its weight. It also knows that handling Afghanistan if the US withdraws fully is going to be a Pakistani responsibility. With China also not averse to finding an exit from the embarrassment it suffered in Ladakh, Pakistan, by initiating the ceasefire recommitment, is reaping the benefits of the emerging environment. If it can reduce violence and curtail the chances of a larger conflagration on its eastern border, it can handle Afghanistan far better; that wins US support too as it helps in an easier draw-down and eventual departure of US troops. With Ladakh cooling down, there's little sense for

Pakistan to keep the LoC or Kashmir hot. But everything is temporary, for how long it cannot be said. Yet, it provides a window for all stakeholders to revisit their core interests and examine their bottom lines for any possibilities of permanent peace.

With Pakistan reiterating there is no change to its J&K policy and India going strongly in the direction of full and final integration of the people and territories of J&K under the Indian Constitution, the ceasefire seems only a positive blip in the canvas of conflict and despair. No one expects any change in either policy, and there's no finality of outcomes expected anytime soon. The ceasefire is something which creates a more congenial environment in which to improve ties, which can then eventually help resolve the tenuous issues between the two countries; no one expects any miracles in the short term.

Noticeably, in the midst of all the buildup of negativity on the J&K and Ladakh fronts, it was only Imran Khan who continued his fusillade, personal and otherwise, against the Indian leadership. Prime Minister Narendra Modi maintained a statesman-like approach, not naming the adversaries or indulging in name-calling, with the fullest regard to the future, in which he knew negotiation and discussion will be with the very same people you abuse.

The obstacles to the ceasefire are many, the chief one being the lack of acceptance of peace with India by Pakistan's "Deep State", and the intent of the jihadi elements to disallow any peace. It is only a special effort by the Pakistan Army, civil society in Pakistan and the media which can hope to ensure that the ceasefire lasts and becomes a stepping stone to the beginning of a peace process between India and Pakistan.

*The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, is a former GOC of the Srinagar-based 15 Corps*

**With Ladakh cooling down, there's little sense for Pakistan to keep the LoC or Kashmir hot. But everything is temporary, for how long it cannot be said.**

## LETTERS

### SHIFTING GOALPOSTS

This may be quibbling, but if the eight-phase poll schedule in West Bengal bears testimony to a "broken" law and order situation in the state, can it be concluded that Left-ruled Kerala is superior to BJP-governed Assam in this regard? After all, Assam witnesses an additional two phases of polling as compared to Kerala despite having 14 seats fewer in the state legislature than its southern counterpart! During the parliamentary polls, the BJP used to relentlessly mock the Opposition with "Who is your prime ministerial face?" Would it, in its turn, enlighten us as to who its chief ministerial face is in West Bengal?

**Kajal Chatterjee**  
Kolkata

### REIN GHOSH IN

**IT IS SHOCKING** that BJP leader Dilip Ghosh has claimed that if his party is voted to power, it would ensure a single-phase election. Elections are decided by the Election Commission, not the party in power, and such claims will only succeed in raising needless doubts on the integrity of the Commission. The top brass of the BJP must pull up Mr Ghosh. During election campaigns, parties promise the moon routinely, but this matter is too serious to be ignored.

**Anthony Henriques**  
Mumbai

### GIVE INDIANS CREDIT

**IT IS INCONGRUOUS** that many former English players have laid the blame squarely on the pitch for England's debacle in the second and third Tests at Chennai and Ahmedabad. India did well to come back from a game down to outwit the Poms in the last two Tests. Joe Root and the company must also blame for displaying a lack of commitment in negotiating the spinners. The pitch critics must stop cribbing and give Kohli's devils their due.

**N.J. Ravi Chander**  
Bengaluru

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Amit Banerjee (Feb. 24). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Kishwar Desai  
London Diary



# Britain's spot of schadenfreude; pregnancy triggers definition row

It is only befitting that good news about the vaccination drive is accompanied with good weather too — which for UK means sunny days here again! The mood has definitely begun to lift. There is also much more confidence because the vaccination programme has been so successful. Twenty million have already been vaccinated (36 per cent of population), more than in France, Germany, Italy and Spain put together. There is the joy of revenge, having Brexit, that Europe is doing worse. We are now vaccinating the age group 60 plus with the promise of all by end-June. (I have, too, received my call for the vaccine from NHS!) And the best part is that the government has also ordered the single shot Johnson and Johnson vaccine which can be stored in a refrigerator — and thus does not face the challenges of a Pfizer vaccine for storage. This sounds ideal for India — where a single shot that could be stored easily would mean faster vaccination for the entire population. Trials have shown that the Johnson vaccine is over 90 per cent successful against the virus — so definitely things are getting better and better!

The only problem with the hot weather is that all chances of social distancing are gone! The weekend saw people already stripping down and going to the beach, and eventually to the bars. Despite all warnings to be careful — the British always jump back into anarchy with the slightest bit of warm weather. While in India we rush indoors and switch on our air conditioners on warm days, in the UK, they head outdoors and lie down on any available open space — treating parks like green beaches. Except the Desi community of course, who are safely indoors, avoiding the hot sun, and switching on fans, if they have them.

Ministers are still being cautious after the earlier mistakes of a premature relaxation of lockdown. But it looks like schools will reopen early March. Young people bored out of their heads at home will love this break. But even more so their parents. Apparently home teaching has been harder on the older ones than on the children. Teaching fractions and knowing what a gerund is or locating Botswana is trying. So apparently

Google has been working over time answering the parents' inquiries. Once schools reopen, they will heave a sigh of relief and promptly forget problems of the past participle.

Wednesday is Budget Day. Normally no one cares much except the business pages of newspapers. But the Chancellor Rishi Sunak (or "Disly Rishi") retains his popularity, despite the threat of the looming increase in taxes ...which he has already begun to warn everyone about. The media is in a quandary about how to tackle him. Normally, a Chancellor belonging to a minority group, Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) would deserve warm sympathy and several encouraging tweets. But how do you deal with a Chancellor who is public school, Oxford and Stanford educated, successful as a hedge fund manager and sufficiently at home with billions and fractions not to have to go to Google to do his sums? Hmmm... could some of the good publicity be due to the special adviser helping him calibrate his image, his clothes, his winning slogans? Why not? I think having good public relations

and communications is half the battle won!

The saga of the pregnant minister came to a climax last week in Parliament (we had mentioned it some time back). Of course, at first, there was a shock that no provision had been made in law for a minister to have maternity leave. But then it was discovered that the word woman (or man) falls foul of equality legislation. So the word "person" was used instead of "woman" in the drafting of the bill. The "person" had to be pregnant, etc.

When the bill came to the House of Lords there were 38 identical amendments from various lords and Baronesses asking that the word "person" be replaced by "woman". But — in these days of political correctness — there was worry about the trans community which takes the view that the word "woman" is discriminatory. Biological sex at birth is different from identity one can choose and what would happen if a "trans person" fell pregnant? This is a tricky issue not to be mocked. But all decided that, for this matter, the word "woman" was appropriate. So

no vote had to be taken on the amendments. The bill has now passed both houses and is law. Phew!

By the way, cricket or Test matches or spin bowling are taboo subjects after the inglorious collapse in Ahmedabad. Maybe England will send a team of 11 players who are Persons of Indian Origin. Then England may win.

On the same note, may I add that the reverse colonisation of Britain may be already taking place — at least in the eyes of some Indian film producers. The film adaptation of the novel, *The Girl On The Train*, has mainly Indian characters, all living in London, speaking Hindi. There are a few white British characters, but all minor. It is as though the White British were suddenly wiped out from the city. For those of us living here — it makes the adaptation quite unreal... as yet....

*Kishwar Desai is an award winning author and playwright. Her latest book 'The Longest Kiss: The Life And Times of Devika Rani has just been published.*



## SHORT TAKES

## 10 KILLED IN SHOOTOUT ON MEXICO CARTEL

**Mexico City:** Ten men were killed and a woman and two boys were wounded in a shooting attack on a home in western Mexico on Saturday.

Prosecutors in the state of Jalisco said the bullet-ridden bodies of the 10 men were found by police on the sidewalk in front of the home. Another wounded boy was found inside, and a woman and another boy were located at a local hospital.

The prosecutors' office said the attack was carried out by unidentified assailants travelling in an SUV. The state is home to the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, one of Mexico's most violent and powerful.

## RUSSIA SATELLITE TO MONITOR ARCTIC CLIMATE

**Moscow:** A Soyuz rocket blasted off from the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan on Sunday carrying Russia's first satellite for monitoring the Arctic's climate, the Roscosmos space agency said.

Video published by the Russian space agency showed the Soyuz blaster launching against grey skies at 0655 GMT, carrying an Arktika-M satellite.

Space agency chief Dmitry Rogozin wrote on Twitter later that communication with the satellite had been established.

The monitoring system will need at least two satellites to operate properly, the space agency said.

"As part of the system, they will provide round-the-clock all-weather monitoring of the Earth's surface and the seas of the Arctic Ocean," it added.

## 'EXORCIST' HELD AFTER CHILD KILLED IN RITUAL

**Colombo, Feb. 28:** Sri Lankan police on Sunday arrested a self-proclaimed exorcist after a nine-year-old girl she had beaten as part of a ritual died.

The unidentified woman allegedly struck the girl repeatedly with a cane, claiming it was a way to drive out a demon that had possessed the child, said police spokesman Ajith Rohana.

The girl's parents had taken her to the woman in the village of Meegahawatte, just outside the capital Colombo, where neighbours responded to the cries of the child but not in time to save her, Rohana added.

"The child had collapsed after the severe beating she received. She was found dead on admission to hospital," he said.

There have been a number of such alleged exorcism attempts in the area in recent years, police added, with some causing physical harm — including death.

## SPACEWALKING ASTRONAUTS PREP STATION

**Cape Canaveral (US):** Spacewalking astronauts ventured out Sunday to install support frames for new, high-efficiency solar panels arriving at the International Space Station later this year.

Nasa's Kate Rubins and Victor Glover emerged from the orbiting lab lugging 8-foot (2.5-meter) duffel-style bags stuffed with hundreds of pounds of mounting brackets and struts. The equipment was so big and awkward that it had to be taken apart like furniture, just to get through the ha.

"We know it's super tight in there," Mission Control radioed.

The astronauts headed with their unusually large load to the far port side of the station, careful not to bump into anything. That's where the station's oldest and most degraded solar wings are located.

With more people and experiments flying on the space station, more power will be needed to keep everything running, according to Nasa. The six new solar panels — to be delivered in pairs by SpaceX over the coming year or so — should boost the station's electrical capability by as much as 30 per cent.

Rubins and Glover had to assemble and bolt down the struts for the first two solar panels, due to launch in June.

The eight solar panels up there now are 12 to 20 years old — most of them past their design lifetime and deteriorating. Each panel is 112 feet (34 meters) long by 39 feet (12 meters) wide.

## 8 killed in Myanmar as junta fires on anti-coup protesters

UN condemns violence, says at least 18 killed, calls on military to halt

**Yangon, Feb. 28:** Myanmar security forces opened fire on protesters on Sunday, killing at least eight in the bloodiest action so far to smother opposition to the military coup four weeks ago.

The junta is battling to contain a massive street movement demanding it yield power and release ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who was detained along with top political allies at the start of the month.

Sunday brought a significant escalation in force, with fatal shootings of protesters in at least four cities around the country, as police and soldiers attempted to bring the civil disobedience campaign to heel.

The United Nations condemned the deadly crackdown, saying it had received credible information that as many as 18 people may have been killed.

"We strongly condemn the escalating violence against protests in Myanmar and call on the military to immediately halt the use of force against peaceful protesters," Ravina Shamdasani, spokeswoman for the UN human rights office, said.

Three men were killed and at least 20 others injured when security forces moved on a rally in the southern coastal hub of Dawei.

Rescue worker Pyae Zaw Hein said the trio were "shot dead with live



Protesters take cover behind homemade shields during a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon on Sunday.

rounds", while the injured were hit by rubber bullets.

"More wounded people keep coming in," he said.

Two teenagers were gunned down in Bago, a two-hour drive north of commercial capital Yangon. Ambulance driver Than Lwin Oo said he had sent the bodies of the 18-year-olds to the mortuary at Bago's main hospital.

Officers in Yangon began dispersing small crowds

minutes before the slated beginning of the day's protest, with a 23-year-old man shot dead in the city's east. "His wife is heartbroken," Win Ko, a social worker who visited the man's widow, said. "She's three months pregnant."

In Mandalay, an emergency doctor said that two men had died from gunshot wounds.

Elsewhere protesters took up positions behind

barricades and wielded homemade shields to defend themselves against the onslaught, with police using tear gas to clear some rallies.

Hundreds of people had been arrested by evening and transported to the city's notorious Insein Prison, where many of Myanmar's leading democracy campaigners have served long jail terms under previous dictator-

ships. At least one journalist documenting Sunday's assaults by security forces was beaten and detained further north in Myitkya, a city at the headwaters of the Irrawaddy river, according to local outlet The 74 Media.

Another reporter was shot with rubber bullets while covering a protest in the central city of Pyay, their employer said.

— AFP

## Beijing uses new security law on HK dissidents

**Hong Kong, Feb. 28:** Dozens of Hong Kong dissidents were charged with subversion on Sunday in the largest use yet of Beijing's sweeping new national security law, as authorities seek to cripple the finance hub's democracy movement.

Police arrested 55 of the city's best-known pro-democracy campaigners in a series of dawn raids last month. On Sunday, 47 were charged with one count each of "conspiracy to commit subversion" — one of the new national security crimes — with police saying the group would appear in court on Monday morning.

Democracy supporters described the move as a body blow. "Every prominent voice of the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong now is either jailed, in exile, or charged for subversion of state power," activist Sophie Mak wrote on Twitter.

The European Union's office in Hong Kong said the charges were of "great concern".

"The nature of these charges makes clear that legitimate political pluralism will no longer be tolerated in Hong Kong," the office added.

Beijing is battling to stamp out dissent in semi-

● **THE BROADLY** worded security law, imposed on the city last June, criminalises any act deemed to be subversion, secession, terrorism or collusion with foreign forces.

autonomous Hong Kong after swathes of the population hit the streets in 2019 in huge and sometimes violent democracy protests.

The broadly worded security law, imposed on the city last June, criminalises any act deemed to be subversion, secession, terrorism or collusion with foreign forces.

Those charged are routinely denied bail until trial and face up to life in prison if convicted.

The activists charged on Sunday represent a broad cross-section of Hong Kong's opposition, from veteran former pro-democracy lawmakers to academics, lawyers, social workers and a host of youth activists.

Joshua Wong, one of the city's most recognisable pro-democracy figures, was among those charged, visited by police inside prison where he is currently serving a sentence for organising protests in 2019.

— AFP

## Rubber bullets to stop stir in Bangla

**Dhaka, Feb. 28:** Dozens were injured on Sunday as Bangladeshi police fired rubber bullets and tear gas at opposition activists to prevent new protests over the death of a writer in jail, police and a party official said.

Live footage from local television station Channel 24 showed a road and footpath in front of the National Press Club — a favourite protest site in the capital Dhaka — turning into a battleground as police beat protesters with batons to disperse them.

Clashes ensued as student activists from the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist

Party (BNP) hurled rocks and attacked officers with plastic pipes, prompting police to retaliate by "firing rubber bullets and tear gas", Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka police Sazzadur Rahman said.

"They did not take any permission (for the protests)," he added, defending the police's move to clear the protesters.

BNP spokesman Rizvi Ahmed said about 30 student activists of the party including a senior leader were injured in the clashes. Several policemen were also hurt, including an officer who was rushed to hospital.

— AFP

## Pope to spend his final days in Rome

**Buenos Aires, Feb. 28:** Pope Francis expects to die in Rome, still the Catholic pontiff, without returning to spend his final days in his native Argentina, according to a new book titled *The Health of Popes*.

In an interview granted to Argentine journalist and physician Nelson Castro at the Vatican in February 2019, the Pope said he thinks about death, but does not fear it.

Extracts from the book were published Saturday in Argentine daily La Nacion. Asked how he sees his final days, Francis, who is 84, responded: "I will be pope, either active or emeritus, and in Rome. I will not return to Argentina." Francis has had to cancel some events

in recent months due to a painful problem with sciatica, but is not known to suffer any other major ailments.

The Vatican has always been reticent about a pope's health. According to the new book, "this is the first time that a pope has discussed his health with the transparency afforded by Francis." The pontiff, formerly the archbishop of Buenos Aires, says he does not miss his native Argentina, where he was born Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the son of Italian immigrants.

"No, I do not miss it. I lived there for 76 years. What pains me are its problems" — an allusion to the economic crisis shaking the South American country.

— AFP

## Second former aide of NY gov alleges he sexually abused her

**New York, Feb. 28:** A second ex-employee of powerful New York state Governor Andrew Cuomo has accused him of sexual harassment, charges the governor denied on Saturday.

This time the allegations came from 25-year-old former health adviser Charlotte Bennett, who told *The New York Times* that the governor sexually harassed her in the spring of 2020.

According to Bennett, the 63-year-old politician said in June that he was open to dating women in their 20s, and asked her if she thought age made a difference in romantic

relationships, the *Times* reported.

While Cuomo never tried to touch her, "I understood that the governor wanted to sleep with me, and felt horribly uncomfortable and scared," Bennett told the paper.

She added that she spoke to Cuomo's chief of staff and legal counsel, who transferred her to another post in another building. Bennett was happy with the new job and decided not to insist on an investigation.

Cuomo became a national star last spring with his straight-talking yet empathetic coronavirus briefings that contrasted sharply

with then-president Donald Trump's dismissive approach to the pandemic.

But the harassment allegations come as he faces a growing storm over his handling of the coronavirus in nursing homes in his state.

In a statement Saturday, Cuomo said he "never made advances toward Ms Bennett nor did I ever intend to act in any way that was inappropriate." He said he wanted instead to support Bennett, who had told him that she was a sexual assault survivor.

The governor, whose third term expires at the

end of 2022, called for "a full and thorough outside review" of these charges, led by a former federal judge.

"I ask all New Yorkers to await the findings of the review so that they know the facts before making any judgments," he added.

This is the second time in a week that the Democratic governor, who has led New York state for 10 years, has been accused of sexual harassment.

On Wednesday, another ex-adviser, Lindsey Boylan, said in a blog that he had harassed her when she was working for his administration, from 2015 to 2018.

— AFP

## Yemen rebels claim Saudi strikes

**Sanaa, Feb. 28:** Yemen's Iran-backed Huthi rebels on Sunday claimed the attempted strikes that targeted neighbouring Saudi Arabia overnight and threatened more attacks, as fighting in the grinding civil war escalates.

Huthi fighters have intensified operations against the kingdom as air strikes by the Saudi-led military coalition pound rebel positions in the north of Yemen, in a bid to stop their offensive to seize the government's last northern stronghold of Marib.

Years of war have already pushed Yemen to the brink of famine.

Saudi Arabia — which has been backing the Yemeni government against the rebels since 2015 — said Saturday it thwarted a Huthi missile that targeted Riyadh.

"The operation was carried out with a ballistic missile and 15 drones... targeting sensitive areas in the enemy's capital of Riyadh," said Huthi spokesman Yahya al-Saree, according to the rebels' *Al-Masirah* TV channel.

"Our operations will continue and will expand as long as the aggression and siege on our country continues." Fragments of the missile scattered over several Riyadh neighbourhoods, damaging at least one home but no casualties were reported, Saudi's state-run *Al-Ekhbariya* television said.

Separately, the coalition said it had intercepted six Huthi drones targeting the kingdom, including the southern cities of Khamis Mushait and Jizan.

The Huthis have escalat-

ed cross-border attacks to the kingdom even after the United States delisted the rebels as terrorists, reversing a decision by the administration of former president Donald Trump.

The designation had been widely criticised by aid organisations, who warned it would hamper their efforts to alleviate a humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

US President Joe Biden halted support to Saudi offensive operations in Yemen's war, which he called a "catastrophe" that "has to end".

— AFP

FICTIONAL | DETECTIVE Historian Shrabani Basu's new book set to hit bookstores in India on March 10

## Author to uncover Indian 'mystery' by Holmes

**London, Feb. 28:** Arthur Conan Doyle, the British creator of the world-famous fictional detective Sherlock Holmes, was drawn to investigate just one real-life crime during his lifetime and it involved a British Indian man wrongly accused of a series of mysterious crimes in an English village in the early 20th century.

The story of that Indian-origin barrister, George Edalji, has now been dug up in detail and brought to life in a new book by London-based historian-author Shrabani Basu, who chanced upon the mystery and pursued it through archival records

and letters over the years. The result is *'The Mystery of the Parsee Lawyer: Arthur Conan Doyle, George Edalji and the case of the foreigner in the English village'*, which is released in the UK next week and in India on March 10.

"I think Indian readers will find it interesting that in 1907 Arthur Conan Doyle responded to a letter by a young Indian lawyer appealing to him for help to clear his name, and he took up the cause," said Basu, the author of previous historical accounts such as *'Spy Princess: The Life of Noor Inayat Khan'* and *'Victoria and Abdul: The*



Arthur Conan Doyle

*Extraordinary True Story of the Queen's Closest Confidant'*. "Even Jawaharlal Nehru, who was an 18-year-old student at the time in Harrow School in London, got fascinated with the case and remarked that George had no doubt been targeted because he was Indian," she said.

● **THE SHERLOCK** Holmes author meticulously pieced clues together to conclude that George had been the victim of racism for being a "Hindoo" — as all Indians were referred to at the time.

The story, which revolves around several threatening letters and the distressing killing and mutilation of animals, was one of the most famous cases of miscarriage of justice in Edwardian England which was forgotten over time. Conan Doyle, whom George Edalji had turned

to for help after being jailed for crimes he did not commit, encountered a mystery worthy of his fictional detective.

The Sherlock Holmes author meticulously pieced clues together to conclude that George had been the victim of racism for being a "Hindoo" — as all Indians were referred to at the time. "What fascinated me was the fact that the only true crime that Arthur Conan Doyle investigated personally was to do with an Indian.

To me, it was a story that was calling out to be told. Like most people, I am a fan of the Sherlock Holmes books and love a

mystery," said Basu. While the intriguing incident took place over 100 years ago, the scenario has resonance even in modern-day Britain.

"The more I read the letters and the press coverage at the time, the more it felt that this could be happening now. Mistrust of immigrants, the fear of the foreigner, have been issues in Western society for a while now. The whole Brexit debate focussed on immigrants from eastern Europe entering the country and taking local jobs. Anonymous letters continue today, in the form of hate mail and online trolling," reflects Basu.

— PTI



## quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,099.99	-3.80
Nifty 50	14,529.20	-3.76
S&P 500*	3,811.15	-0.48
Dollar (₹)	73.47	-1.42
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.83	0.80
Euro (₹)	88.76	-0.29
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	45,599*342	0.75
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	66.13	-1.12
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.229	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.491	-0.024

\* As of Friday/saturday

## FPIs invest over ₹25,700 cr in equities in Feb.

Remaining net buyers for the second consecutive month this year, overseas investors pumped in Rs 23,663 crore in Indian markets in February on account of positive sentiment due to the Union Budget 2021-22 and strong third quarter earnings. Foreign portfolio investors invested a net Rs 25,787 crore into equities but pulled out Rs 2,124 crore from the bonds market during February 1-26, the depositories data showed.

## FY20 GST annual returns can be filed till March 31



The finance ministry has extended the deadline for filing GST annual returns for 2019-20 by a month till March 31. This is the second extension given by the Centre after extending it from Dec. 31 to Feb. 28. In view of the difficulties expressed by the taxpayers in meeting this time limit, Government has decided to extend the due date for furnishing of GSTR-9 and GSTR-9C for the financial year 2019-20 to March 31, a statement said.

## Pakistan may resume import of cotton from India

Pakistan may allow cotton import from India through land route as prospects of gradual restoration of bilateral trade ties have brightened after the new ceasefire agreement along the Line of Control. Citing sources in the commerce ministry, *The Express Tribune* reported that adviser to the prime minister on commerce Abdul Razak Dawood may take a decision on whether to import cotton and yarn from India next week.

## Honda looking to export India-made H'ness CB350 bike

Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India (HMSI) is exploring the possibility of exporting its mid-sized premium bike H'ness CB350 to various markets across the globe even as it works to cater to the robust demand for the model in the domestic market, according to director (sales and marketing) Yadavinder Singh Guleria. The company rolls out the bike with over 90 per cent localisation from its Manesar facility.

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## ■ Drivers in India work for long hours: ILO App-based cabbies among worst paid

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 28

App-based taxi drivers in India work for an average 82 hours a week, which is much higher than the average of both traditional taxi services and app-based services in developing countries, finds the International Labour Organisation. Not just that, hourly earnings of these app-based taxi drivers in India fall at the lowest-end among developing countries.

Most workers in the taxi and delivery sectors work long hours and have high work intensity. Long working hours in the transportation sector, particularly in traditional taxi services, have been an enduring concern in developing countries. This situation has also penetrated into app-based platforms, finds a survey-based ILO study of app-based services in developing countries.

While average working hours in the traditional taxi and delivery sectors are 70 and 57 hours per week, respectively, they are 65 and 59 hours, respectively, in the app-based sectors, with over half the respondents working more than these averages. In India the weekly average is as high as 82 hours for app-based taxi services. The report quotes a driver of a leading Indian app-based taxi service platform as saying that he has to work for 12 hours and sometimes more but he does not get paid accordingly.



TOUGH LIFE

► App-based taxi drivers in India work for an average 82 hours a week

► A sizeable proportion works seven days a week

► Hourly earnings in India was lowest in the group of countries under study, including Chile, Ghana, Kenya, Mexico, Morocco and Ukraine

► Hourly earnings for workers in taxi services range between \$1.1 in India and \$8.2 in Lebanon

A sizeable proportion of workers in both the app-based taxi and delivery sectors work seven days a week. About 28 per cent of respondents in the app-based taxi sector reported working for over 12 hours, while half the respondents in the app-based delivery sector reported working for over 10 hours on three or more days per week.

Gamification platforms or offer of freebies and incentives—have created opportunities for drivers to access higher earnings or bonuses, incentivising them to work long hours. This may also lead to high work intensity, as workers often do not take breaks in order to be able to meet their targets or due to the fear of losing a client or an order. On some platforms, workers' break times are controlled by the algorithm, sometimes to the second, and workers can be fined for staying offline for too long.

The report also finds that the hourly earnings in India was the lowest in the group of countries under study, which includes Chile, Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Lebanon, Mexico, Morocco and Ukraine. Hourly earnings, which includes waiting time, for workers in these sectors range between \$1.1 in India and \$8.2 in Lebanon.

"The minimum income guarantee will be paid if I log in for 12 hours, six days a week and complete 60 orders, without holidays on weekends. Then I receive Rs 6,000 per week," a worker in a leading app-based delivery platform in India was quoted in the report.

In all countries, the majority of workers earn less than the average in these sectors. Moreover, incomes of workers on location-based platforms have been severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

## BRINGING PETRO GOODS UNDER GST WILL BE GOOD MOVE: CEA



K. V. Subramanian

**Kolkata, Feb. 28:** Chief economic advisor K. V. Subramanian has backed a proposal to bring petroleum products under the ambit of the goods and services tax (GST).

He, however, said the decision will have to be taken by the GST Council.

"It will be a good move, but the decision rests with the GST Council," Subramanian said during a recent interaction with Ficci FLO members.

Petroleum minister Dharmendra Pradhan had also urged Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman to bring petroleum products under the ambit of the GST.

The continuous rise in fuel prices has burdened the common man and become a political issue in states where assembly elections are due.

Subramanian also said inflationary pressures are mostly on account of "food inflation".

—PTI

## Ergonomic furniture maker expands ops

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, FEB. 28

With rising office space demand and work from home becoming a new norm in India, New York-based Humanscale, manufacturer of ergonomic products, is expanding its presence in India.

After Bengaluru, the company has announced its foray into the Telangana and Andhra Pradesh markets, where it sees huge demand for its ergonomic products for the office and work-from-home setup.

The company on Friday opened its first showroom in Hyderabad through its authorised India distribution partner, S Cube Ergonomics.

"A good ergonomic posture is of critical importance at the workplace as a bad posture is potentially disastrous for health, the most common physical issues being neck stiffness, hunched posture, wrist aching and fatigue. Desks, chairs, monitors, keyboards and lighting all need to be assessed when creating a workspace, whether it is at the office or at home," Alastair Stubbs, country manager India, Humanscale, told *Financial Chronicle*.

## When does commodities boom turn into supercycle?

MARK BURTON, THOMAS BIESHEUVEL &amp; ALEX LONGLEY FEB. 28

A surge in commodity prices has Wall Street banks gearing up for the arrival of what may be a new supercycle — an extended period during which demand drives prices well above their long-run trend. A major impetus is the massive stimulus spending by governments as they juice up their economies following pandemic lockdowns. The evidence includes surging copper and agricultural prices and oil back at pre-Covid-19 levels. One theory is that this could be just the start of a years-long rally in appetite for raw materials across the board, but the reality is more complicated.

### What is a supercycle?

A sustained spell of abnormally strong demand and growth that producers struggle to match, sparking a rally in prices that can last years, or in some cases a decade or more. For some analysts, the current rally is rekindling memories of the supercycle seen during China's rise to economic heavyweight status beginning in the early 2000s. Commodities have experi-

enced three other comparable cycles since the start of the 20th century. US industrialisation sparked the first in the early 1900s, global rearmament fuelled another in the 1930s and the re-industrialisation and reconstruction of Europe and Japan following the Second World War drove a third during the 1950s and 1960s.

### What did the last one look like?

From around 2002, China entered a phase of roaring economic growth, fuelled by a rollout of modern infrastructure and cities on an unprecedented scale. Suppliers struggled to fulfil surging demand for natural resources. In commodities, there's often a time lag to get the product where it's wanted since adding capacity, such as opening a new mine, doesn't happen overnight. For more than a decade, materials, including iron ore, were in tight supply. Copper, priced below \$2,000 a tonne for much of the 1990s, broke \$10,000 and oil jumped from \$20 a barrel to \$140.

### Who says this is another supercycle?

Among the bulls are analysts at JPMorgan Chase



& Co and Goldman Sachs Group Inc. The commodities rally will be a story of a "roaring 20s" post-pandemic economic recovery as well as ultra-loose monetary and fiscal policies,

## Explainer

according to JPMorgan. Commodities may also jump as an unintended consequence of the fight against climate change, which threatens to constrain oil supplies while boosting demand for metals needed to build renewable energy infrastructure and manufacture batteries and electric vehicles, it said. Those include cobalt and lithium. Furthermore, commodities are typically viewed as a hedge against inflation,

which has become more of a concern among investors.

### Why might this not be one?

Longer-term trends point to a cooling down for some materials. For example, the energy transition that heralds a bright new age for green metals such as copper would be built on the decline of oil. Even producers of iron ore, the biggest market of mined commodities, expect prices to weaken over time as Chinese demand starts to decline and new supply comes online. It's an even bleaker outlook for coal, with producers looking to exit the market altogether as the world switches away from the heavy-polluting fuel. Iron ore, coal and oil were the chief beneficiaries of China's industrial expansion. Those markets dwarf copper in scale.

### What's been happening with oil?

Prices collapsed in 2020, even turning negative at one point, but have recovered as demand rebounded more strongly than many had expected. Early in 2021, the Opec and its allies were holding back crude equivalent to about 10 per cent of current

global supply. Market fundamentals have shifted, especially in the US with the emergence of shale oil. Haunting traditional producers is the prospect that a prolonged period of high prices would trigger a new flood of supply beyond Opec's control. Even so, some oil bulls aren't ruling out the eventual return of prices above \$100 a barrel.

### Which other commodities are rising?

Copper was on a tear in early 2021, thanks to rapidly tightening physical markets as governments plough cash into electric-vehicle infrastructure and renewables. Goldman Sachs, BlackRock Inc, Citigroup Inc and Bank of America Corp saw the metal moving toward all-time highs. While agricultural commodities have their own particular dynamics, soybeans and corn have rallied to multi-year highs, driven by relentless buying from China as it rebuilds its hog herd following a devastating pig disease. Agricultural prices are more dependent on global economic and population growth, rather than the decarbonisation trend underpinning excitement in metals.

—Bloomberg

## PSU general insurers trim offices in smaller cities

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 28

Public sector general insurers are bolstering their physical presence in tier-I cities while closing down offices in smaller cities and towns. Their presence in tier-II cities and beyond has come down to 32 per cent share of offices of all general and health insurers from 36 per cent in a years' time.

Public sector general insurers closed a total of 578 offices in smaller cities in the last financial year. As many as 360 offices in tier-III cities were shut. The count of offices in all the smaller cities and towns, except tier-VI, cities came down. Tier-VI cities got 38 new offices. Still, only about one per cent of general insurance offices are in tier-VI locations.

Private general insurers and standalone health insurers opened 85 new offices in cities beyond tier-I. However, private general insurers have very limited presence in cities beyond tier-II. In tier-III cities they have 32 offices but only 14 offices in tier-IV and V cities. Standalone health insurers do not have a presence beyond tier-IV cities.

Data from the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority shows 138 districts in India do not have any offices of general insurers or standalone health insurers. No wonder, non-life insurance penetration in India stands at an abysmally low 0.94 per cent.

Tier-I cities, meanwhile,



## OVER ₹8,300 CR COVID CLAIMS SETTLED

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, FEB. 28

With the country gearing up for the second phase of the Covid-19 vaccination drive from Monday, Indian insurers have already settled over Rs 8,300 crore Covid-19 claims so far.

"The Indian insurance industry has already settled the Covid-19 pandemic related claims to the tune of Rs 8,378 crore so far. The industry, which had shown a negative growth since the onset of Covid-19 pandemic in the beginning of FY2021, has already recorded five per cent of positive

growth and will further recover in the days ahead," Irdai chairman Subhash Chandra Khuntia said, addressing a National Insurance Academy-Swiss Re event on Friday.

"The general insurance industry has taken a lead by settling total claims of Rs 7,136 crore, while the balance amount has come from the life insurance industry. Nevertheless, insurers have also been able to adapt to challenges posed by the pandemic and they were resilient in providing services to their policyholders without any disruption," he said.

got an increased share of offices at 68 per cent in FY20 from 64 per cent in FY19. Tier-I cities have 7,796 offices of general and health insurers, of which 367 were added in FY20.

Public sector general insurers added 34 new offices in tier-I cities in FY20, private general insurers added 164 offices and standalone health insurers 169 offices.

Specialised insurers like Export Credit Guarantee Corporation and Agricultural Insurance Company, which have offices only in tier I cities, added none.

Despite these additions, both public and private general insurers were operating 11,394 offices in FY20 as against 11,578 offices in FY19 all over the country—a decrease by 184 offices.

## Trying to get Airbus unit in India: Goyal



Piyush Goyal

**New Delhi, Feb. 28:** Union minister Piyush Goyal said he is "actively pursuing" Airbus to begin manufacturing aeroplanes in India.

Addressing the CEOs session at Toy Fair 2021 on Saturday, the commerce and industry minister said: "We are looking at world domination in the toy sector and anything short of that would be a terrible disappointment".

Narrating an experience from his childhood about a toy setup for planes that influenced him to aspire to become a toy manufacturer, the minister said, "It is another matter that I don't think I will be able to do it, but I'm actively pursuing Airbus to try and get them to come to India to start manufacturing aeroplanes in India".

—PTI

## Sebi tracking system found wanting

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, FEB. 28

Markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India's integrated market surveillance system, set up in 2007, needs to be stronger, as it failed to advise or alert the NSE about last week's system breakdown in advance even though volumes soared towards monthly derivatives expiry date.

During the February 24 halt of trade, the NSE was in close contact with the Sebi and keeping it updated on developments, as per an NSE statement.

Indian bourses are facing such glitches regu-

larly but the regulator so far only has surveillance systems built for suspicious transactions like insider trading, front running and not for keeping a watch on the robustness of the market infrastructure.

Wednesday's trading halt has left several market participants in huge financial losses. Last year, the Sebi had imposed stricter surveillance measures to tackle market volatility amid the coronavirus pandemic from March 23 till June 25, 2020. Besides, ensuring orderly trading and settlement, these steps were aimed at effective risk management, price discovery and maintenance

of market integrity.

NSE's average daily turnover has shot up sharply from Rs 47,917 crore in March 2020 to Rs 75,898.93 crore on February 23, just a day before the technical glitch and had crossed Rs 1 lakh crore on February 2, 2021 a day after the Union Budget while it was higher on the Union Budget day too at Rs 87,599.7 crore.

In the last trading session of this month i.e., February 26, NSE's turnover was the highest in recent times at over Rs 1.15 lakh crore.

"NSE is the largest derivatives exchange in the world by volume. Equity and equity deriv-

atives segments' daily average volumes have gone up by 122 per cent and 79 per cent respectively in 2021 compared to 2019. Average order messages per day have gone up by about 200 per cent during the period across all segments with a peak load of over 6.5 billion order messages in a day," the NSE said after the February 24 trading halt.

Sebi needs to develop a real-time surveillance mechanism, to allow the market regulator to intervene even in the mid-market hours. Currently, Sebi largely relies on the data sent by stock exchanges after trading ends, said a report.

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## SHORT TAKES

## Asia Cup set to be postponed?

**Karachi:** PCB chairman Ehsan Mani said the ICC has assured them it will get a written assurance from the BCCI by next month that all its players, officials, fans and journalists will be issued visas for the World T20 Cup to be held in India. On Sunday, Mani also said that the Asia Cup scheduled to be held in June this year in Sri Lanka will need to be postponed if India qualifies for the World Test Championships final. "I have informed the board that the BCCI was supposed to give us visa assurances by 31st December but that didn't happen because their President, Saurav Ganguly was twice hospitalised," he said at a media conference here. "But I have now again taken up this matter with the ICC and am in touch with them. I also have another virtual conference with them tomorrow on this issue. The ICC has told us that we will get our written confirmation by the end of next month." — PTI

## Gold for para archer Rakesh

**New Delhi:** Indian para archer Rakesh Kumar stood on top of the podium in the Compound event while the pair of Harvinder Singh and Pooja grabbed gold in the recurve mixed team event at the Fazza world ranking tournament in Dubai. Rakesh defeated compatriot Shyam Sunder 143-135 in the final after his 143-138 semifinal win over Turkey's Agyan. Harvinder and Pooja got the better of number one ranked team from Turkey. Shyam Sunder and Jyoti Balian won silver in the Compound mixed team event. Both of them also won silver medals in the individual events as well. As many as 70 archers from 11 nations are competing in this year's Championships which will also mark the return of Para Archery action after a year. — PTI

## Ronaldo scores as Juventus held

**Rome:** Cristiano Ronaldo scored his 19th goal this campaign but champions Juventus had to settle for a 1-1 draw at Hellas Verona in Serie A on Saturday. The draw gives leaders Inter Milan the chance to pull 10 points clear of Juventus when they play mid-table Genoa on Sunday. Juventus are third and three points adrift of second-placed AC Milan who travel to Roma, two points behind the champions in fourth, on Sunday. "We managed to take the lead, which was the hardest part, it's a pity not being able to hold it," said Juve coach Andrea Pirlo. Pirlo's side paid for their many absences and a redesigned defence with Leonardo Bonucci and Giorgio Chiellini out injured and Danilo suspended. "We lacked experienced players, we had many youngsters on the pitch and there are details that they don't understand," continued Pirlo. "I asked Ronaldo and Alex Sandro to make their voices heard, but it wasn't enough." — AFP

## Mary Kom to lead Indian challenge

**New Delhi:** Six-time world champion M.C. Mary Kom will spearhead a 14-member Indian boxing in the Boxam International tournament in Castellon, Spain from March 1 to 7. According to a release issued by the Boxing Federation of India, the Indian contingent left for Spain in early hours on Sunday. Besides Mary Kom, the team also has Commonwealth Games silver medallist Manish Kaushik (63kg). The Indian team will consist of eight men and six women pugilists, including nine Olympic qualified boxers. Young boxer Jasmine, who was highly-impressive during the national camp, is also accompanying the boxers for her maiden senior tour. She will participate in the 57kg category. — PTI

## Live on

## TV

## FOOTBALL

**English Premier League:** Everton vs Southampton from 1.30 am (Tuesday) on Star Sports Select 1

## WWE

**Raw:** Bouts from 6.30 am (Tuesday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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## THAT'S ALL, FOAKES!

Keeper Ben says England should stop worrying about the pitch factor

**Ahmedabad, Feb. 28:** The square turner at the Chepauk for the second Test and the Ahmedabad dust bowl provided for the 'pink ball' game are hardest surfaces that Ben Foakes has kept on in his nascent international career.

India have put England on the mat with a couple of tracks which aided the home spinners as Ravichandran Ashwin and Axar Patel ran riot, giving India 2-1 lead in the four-match series.

"Last two games are the hardest pitches I have kept on. In the last game the pink ball was skidding, I haven't seen a wicket like that and keeping on it was a good challenge," Foakes, who has replaced Jos Buttler as per England's rotation policy, said during a virtual media conference.

By his own admission, Foakes hasn't seen a cricket ball turn so much. "The two pitches that I have played, I have never seen ball turn like that. It's certainly very challenging. It's like having day five pitch from ball one."

But for one of world's best glovesman, the last two games were learning experience and real fun.

"When the ball spins, it's fun to keep and in Sri Lanka, it was easy because it was consistent and you knew the ball is going to turn. What I found during pink ball Test was it could spin square past batter or it could skid."

He admitted that no keeper can take every catch on these sort of tracks.

As far as the last Test goes, Foakes feels that the team needs to make peace with the fact that wicket will behave a certain way and yet they have to give their best shot. "Understanding and making peace that we are going to get out in a certain way. We have to grind it out and just put runs on the board. Be solid and understand our gameplan which will be different for all of us. If you get out, get out but trying to do it your way."

He also feels that a positive mindset and clarity in their game plan will only help as testing times can also affect the capability of judgement. — PTI



Ben Foakes (left)

The two pitches that I have played, I have never seen ball turn like that. It's certainly very challenging. It's like having day five pitch from ball one.

— BEN FOAKES  
England wicketkeeper

## Eng panicked against spin: Chappell

**New Delhi, Feb. 28:** India figured out England's general "ineptitude against spin" during the second Test in Chennai and used it to their advantage in the 'Pink Ball' game by unleashing a spin-heavy attack on a helpful track, says former Australia captain Ian Chappell.

"India's decision to select three spinners for the Test was prompted by England's batting on a tricky Chennai pitch, where their batsmen — Joe Root excepted — displayed a distinct ineptitude against spin," Chappell wrote in a column in *ESPNCricinfo*.

"India correctly calculated that would result in mental scarring and used it to their advantage."

Chappell said it was poor defence which led to England's collapse in the third Test.

"When faced with a seri-

## LYON LAMBASTS CRITICS FOR 'CRYING' OVER MOTERA STRIP

**Melbourne, Feb. 28:** Star Australia spinner Nathan Lyon is baffled by all the hullabaloo over the Motera pitch, saying "everyone seems to start crying" when the ball starts spinning but no one speaks out when teams are bundled out for low scores on seaming tracks.

However, Lyon gave a thumbs up to the curator. "We play on seaming wickets around the world and get bowled out for 47, 60. Nobody ever says a thing (about the pitch). But as soon as it starts spinning, everyone in the world seems to start crying about it," Lyon was quoted as saying by *The West Australian*.

"I don't get it. I'm all for it, it was entertaining," Lyon, who had scripted an incredible journey from being a pitch curator to one of the greatest off-spinners, said he would like to get the Ahmedabad curator to Sydney Cricket Ground. — PTI

ous spin challenge, the England batsmen didn't trust their defence, which eventually resulted in panicked attempts to attack the Indian spin-

ners," he wrote.

"How can a risky premeditated shot be less dangerous than what was previously a trusted technique to unsettle good

spinners?," he questioned.

Chappell said "Shrewd use of footwork not only helps negate the spin but also puts a batsman in a position to direct the ball where he wants."

"To be fair, this is a skill to be learned at a young age. Which prompts the question: why is it not widely taught in England, where sweeping is misguidedly touted as the secret to playing spin bowling successfully?"

Ollie Pope had decided to use his feet against the Indian spinners but Chappell said "he had the right idea but the wrong execution."

"Pope was conscious of the keeper as he tentatively ventured out of his crease, which meant he was worried he would miss the delivery. That results in footwork that hinders rather than helps." — PTI

## ROHIT REACHES CAREER-BEST 8TH RANK IN TESTS

**Dubai, Feb. 28:** Opener Rohit Sharma touched his career-best eighth position in the ICC Test Batsmen's Rankings on Sunday with a six-place jump after his impressive show in India's 10-wicket win over England in the third Test in Ahmedabad. Player of the match Axar Patel and R. Ashwin have also made solid gains after playing a crucial role in India's win on a spin-friendly track.

Patel's 11-wicket match haul has helped him gain 30 slots to reach 36th position while Ashwin's seven wickets have lifted him four places to third position. — PTI

## Vinesh returns to mat with gold

**Kiev (Ukraine), Feb. 28:** Star Indian wrestler Vinesh Phogat on Sunday pinned 2017 world champion V. Kaladzinskay to grab a gold medal at the Outstanding Ukrainian Wrestlers and Coaches Memorial tournament here, and returned to the mat in style after a long coronavirus-forced break.

Up against the world number seven Belarusian, it was not an easy bout for the world number three Indian as the two grapplers kept testing each other with consistent attacks in the sea-saw battle in which Vinesh prevailed.

Vinesh opened up a 4-0 lead in the 53kg final with a throw which she initiated with a left-leg attack but Kaladzinskay made it 4-4 with her brilliant move.

Vinesh took the break leading 6-4, adding to her score with a take down, 10 seconds before the break.

The Belarusian put pressure on the Indian with another four-point throw but with 25 seconds to go, Vinesh's move fetched her four more points for a 10-8 lead. She got into a position from where she pinned Kaladzinskay to ensure herself a gold.

Since the coronavirus halted all competitions last year, it was the first competition for Vinesh, who is the only Indian woman wrestler to have qualified for the Tokyo Games.

Asked about her defence, Vinesh's Belgian coach Woller Akos said he would speak only after he discuss-



● Since the coronavirus halted all competitions last year, it was the first competition for Vinesh, who is the only Indian woman wrestler to have qualified for the Tokyo Games.

es the bout with his ward.

The next tournament for Vinesh is UWW ranking series event — Matteo Pellicone in Italy, where fellow Tokyo Qualifiers Bajrang Punia and Ravi Dahiya will also be seen in action from March 4-7. — PTI



Arsenal players celebrate their 3-1 win over Leicester City in an English Premier League match at the King Power Stadium in Leicester on Sunday. — AP

## Arsenal hit back to beat Leicester

**London, Feb. 28:** Arsenal delivered a hammer blow to Leicester's faint hopes of winning the Premier League with an impressive fightback to win 3-1 on Sunday.

Mikel Arteta's side fell behind to Youri Tielemans' early goal at the King Power Stadium.

They had lost nine of 11 league games when they conceded the opening goal this term.

But David Luiz equalised and Alexandre Lacazette's penalty gave the Gunners the lead just before half-time.

Nicolas Pepe's second half goal sealed Arsenal's second win in their last six league games.

The north Londoners' stirring escape act left Leicester in third place, trailing Manchester City by 13

## THE RESULTS

Crystal Palace	0
Fulham	0
Leicester	1
(Tielemans 7)	
Arsenal	3
(Luiz 39, Lacazette 45-pen, Pepe 52)	

points with 12 games remaining.

After Thursday's shock Europa League exit against Slavia Prague, it was a week to forget for Leicester manager Brendan Rodgers.

Arsenal have virtually no chance of finishing in the top four, but this was still a significant result as it underlined the potential in Arteta's team.

In Sunday's other early match, Fulham had to settle for a 0-0 draw at Crystal Palace. — AFP

## Devdutt sends Karnataka into QFs

**Bengaluru, Feb. 28:** Young Karnataka sensation Devdutt Padikkal continued his terrific form ahead of the IPL with a third successive century as the defending champions stormed into the Vijay Hazare Trophy quarterfinals with a lopsided 10-wicket win over Railways in a group C here on Sunday.

The Royal Challengers Bangalore opener, who scored a career-best 152 against Odisha and followed it up with 126 net out versus Kerala in their last outing, smacked nine sixes and as many boundaries in his 145 not out from 125 balls.

The 20-year-old left-hander had the company of his skipper Ravikumar

BRIEF SCORES	
■ Railways 284/9 in 50 overs (Pratham Singh 129; Shreyas Gopal 3/41) lost to Karnataka 285/0 in 40.3 overs (Devdutt Padikkal 145 n.o., Ravikumar Samarth 130 n.o.) by 10 wickets.	■ Bihar 148 in 40.2 overs (Babul Kumar 64; Sreesanth 4/30, Jalaal Saxena 3/30) lost to Kerala 149/1 in 8.5 overs (Robin Uthappa 87 not out, Sanju Samson 24 not out) by nine wickets.
■ Odisha 148 in 40.1 overs (Subhanshu Senapati 49 not out, Rakesh Pattanaik 46; Shivam Sharma 6/22) lost to Uttar Pradesh 150/4 in 21.4 overs (Upendra Yadav 32) by six wickets.	■ Vidarbha 150 in 41 overs (Akshay Wadkar 31, B Aparajith 3/10, J. Kousik 3/22, M Mohammed 3/33) lost to Tamil Nadu 152/5 in 11.2 overs (N Jagadeesan 48, M Mohammed 37 not out) by five wickets.
■ Jharkhand 139 in 46.2 overs (Ishan Kishan 38, Anukul Roy 30, M Harishankar Reddy 4/30) lost to Andhra 140/3 in 9.5 overs (Ashwin Hebbur 44,	Ricky Bhui 57 not out) by seven wickets.
■ Madhya Pradesh 402/3 in 30 overs (Venkatesh Iyer 198, Aditya Shrivastava 88 not out, Rajat Patidar 54) beat Punjab 297 in 42.3 overs (Abhishek Sharma 104, Mihir Hirwani 4/62) by 105 runs.	■ Gujarat 277/7 in 50 overs (Dhruv Raval 102, Het Patel 82; Atit Sheth 3/53) beat Baroda 237/9 in 50 overs (Smit Patel 73, Vishnu Solanki 37; Piyush Chawla 3/52, Chintan Gajra 2/40) by 40 runs.
■ Hyderabad 345/6 in 50 overs (Tanmay Agarwal 150, Tilak Verma 128; Lakshay Garg 2/60, Suyash Prabhudessai 1/60) beat Goa 343/5 in 50 overs (KD Eknath 169 not out, Snehal Kauthankar 116; T Ravi Teja 3/69; B Sandeep 1/63) by two runs.	■ Tripura 230 in 48.4 overs (Samrat Singha 102; Milind Kumar 55; Ajay Mandal 2/18, Sumit Ruikar 2/39) lost to Chhattisgarh 233/5 in 47.1 overs (Amandeep Khare 101 not out, Parvez Sultan 2/40, MB Mura Singh 2/45) by five wickets.

Samarth who also slammed an unbeaten century (130 not out) as the opening duo raced to the 285-run target win

with 57 balls to spare at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium here.

The big win ensured that they finished on top

of Group C to qualify for the last-eight while Uttar Pradesh finished second following their six-wicket win over Odisha. — PTI

## Hosts should take the feelings of fans into consideration



Hemant Kenkre  
Silly Point

The third Test match at Ahmedabad is really done and (literally) dusted. With the much-touted game, certainly not a 'match,' over in a little less than two days and smiles and frowns on the face of the two competing teams, only the aftertaste remains. Like a bitter pill swallowed to regain strength. While India seem to be in the pink of health, England's colour can best be described as pale for obvious reasons. The spectators, unfortunately, were left with unused stubs of

tickets for three days. As expected there was a backlash from those who represent the visitors, the content of which makes for interesting reading. Noteworthy Englishmen like Nasser Hussain, David 'Bumble' Lloyd and the irrepressible Geoffrey Boycott panned their team for various reasons. From lack of intent as batsmen who were found wanting in spin-friendly conditions and a ball that skidded much more than it bounced, and team selection where the visitors went in with only one spin-

ner, the team management got the stick from their former players.

On the other hand, former England skipper Micheal Vaughan rested the blame solely on the playing surface saying that the pitch wasn't good enough for Test cricket and if 'India is allowed to get away with producing such surfaces, the more toothless the ICC will look.' Heat and dust has always been a bugbear with the English whenever they have visited their former colony to play the game that they invented. Even while playing around the tropic of cancer when the weather is generally hot and dry, Vaughan and co expected a grass laden pitch which will enable swing and seam just like the village greens back home.

The expectations, though slightly different, also prompted England skipper Joe Root to opt for four seamers leaving out off-spinner Dom Bess as the pink ball 'swung' on practice pitches. So what makes a good pitch and what does not is the latest debate to hit the cricket world. R. Ashwin who is in the prime of form, gave his opinion while sniping back at an English reporter in a presser held a few days ago. When asked if the Motera pitch was a 'good Test wicket' and if there was a 'contest between bat and ball,' Ashwin used the old management trick of throwing the question back asking the reporter what in his opinion a good surface was and who defines it. Ashwin, known for his

straight talk, might have sounded a tad cocky but he did make a point. And his focus was that questions such as these (relating to the host country taking home advantage) are invariably asked when a visiting team loses in India and never abroad. Stating that no one asked if the pitches were good or bad when India toured New Zealand last year and the two Test matches ended in a total of five days, the Chennai spinner emphasised that Indians were taught to play on the surfaces given to them without any complaint.

It is a fact that 'pink' ball Test matches tend to get over much before the stipulated time not giving paying spectators their money's worth, thereby debunking the very reason for conducting these

day/night games: to increase the fallout in stadiums and getting in more fans. Ashwin may have made a point which can be debated till the cows come home but pitches such as these that challenge stroke making are out of tune with the tenet of the day which sells the game only on entertaining run fests.

India's recent remarkable show against Australia at the Sydney and Brisbane Tests came on nasty pitches against (almost) intimidatory bowling by the hosts. The draw and win at these venues, against all odds, with the matches lasting all five days, was a fabulous testament to Test cricket and gave the fans moments they would remember forever. Testing the patience and ability of batsmen and bowlers in unfamiliar con-

ditions is the reason it's called 'Test' cricket. When games such as the last encounter at Ahmedabad end in less than half the time allotted, it does leave a true blue cricket fan wanting.

Going on to the fourth and last Test match at the same venue, one hopes that the organisers take the feelings of the fan into consideration. Winning at any cost seems to be the philosophy of modern cricketers but it goes against the doctrine on which the edifice of Test cricket was built.

While victory is what the fans' will undoubtedly want they would also expect it to be a fair win giving batsmen and bowlers an equal chance. Unless the organisers respect the wishes of fans, Test cricket will remain on 'skid row.'